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"A Middle Way for the Middle Kingdom"

America's Struggles to Come to Terms with Post-Tiananmen China

June 1989 – June 1994

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Abstract

This doctoral dissertation aims to demonstrate how the crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Beijing and other major cities in China in early June 1989 forced a recalibration of U.S. priority hierarchy in its relationship with the PRC, while also revealing the complexities of the policymaking process in Washington, where strategic decisions became progressively entangled with domestic political considerations. By drawing a multifaceted picture of both governmental and non-governmental actors involved, the study aims to provide an integrated, dual-level examination – incorporating both top-down and bottom-up perspectives – of the forces influencing U.S.-China relations during this pivotal period. These new dynamics, the research shows, exacerbated the tension between a human right driven foreign policy, growing economic interests and interdependencies, and the objective to co-opt and integrate China within the post-Cold War US-led international order. Additionally, the massacre in Beijing undermined the prevailing belief that Deng Xiaoping's market-oriented reforms, initiated in the late 1970s, would lead to gradual political liberalization in China. It therefore exposed the limits of a problematic, triumphalist interpretation of the end of the Cold War as the definitive victory of freedom, democracy, and human rights. Drawing on extensive archival research in the United States, as well as interviews with key individuals involved in the events under examination, this project provides a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the competing interests and policy dynamics that shaped the U.S. response to China in the aftermath of the crackdown.

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List of Abbreviations

ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
AmCham	American Chamber of Commerce
AI	Amnesty International
AILA	American Immigration Lawyers Association
AmCham	American Chamber of Commerce
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
BHN	Basic Human Needs
CAD	Chinese Alliance for Democracy
CBR	China Business Review
CCAS	Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CND	China News Digest
CSCPRC	Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China
DoC	Department of Commerce
DoD	Department of Defense
EC	European Community
ENCS	Electronic Newsletter for Chinese Students
FDC	Front for Democracy in China
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
HRIC	Human Rights In China
HRW	Human Rights Watch

ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFCSS	Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
JCS	Department of the Treasury, Joint Chiefs of Staff
MFN	Most Favored Nation
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MTCR	Missile Technology Control Regime
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NEC	National Economic Council
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NSC	National Security Council
OPIC	Overseas Private Investment Corporation
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCC	Soc.Culture.China
TDP	Trade Development Program
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TRC	Tibetan Rights Campaign
T-TIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
USTC	University of Science and Technology of China
USTR	United States Trade Representative
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Introduction

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I. After Tiananmen: Priority Hierarchy Reconsidered

"I think we should seek a middle way for the Middle Kingdom. I think this is the way to square the circle," urged in June 1990 Representative Stephen J. Solarz (D-NY). On the agenda of the debate in Congress was the renewal of China's Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status, first granted in 1980 as part of the normalization of diplomatic relations.[1] While this preferential trade arrangement had historically been renewed annually with minimal opposition, the crackdown on the peaceful pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in June 1989 marked a turning point in U.S. perceptions of China. It cast significant doubt not only on China's reliability as a strategic ally but also challenged the quintessential American assumption that deeper integration into the capitalist system would naturally foster social and political liberalization. Solarz's advocacy for a balanced policy approach increasingly proved unattainable, as U.S.-China relations became a complex battleground of competing political, strategic, economic, and moral imperatives. This study investigates the factors that made the pursuit of a "middle way" untenable for nearly half a decade, focusing on the institutional tensions between the executive branch, Congress, and the expanding influence of both established and newly professionalized non-governmental organizations in Washington. These actors played pivotal roles in shaping the contentious post-Tiananmen discourse on U.S. foreign policy toward China complicating America's response to China.

This research contends that the violent suppression of student- and worker-led demonstrations in Tiananmen Square and other major Chinese cities profoundly challenged the United States' ability to articulate a coherent justification for preserving its relationship with China. Established during the Nixon Administration's groundbreaking opening to

[1] U.S. House of Representatives, *United States – People's Republic of China (PRC) Trade Relations, Including Most-Favored-Nation Status for the PRC Hearing before the Subcommittee on Trade*, 101st Congress, Second Session, June 19 and 21, 1990, pp.249–254.

Beijing, these ties increasingly pivoted from Cold War strategic imperatives to economic interdependencies and trade interests by the late 1980s.[2] Reconciling these priorities with foundational American values – particularly the promotion of human rights, which had gained prominence in U.S. foreign policy since the late 1970s – emerged as an exceptionally intricate task. Both the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations confronted a complex dual challenge in their policymaking toward the People's Republic of China (PRC). On the one hand, they were constrained by the persistent fear of resuming a confrontational relationship with the PRC or, more significantly, the potential geopolitical consequences of "losing China." This anxiety drew on a deep-seated historical narrative originating in the 1950s, when the perceived "loss of China" to communism informed U.S. domestic political discourse.[3] On the other hand, these administrations faced the difficult task of reconciling their diplomatic engagement with a regime that had flagrantly violated fundamental democratic principles and human rights. This effort was further complicated by the necessity of presenting a coherent and defensible policy to an American public increasingly sensitive to moral imperatives in the conduct of foreign affairs.

As historian Jeremy Brown persuasively argues the protests that unfolded in China during 1989 began on university campuses in April and rapidly escalated into a nationwide movement, encompassing a broad cross-section of Chinese society, and much beyond the student-led rallies in Tiananmen Square.[4] These demonstrations were characterized by demands for political reform, including opposition to corruption among Party officials, calls

[2] For an analysis of the opening to China, see Margaret MacMillan, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the Opening to China," in Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). MacMillan also provides a more detailed examination in *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World* (New York, NY: Random House, 2007). Additionally, Evelyn Goh's article, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the 'Soviet Card' in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971–1974," *Diplomatic History*, vol.29, no.3 (June 2005): pp.475–502, further explores the strategic motivations behind U.S. engagement with China within the Cold War framework. Finally, refer to William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Li Gong (eds.), *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations: An International History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005) which presents a comprehensive collection of essays offering both the American and Chinese perspectives on the rapprochement between the two powers.

[3] The persistent concern over the potential loss of a strategic ally can be traced to Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Nationalist government collapse and the 1949 takeover of mainland China by the Chinese Communist Party. This historical context is explored in depth by Nancy Bernkopf Tucker in *Patterns in the Dust: Chinese-American Relations and the Recognition Controversy, 1949-1950* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983).

[4] Jeremy Brown, *June Fourth: The Tiananmen Protests and Beijing Massacre of 1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Additional significant contributions to the scholarship on the Tiananmen crackdown include Craig J. Calhoun, *Neither Gods nor Emperors: Students and the Struggle for Democracy in China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Denise Chong, *Egg on Mao: The Story of an Ordinary Man Who Defaced an Icon and Unmasked a Dictatorship* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 2009); Anna Wang, *Inconvenient Memories: A Personal Account of the Tiananmen Square Incident and the China Before and After* (Congleton, Cheshire: Purple Pegasus Incorporated, 2019).

for increased government transparency, advocacy for freedom of speech, the establishment of autonomous student organizations, and the formation of independent workers' unions. Central to the protesters' agenda was the demand for open dialogue between the state and its citizens. In Brown's recollection, the movement drew millions of participants, each motivated by a diverse array of grievances and aspirations. He identifies at least three primary motivations behind the widespread mobilization. First, the market-oriented reforms and increased liberties of the 1980s had raised expectations for further progress, fostering a collective desire for greater economic prosperity. Second, the movement was fueled by frustration and trauma, such as the widespread suffering caused by the one-child policy and the repressive anti-crime campaigns of the decade. Third, in regions like Tibet and Xinjiang, restrictions on religious freedoms further fueled dissent. This confluence of hope and discontent galvanized people from varied backgrounds, uniting them in a mass mobilization that spread across the country. After nearly fifty days of sustained demonstrations, the declaration of martial law in Beijing – at a moment when the protests had reached their peak and as the PRC leadership prepared to host the landmark visit of Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev – signified a critical juncture in the unfolding crisis.[5] Soon after, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was deployed to clear Tiananmen Square, where thousands of demonstrators had gathered since weeks in defiance of the government. The resulting crackdown – which lasted for at least three days – led to extensive arrests and harsh penalties for an indeterminate number of individuals, as well as for local party officials and military personnel who had sympathized with the protests.[6]

The widespread media coverage of the Tiananmen Square crackdown marked a crucial moment in American public consciousness, compelling the U.S. to reevaluate its relationship with China.[7] Sociologist Richard Madsen contends that the extensive live broadcasts of the massacre fostered "a heartbreaking experimental connection to China's suffering" as the media "provided something never before achieved in the history of the West's relationship

[5] Chen Jian, "Tiananmen and the Fall of the Berlin Wall: China's Path Toward 1989 and Beyond," in Jeffrey A. Engel (eds.), *The Fall of the Berlin Wall. The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[6] Jeremy Brown presented this account during the June 1, 2021, session of the Washington History Seminar, co-hosted by the National History Center of the American Historical Association and the Woodrow Wilson Center's History and Public Policy Program.

[7] For a critical and thought-provoking examination of the impact of television and entertainment on politics, education, and public opinion, see Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (London: Heinemann, 1986). Additionally, the Vanderbilt University Television News Archive offers a rich collection of news broadcasts from major networks such as ABC, NBC, CBS, and CNN, enabling an in-depth analysis of media coverage during the Tiananmen crackdown.

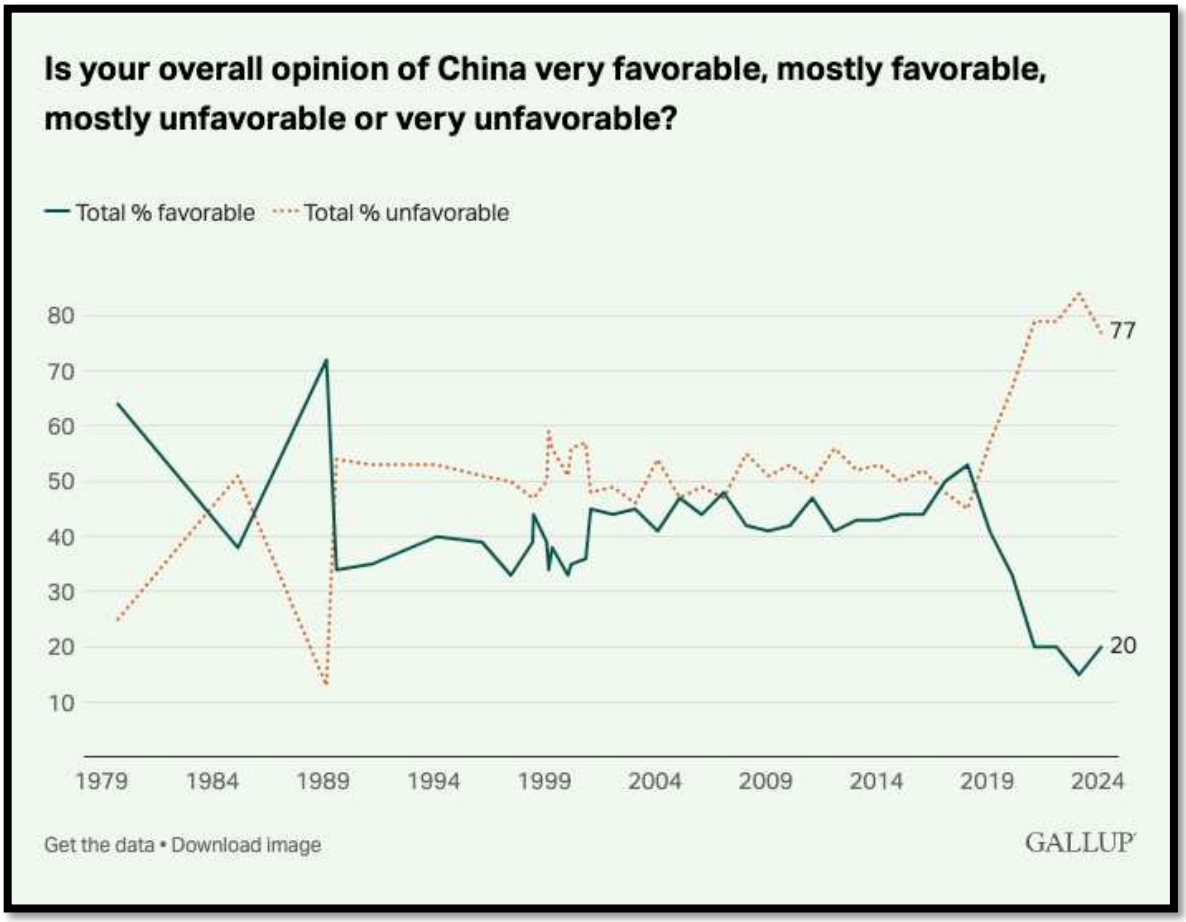
with China."[8] The violent suppression of the pro-democracy protests dismantled the prevailing image of China as a unique and relatively moderate form of Communist rule. Prior to the crackdown, President Reagan, following his 1984 visit to the PRC, notably described China as a "so-called Communist" state, thereby emphasizing a clear distinction between the PRC and the Soviet Union.[9] Public opinion data from the 1970s indicates that only 25% of Americans held an unfavorable view of China, while 64% viewed the country positively.[10] This favorable perception peaked at 72% in the late 1980s, just before the Tiananmen events. However, following the violence of June 1989, unfavorable views surged to 53%, and this trend remained largely consistent in the subsequent years, with only minor fluctuations.[11] In response to this shift in public opinion, U.S. policymakers faced a significant challenge: how to address the human rights violations committed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) without compromising core American values, all while preventing a return to the confrontational dynamics of the Mao era. Striking a balance between these competing priorities became a central issue in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy toward China in the post-Tiananmen pe

[8] Richard Madsen, *China and the American Dream. A Moral Inquiry* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

[9] "But in a speech to about 500 community leaders here, Mr. Reagan, who for many years had sharply attacked 'Red China' as an implacable foe of the United States, dramatically shifted his language by asserting that the United States could get along 'with this so-called Communist China' since it was not an expansionist power and since it wanted American investment," Hedrick Smith, "Reagan, in U.S., Says China Trip Advanced Ties," *The New York Times*, May 2, 1984.

[10] At the time of Nixon's first visit to China, the President was able to leverage a pre-existing positive image of China among Americans. The Chinese were perceived as "hardworking" and "intelligent" people. Following the 1972's *week that changed the world*, "Gallup found more than two-thirds of Americans believing the trip was successful, with 18% predicting it would be very effective at improving world peace and 50% predicting it would be fairly effective," online at https://news.gallup.com/vault/204065/gallup-vault-nixon-china-visit-game-changer.aspx (last accessed November 2024).

[11] Since the establishment of diplomatic recognition in 1979, Gallup has systematically tracked U.S. public opinion on China. For further details, see the Gallup Poll China Series website: https://news.gallup.com/poll/1627/china.aspx (last accessed November 2024). In March 2023, Gallup published a report titled *"Record-Low 15% of Americans View China Favorably,"* highlighting the significant decline in Americans' favorable perceptions of China in recent years. See Megan Brenan, *"Record-Low 15% of Americans View China Favorably,"* Gallup Poll Social Series, March 27, 2023, available online at https://news.gallup.com/poll/471551/record-low-americans-view-china-favorably.aspx (last accessed December 2024).



Next, I'd like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. What is your overall opinion of China? Is it very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable or very unfavorable?

	Very favorable	Mostly favorable	Mostly unfavorable	Very unfavorable	No opinion
	%	%	%	%	%
1994 Feb 26-28	4	36	38	15	7
1991 Mar 14-17	5	30	35	18	12
1989 Aug 10-13	5	29	32	22	12
1989 Feb 28-Mar 2	12	60	10	3	15
1985 Feb 22-Mar 3	5	33	35	16	11
1979 Sep	18	46	18	7	10

^ Asked of a half sample; * Less than 0.5%

GALLUP

Figure 1. "Overall Opinion of China"
Chart credit: Gallup Poll Historical Trends – China

The topic remains crucial for historians interested in Sino-American relations in the early post-Cold War era. This doctoral project examines the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown in Washington's foreign policy environment, focusing on the complexities and limitations that defined U.S. policymaking toward the PRC during this transformative period. It argues that the events of June 1989 created enduring complications in the formulation of American policy, driven by three key factors. Firstly, the crackdown took place at a time when the Cold War was coming to an end, translating into the impossibility for Washington to sell its China policy as a counterbalance strategy against the Soviet threat. The crackdown – coupled with the problematic responses of both the George H. W. Bush Administration, which many in Washington considered overly cautious, and the Bill Clinton Administration, whose campaign rhetoric pledged a departure from its predecessor's policies but ultimately maintained a similar emphasis on engagement over sanctions – informed a significant shift in the internal balance of how U.S. foreign policy toward Beijing was conceived and conducted. For nearly two decades, the executive branch had dominated the formulation and implementation of China policy with the Cold War context justifying a specific approach to foreign policy – where secrecy and personal diplomacy were considered valuable and accepted instruments.12 However, the making of a post-Cold War policy towards Beijing was complicated by an unprecedented domestic negotiation among new influential stakeholders who demanded greater transparency and accountability, ultimately losing its "insulation" from domestic policy-related issues.13 Efforts to maintain the status quo in Sino-American relations – especially under Bush Sr., who adopted a more confrontational approach in Washington, and to a lesser extent under Clinton, who employed a more creative strategy – were criticized by observers as a precarious gamble with the future of bilateral relations, amplifying the significance of what many considered to be merely symbolic gestures.

This dissatisfaction within Washington ultimately gave rise to a more triangular policymaking structure, in which Congress and several American stakeholders, once

[12] Secrecy and insulation from public scrutiny were central to the U.S. diplomatic approach toward Beijing during the period of rapprochement. Historians frequently use periodization to identify turning points in international relations, and the two-decade-long engagement between the United States and China can be framed by two pivotal secret missions undertaken by high-ranking officials. The first, Henry Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in July 1971, inaugurated a new phase in Sino-American diplomacy, characterized by efforts to normalize relations. The second, Brent Scowcroft's covert visit to China in July 1989, conducted just one month after the Tiananmen Square crackdown, symbolically marked the conclusion of this era of discreet and insulated diplomacy. See Yukinori Komine, *Secrecy in U.S. Foreign Policy: Nixon, Kissinger and the Rapprochement with China* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Pub., 2008).

[13] Robert Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), p.5.

peripheral actors, increasingly asserted their influence in shaping U.S. policy toward China. The massacre marked the beginning of a more diversified and contested approach to China policy, where a multitude of actors played a role in shaping America's stance towards the PRC. This shift in attitude would have far-reaching consequences for how the United States engaged with the PRC in the years to come. A broad coalition – including members of Congress, human rights advocates, conservative anti-communist hawks, and various lobbying groups opposed to closer relations with the PRC – condemned China's alleged "inhumane" practices. These included "imprisonment of political dissidents and religious leaders, torture of Tibetan and Islamic independence activists, widespread use of the death penalty, sovereignty over Tibet, export of prison-labor products, and population planning."[14] Reflecting on the changing scenario and dynamics related to the elaboration of U.S. China Policy, Kerry Dumbaugh, Specialist in Asian Affairs for the U.S. Congressional Research Service, argued that "this fluid and uncertain atmosphere in the American political scene has proven fertile ground for a range of interest groups and individuals competing for influence over U.S. policy decisions involving China."[15] President Bush's reluctance to share foreign policy prerogatives with stakeholders beyond a select group of advisors within his Administration "created an atmosphere that effectively empowered more organized groups able to combine forces and work through an increasingly receptive Congress to pursue alternate objectives to those set by the President."[16]

Secondly, the diplomatic framework established by President Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, in the early 1970s unraveled rapidly, leading to a profound shift in the internal dynamics of U.S. foreign policy towards China. The delegitimization of traditional diplomatic channels coupled with contestation of seniority mechanisms subjected foreign policy decisions to a convoluted dialogue – and at times, conflict – among a plurality of stakeholders. A dialogue that was informed by the ever more recurrent bipartisan use of human rights language able to provide new universalistic codes to U.S. China policy and to deliver a moral legitimacy to the American involvement in China's internal affairs.[17] Although

[14] Robert S. Ross, "The Strategic and Bilateral Context of Policy-Making in China and the United States. Why Domestic Factors Matter," in Robert S. Ross (eds.), *After the Cold War: Domestic Factors and U.S.-China Relations* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 1998).
[15] Kerry Dumbaugh, "Ten Years in U.S.-China Policy; Interest Groups and Their Influence, 1989-2000," CRS Report for Congress, *Congressional Research Service – The Library of Congress*, Order Code RL-30768, December 12, 2000.
[16] Ibid. Dumbaugh, "Ten Years in U.S.-China Policy."
[17] On the issue of human rights universalistic codes and moral legitimacy see Mario Del Pero, review of Barbara Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue. The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

Capitol Hill had reasserted its prerogatives on foreign policy since the mid-1970s, issues related to China – with the only exception of Americans' concerns regarding Tibet –[18] had largely remained absent from the congressional agenda. Likewise, and somewhat paradoxically, the PRC had not been a focal point of the U.S.-led human rights campaign that had characterized the late Cold War. However, the discourse surrounding human rights in China gradually gained resonance across the political spectrum, cutting across party lines. Republican Cold War hawks used it to reinvigorate anti-communist rhetoric, while Liberal Democrats leveraged it to critique U.S. engagement with authoritarian regimes. In this shifting political landscape, China became a significant tool in domestic political bargaining, with human rights discourse being strategically invoked, redefined, and at times stretched to serve competing political agendas. Congressional committees grew actively engaged in China-related issues, with human rights advocates switching their focus from Moscow to Beijing. In this regard, this study seeks to advance the historiographical debate on the role of human rights in American foreign policy by reassessing its temporal and thematic boundaries.[19]

While many historians – particularly those emphasizing discontinuities, ruptures, and turning points rather than a teleological and evolutionary path –[20] have identified the 1970s as a momentous decade in the history of human rights, this research aligns with historian Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann's compelling argument to situate the breakthrough of human rights in the 1990s.[21] This reframing is especially pertinent when analyzing the case of China. Although concerns related to China had emerged earlier – notably when Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) and the "Taiwan Lobby," a minority faction at the time, oppose President Carter's

University Press, 2014), *Ricerche di Storia Politica*, online at http://www.arsp.it/2015/11/29/reclaiming-american-virtue-recensione-e-replica-dellautore/ (last accessed September 2023); Barbara Keys and Roland Burke, "Human Rights," in Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War – Part IV Challenging the Cold War Paradigm (*2013): pp.486–502.

[18] Melvyn C. Goldstein, "The United States, Tibet, and the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol.8, no.3 (Summer 2006): pp.145–164.

[19] On the 1970s human rights breakthrough as a both U.S. and transnational phenomenon see Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and The End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Sara Lorenzini, Umberto Tulli, and Ilaria Zamburlini, *The Human Rights Breakthrough of the 1970s: The European Community and International Relations* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022); Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (eds.), *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Barbara Keys, "Human Rights," in David C. Engerman, Max Paul Friedman, and Melani McAlister (eds.), *The Cambridge History of America and the World – Volume IV: 1945 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022): pp.328–48.

[20] For perspectives emphasizing a linear progression in the history of human rights, see Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007).

[21] Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Human Rights and History," *Past & Present*, vol.232, no.1 (August 2016): pp.279–310.

extension of diplomatic recognition to the PRC in 1979 – it was only in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown that human rights discourse invariably became a central and enduring component of Washington's policymaking deliberations.[22] As political scientist Robert Ross has observed, during this period and continuing through the dissolution of the Soviet Union, "common strategic interests allowed for compromises over the Taiwan issue [and, more broadly, human rights] and encouraged the two sides to minimize their ideological differences, but they did not allow for resolution of important differences."[23] The end of the Cold War, coupled with the brutal suppression of the 1989 pro-democracy protests by the Chinese People's Liberation Army, disrupted this "marriage of strategic convenience," marking a key turning point and ushering in a period of profound disillusionment and mutual mistrust between Washington and Beijing.[24] Finally, this research builds on the influential work of Rosemary Foot, *Rights Beyond Borders*, which explores the efforts and motivations of non-governmental organizations, national governments, and international human rights bodies, including those within the United Nations system, to incorporate China into a global order that mandated compliance with internationally recognized human rights standards. By analyzing both the international community's perspective and China's position, Foot highlights the central dilemmas confronting advocates of human rights norms. She contends that "inaction in the face of evidence of China's human rights violations risks increasing cynicism about the regime's impartiality and consistency of application; action, on the other hand, may spark reaction on China's part that disrupts the not that we exist in a normatively based international society, undermining claims to universality and the prospects for world order." At the same time, Foot identifies similar challenges for China itself, noting that "participation in the rights regime poses particular threats to an authoritarian government because of the domestic political transformation that full adherence to international standards entails."[25]

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[22] On the topic of the history of U.S.-Taiwan relations see Richard C. Bush, *At Cross Purposes. U.S.-Taiwan Relations Since 1942* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2004). On the specific topic of the Taiwan Lobby and its activity in Congress see Brian Hilton, "'Maximum Flexibility for Peaceful Change': Jimmy Carter, Taiwan, and the Recognition of the People's Republic of China," *Diplomatic History*, vol.33, no.4 (2009): pp.595–613, and Zhiqun Zhu, "Battle Without Gunfire: Taiwan and the PRC's Lobbying Competition in the United States," *Asian Perspective*, vol.24, no.1 (2000): pp.47–70.

[23] Robert Ross, "Foreword," in in Robert S. Ross (eds.), *After the Cold War: Domestic Factors and U.S.-China Relations* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 1998), p.viii.

[24] Ibid. Ross, *After the Cold War*, p.ix.

[25] Rosemary Foot, *Rights Beyond Borders: The Global Community and The Struggle over Human Rights in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Thirdly, the Beijing massacre, its representation, and its reception in the United States posed a direct challenge to the triumphalist narrative that framed the end of the Cold War as a definitive victory for freedom, democracy, and human rights. The events of June 1989 disrupted the widely held assumption that the PRC was inevitably progressing toward Western-style modernization. This belief had been rooted in the notion that Deng Xiaoping's market-oriented reforms, introduced in the early 1980s, would naturally pave the way for the liberalization of China's political system. The violent suppression of the pro-democracy protests profoundly undermined this optimistic narrative, which had been further bolstered by expanding exchanges involving students, businesspeople, and tourists that seemed to signal China's openness to change. Emerging from the devastation of the Cultural Revolution, China underwent a profound transformation from the 1970s onward, ultimately establishing itself as a global superpower.[26] Scholars such as Arne Westad have characterized this transformation as the result of an exceptional confluence of international and domestic factors, producing a trajectory of development that, in its rapidity and magnitude, stands apart from comparable historical cases. The interplay of these dimensions was crucial, as no single factor alone would likely have sufficed to drive such a swift and large-scale transformation.[27]

Internationally, the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, coupled with the deregulation of financial transactions, investments, and trade, created new opportunities for countries like China to integrate into the global economy.[28] Mao Zedong's late-stage political and strategic alignment with the United States – largely driven by tensions with the Soviet Union –[29] despite his skepticism toward economic reform, laid the groundwork for China to exploit these opportunities after his death. Under the post-Mao leadership, China effectively leveraged its relationships with foreign nations to attract critical resources, including loans, investments,

[26] See Priscilla Roberts and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *China, Hong Kong, and the Long 1970s: Global Perspectives* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017).
[27] The works of Odd Arne Westad are particularly important for situating China within a global historical context. See, *Restless Empire: China and the World since 1750* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2012); *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[28] On the implosion of the Bretton Woods order see Giovanni Arrighi, "The World Economy and the Cold War, 1970-1990," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War – Volume III: Endings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): pp.23–44; Daniel J. Sargent, "The United States and Globalization in the 1970s," in Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel J. Sargent (eds.), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010): pp.49–64. See also, Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[29] On the Sino-Soviet split see Odd Arne Westad, *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Washington, D. C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998); Sergey Radchenko, "The Sino-Soviet Split," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War – Volume III: Endings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): pp.349–72.

and market access, particularly from the United States, Europe, and East Asia. Domestically, the death of Mao in 1976 marked a pivotal moment, ending the revolutionary era and facilitating a political realignment that culminated in Deng Xiaoping's leadership. Deng capitalized on emerging international opportunities to promote economic reforms that transitioned China's economy from a state-controlled model to one increasingly oriented toward market principles. These reforms, Westad and Jian Chen show, which began as experimental and often clandestine initiatives, were subsequently expanded as Deng prioritized economic modernization as a central strategy for ensuring regime stability and legitimacy.[30] However, this economic liberalization was not accompanied by political democratization. The regime's authoritarian nature was starkly reaffirmed through actions such as the violent suppression of pro-democracy movements, illustrating Deng's belief that economic growth and one-party rule were not only compatible but "mutually reinforcing" – a governance model that remains intact. The Western perception, particularly prevalent in the United States, that China's economic integration into global markets would lead to reciprocal benefits and eventually promote democratization, further legitimized the regime's developmental path.[31] In this context, as Kristina Spohr contends in *Post Wall, Post Square*, Deng Xiaoping successfully "reinvented communism" by adapting it into a "hybrid model – communist-controlled embryonic capitalism."[32]

In light of these initial considerations, this project aims to contribute to the extensive body of scholarship on contemporary U.S.-China relations by focusing on a brief, yet consequential, period between June 1989 and June 1994, when the Cold War was nearing its conclusion, but its outcome remained uncertain.[33] While the strategic dynamics of the bipolar world order continued to influence international relations, the initial stages of globalization began to reveal

[30] On this topic see Odd Arne Westad and Jian Chen, *The Great Transformation: China's Road from Revolution to Reform* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2024).
[31] This analysis of China's liberalization process is drawn from Arne Westad's series of lectures at Yale University, *The Twentieth Century: A World History,* delivered during the 2024/25 academic year.
[32] Kristina Spohr, *Post Wall, Post Square: How Bush, Gorbachev, Kohl, and Deng Shaped the World after 1989* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), p.65.
[33] The broad literature on U.S.-China relations that informs this research includes James Mann, *About Face. A History of America's Curious Relationship with China from Nixon to Clinton* (New York, NY: Random House 1999); Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China. A History of Sino-American Relations. Fifth Edition* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010); David M. Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing U.S.-China Relations, 1989- 2000* (Berkeley, CA: University of California 2001); Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1992); Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America's Preoccupation with China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); S. Mahmud Ali, *U.S.-China Relations in the Asia-Pacific Century* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Dong Wang, *The United States and China: A History from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013).

potential trajectories for the post-Cold War international system. Within this context of uncertainty, this research argues that an unprecedented contestation of policy-making mechanisms in Washington – unseen in the preceding two decades since Nixon's normalization of relations with China – exacerbated tensions between a human rights-centered foreign policy, growing economic interdependencies, and the broader objective of integrating China into the emerging post-Cold War, U.S.-led international order. This study seeks to address three key research questions:

- First, how did the Tiananmen Square crackdown, alongside the end of the Cold War, reconfigure the hierarchy of U.S. foreign policy priorities toward the People's Republic of China?
- Second, through which institutional mechanisms and political strategies did governmental and non-governmental actors seek to challenge or constrain presidential prerogatives in shaping foreign policy?
- Third, as the central focus of U.S.-China relations transitioned from Cold War geopolitical strategy to economic interdependence, what role remained for human rights advocates within this evolving framework?

The contentious domestic debate within the United States over its China policy, combined with the impracticality of identifying "a middle way for the Middle Kingdom," had enduring effects on the nature of the relationship. The crackdown and the subsequent problematic response of the United States are viewed as the key turning point "when the problems [between the U.S. and China] which are actual in the world today first took visible shape."[34] This pivotal moment signified a fundamental shift, transforming the bilateral relationship from one characterized by "amity and strategic cooperation" to one marked by "hostility, distrust, and misunderstanding."[35] As Robert Suettinger noted in his analysis of the events shaping Sino-American relations post-1989, the lasting repercussions of the June Fourth incident fuelled deep-rooted mutual suspicion and resentment, leading to a situation in which "little forgetting and less forgiving" characterized the exchange between the two countries.[36] In the wake of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, human rights became a central point of contention,

[34] Geoffrey Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 1965) cited in Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Introduction: Genealogies of Human Rights," in Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman (eds.), *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[35] Ibid. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, p.-
[36] Ibid. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, p.3.

significantly complicating the bilateral relationship. This tension arose as the relationship transitioned from a Cold War framework to one increasingly shaped by the forces of globalization. Therefore, an examination of the early 1990s is essential to understanding the emerging moral, economic, and emotional "interdependence" between the two countries, a period in which their mutual perceptions were profoundly at odds.

II. China Policy-Making in Washington. A Quest for a Domestic Angle

This study examines the interplay between domestic political dynamics, parochial interests, and appeals to local constituencies, highlighting their profound influence on the global posture of the United States. Focusing on the case of Washington's post-Tiananmen China policy, it explores how, over nearly half a decade, the prolonged contestation between the executive and legislative branches – amplified by an expanding network of stakeholders and external pressures – delayed the formulation of a coherent response to events in China. It argues that this dynamic not only directly impacted the nature of Sino-American relations, but also threatened to undermine the United States' capacity to effectively lead – at least in the short term – the post-Cold War integration of Beijing into the global community, while amplifying concerns over competition with European allies and Japan. As contended by Robert Ross, the year 1989 saw the emergence of a "new bilateral bargaining relationship reflecting new dependencies and new sources of negotiating leverage."[37]

Drawing on Robert Suettinger's comprehensive definition of policymaking in *Beyond Tiananmen*, this study adopts his conceptualization of the process leading to the formulation of Washington's post-1989 China policy as "that very human process by which ideas, beliefs, strategies, theories, prejudices, pressures, tradeoffs, and choices become identifiable foreign policies. It is a complex and confusing process, often misunderstood, especially by those who look only at the policy outcomes."[38] This plethora of elements was particularly significant and influencing in the period under examination as the ending of the Cold War left a vacuum and uncertainties about the future role of China in global dynamics. As Suettinger observes, the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown and the imminent end of the Cold War marked a juncture in U.S.-China relations, where "China's strategic importance was less acknowledged, mercantilist trade policies less forgivable, repression of human rights and democracy less

[37] Ibid. Ross, *After the Cold War*, p.ix.
[38] Ibid. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, p.5.

acceptable, proliferation of nuclear materials and missiles less tolerable."[39] The erosion of the Cold War-era consensus on China policy opened new avenues for dissent, where diverging interests, priorities, and expectations disrupted the traditional executive-led approach to foreign policymaking. This environment empowered a previously dormant, yet still influential, anti-Beijing lobby up on the Hill and throughout the country and prompted human rights as a central, still contentious, issue – one that often collided with growing economic interests, thereby exemplifying the complexity of this transitional period in U.S. foreign policy.[40]

Without disregarding the broader context of transnational dynamics, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing methodological reexamination of how historians approach the post-1945 history of the United States within a global framework. The international and transnational turns, which have dominated scholarship since the 1990s, have been met with substantial critique, notably by Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall, who, in a provocative 2020 article, argued that these studies have "implicitly decentered the United States from the historiography of U.S. foreign relations."[41] While acknowledging the value of these approaches – particularly the "de-exceptionalization" of American foreign policy, often shaped by external and weaker actors, and the recognition of the influence of non-state actors – Bessner and Logevall call for a reintegration of the United States at the center of diplomatic history. They argue that U.S. foreign policy requires a reevaluation for two principal reasons. First, despite its contradictions and limitations, the U.S. has consistently played a distinctive role in the post-1945 era, and this exceptional significance must be acknowledged in the historiography of the late Twentieth Century. Second, domestic factors often have a decisive impact on foreign policy. As Bessner and Logevall contend, "domestic processes and phenomena – elections,

[39] Ibid. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, p.87.

[40] The literature on decision-making in U.S.-China relations is extensive and features significant contributions from scholars in the field of international relations. Notable works include Qingshan Tan, *The Making of U.S. China Policy: From Normalization to The Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992) and his article "Explaining U.S.-China Policy in the 1990s: Who Is in Control?" *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, vol.20, no.3 (1993): pp.143–160. Jean A. Garrison's *Making China Policy: From Nixon to G.W. Bush* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005) offers a comprehensive overview of policy evolution across multiple administrations. More recently, Hugo Meijer and Benjamin Jensen's article, "The Strategist's Dilemma: Global Dynamic Density and the Making of US 'China Policy,'" *European Journal of International Security*, vol.3, no.2 (2017): pp.211–234, provided an analytical perspective on the challenges of formulating policy in a complex global environment. These works collectively frame the multifaceted nature of U.S.-China policymaking, encompassing historical, strategic, and institutional dimensions.

[41] Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall, "Recentering the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations," *Texas National Security Review*, vol.3, no.2 (Spring 2020), p.39. See also Fredrik Logevall, "Domestic politics," in Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan (eds.), *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016): pp.151–167; Fredrik Logevall, "Politics and Foreign Relations," *The Journal of American History*, vol.95, no.4 (2009): pp.1074–1078.

institutions, coalition-building, business interests, ideologies, individual pride, and careerist ambition – often have had more of an effect on the course of U.S. foreign relations than international processes."[42] Focusing on American domestic circumstances within a study of Sino-U.S. relations during the early post-Cold War period does not imply a provincial perspective on a narrative that warrants global significance. Rather, this research aims to uncover its transnational dimensions by examining how evolving global conditions influenced a substantial shift in the balance between values and interests, reshaped the concept of U.S. security, and ultimately altered the domestic dynamics of the American China policy-making power equation.

While recognizing the "healthy transformation in the historiography of the Cold War," which now incorporates perspectives beyond the traditional U.S.-Soviet confrontation to include the many cold wars across different regions of the world, Jussi Hanhimäki warns that the integration of new findings and methodologies, despite enriching the field, risks overshadowing foundational insights that are crucial for understanding the dynamics of the Cold War. One such foundational insight is the primacy of U.S. domestic politics in shaping American foreign policy. Hanhimäki emphasizes three key points in this regard: domestic politics has always been a significant factor in the formulation of foreign policy; "domestic parochialism – the shared conviction that the United States is exceptional – has been an important source in driving American unilateralism;" and external perceptions of the United States solidifying its global reach increasingly influenced domestic political debates.[43]

Beyond the insights provided by Bessner and Logevall, a substantial body of literature has explored the profound influence of domestic political factors on the formulation and execution of American foreign policy. Melvin Small's *Democracy and Diplomacy* adopts a long-term perspective, emphasizing the persistent interplay between domestic politics and foreign policy, arguing that the latter is far from immune to internal political dynamics.[44] Similarly, Helen Milner and Dustin Tingley's *Sailing the Water's Edge* examine the constraints imposed on presidential foreign policy prerogatives since World War II by domestic actors such as Congress, interest groups, bureaucratic institutions, and public opinion. Their study highlights how these constraints fluctuate based on the policy instruments employed – whether foreign

[42] Ibid. Bessner and Logevall, "Recentering the United States,", p.41.
[43] Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "Global Visions and Parochial Politics: The Persistent Dilemma of the 'American Century'," *Diplomatic History*, vol.27, no.4 (September 2003): pp.423–447.
[44] Melvin Small, *Democracy & Diplomacy: The Impact of Domestic Politics on U.S. Foreign Policy, 1789-1994* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

aid, international trade, immigration policies, or military expenditures – to pursue national security objectives.[45] Paula Stern's *Water's Edge* provides a focused analysis of the negotiations surrounding the introduction of the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the 1974 Trade Reform Act, illustrating how congressional action significantly curtailed presidential authority in the context of Cold War foreign policy. Stern's work stresses the interplay of domestic and international considerations, including security concerns, economic priorities, and human rights advocacy, while emphasizing the critical role of lobbying groups, such as the Jewish community and labor unions, in shaping legislative outcomes.[46] This research draws particular relevance from Stern's findings, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, given that the Jackson-Vanik amendment eventually served as a crucial legislative instrument employed by Congress in the post-Tiananmen era to influence U.S.-China relations.

This thesis argues that with the end of the Cold War the China policy elitist/top-down model lost ground in favor of a more pluralist model where public opinion and lobbies have gained leverage on members of Congress, ultimately, disrupting U.S.-China relations. By drawing a multifaceted picture of both governmental and non-governmental actors involved, the study aims to provide an integrated, dual-level examination – incorporating both top-down and bottom-up perspectives – of the forces influencing U.S.-China relations during this critical juncture. In practical terms, this approach retains the diplomatic dimension of the relationship as one of the central, though not exclusive, focal points. As evidenced by numerous confidential cables exchanged between the White House and the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, internal memoranda among government officials at various levels, and transcripts of meetings between representatives of the two governments, the Administration, while attempting to manage growing political discontent in Washington, worked behind the scenes to preserve dialogue with the Chinese leadership. This effort sought to negotiate with the Chinese leadership improvements in human rights, economic, and strategic areas in order to establish a framework through which sustained engagement could be justified to the American public.

Notably, the research draws on documents from the George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton Presidential Libraries in College Station (TX) and Little Rock (AR). Additional significant records are found in several other repositories: the Mudd Library at Princeton University holds

[45] Helen V. Milner and Dustin H. Tingley, *Sailing the Water's Edge: The Domestic Politics of American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
[46] Paula Stern, *Water's Edge: Domestic Politics and The Making of American Foreign Policy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979).

the papers of Secretary of State James Baker, encompassing correspondence with President Bush, memoranda, and speech transcripts; the Green Library at Stanford University contains the papers of James Lilley, the U.S. Ambassador to China during the Tiananmen Square protests and crackdown; the Library of Congress preserves the papers of Anthony Lake, National Security Advisor under President Clinton; and the Hoover Archives at Stanford University houses the papers of Secretary of State Warren Christopher. Furthermore, online and electronic resources, such as those provided by the National Security Archive, offer a thorough overview of institutional relations between Washington and Beijing. Particularly relevant to this study are two collections: *The Tiananmen Papers: The Declassified History* and *China and the United States: From Hostility to Engagement*. Selected documents from these collections, which are also housed in presidential libraries, have been incorporated into this research to enrich the analysis.

As Bessner and Logevall suggest, incorporating the domestic dimension is essential for a comprehensive analysis U.S. foreign policy, particularly the role of domestic actors, with Congress occupying a central position. This study investigates congressional influence through an analysis of primary sources, including Congressional hearings and records, as well as the personal papers of prominent legislators such Tom Lantos and Bob Matsui, archived at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.[47] By situating this inquiry within the expanding scholarly discourse on Congress's role in foreign policymaking, the research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of this critical dimension of U.S. interactions with China. A foundational contribution to this field is James Lindsay's *Congress and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy*, which redirected attention to the legislative branch in the mid-1990s. Lindsay's work introduced the concept of the "imperial Congress," describing the surge in congressional activism during the post-Vietnam and Watergate era, fueled by widespread perceptions of executive overreach.[48] Building on this framework, Ralph G. Carter and James M. Scott's *Choosing to Lead* identifies the emergence of "policy entrepreneurs" in Congress – members who actively shape foreign policy by mobilizing public opinion, leveraging interest groups, rallying legislative colleagues, and setting the agenda. According to Carter and Scott, these are "members of Congress who [sought] to initiate action on the foreign policy issues

[47] Two archival collections that remain to be examined are the papers of Representative Nancy Pelosi, housed at the Library of Congress, and those of Senator George Mitchell, preserved at the Bowdoin College Library.
[48] James M. Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). The book was published as one of the many responses to Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

about which they care rather than to await action from the administration."[49] This shift highlights Congress' increasingly assertive role in constraining the executive and recalibrating the balance of power in foreign policymaking. Rebecca Hersman's *Friends and Foes* further explores the institutional tensions inherent in executive-legislative relations, offering case studies that reflect both the benefits and challenges of institutional harm wrestling. Hersman argues that while these tensions foster desirable checks and balances, they also risk undermining the coherence of U.S. foreign policy. In her own words, "the fatigue, frustration, and mistrust that so often characterize executive-legislative relations can be devastating to the foreign policy process." The potential drawbacks, Hersman notes, reflects in the persistent discord that can harm U.S. foreign policy by straining relations with allies, sending "mixed signals that confuse friend and foe alike, and diminished U.S. global standing."[50] A final important contribution for this research is Robert David Johnson's *Congress and the Cold War*. By providing an in-depth analysis of the personal papers of key legislators, Johnson demonstrates how increasingly informed, professionalized, and assertive congressional subcommittees influenced U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War, extending their impact well beyond the constitutionally defined powers of declaring war and ratifying treaties.[51] These scholarly perspectives frame the present study's investigation into the interplay between domestic politics and foreign policy, emphasizing the complexities and consequences of congressional engagement in shaping U.S.-China relations.

The legislative branch's role in shaping U.S.-China relations has often been marginalized in scholarly discourse, frequently relegated to a secondary position. One notable exception is Robert Sutter's recent work, *Congress and China Policy*, which offers critical insights into Capitol Hill's involvement in U.S.-China policymaking. For the purposes of this introduction, the analysis of the two decades preceding the transformative events of June 1989 proves particularly informative. Sutter's analysis demonstrates that while Congress was actively engaged in shaping China policy from the normalization under the Nixon Administration through the institutional clashes following the Tiananmen Square crackdown, its stance during this earlier period was overall less confrontational compared to the 1990s, with only a few exceptions. In the 1970s, as both the Nixon and Ford administrations prioritized other pressing

[49] Ralph G. Carter and James M. Scott, *Choosing to Lead: Understanding Congressional Foreign Policy Entrepreneurs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
[50] Rebecca K. C. Hersman, *Friends and Foes: How Congress and the President Really Make Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000).
[51] Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

issues, congressional delegations – comprising nearly one hundred representatives and scholars – became the primary channel for fostering dialogue with Chinese officials and outlining terms for future engagement. Reports published after these visits, along with extensive media coverage, contributed to cultivating a positive attitude – among the majority of legislators and their constituencies – toward opening relations with Communist China, a policy initiated by Nixon and broadly supported on Capitol Hill. During this first decade, Sutter argues, a reciprocal alignment characterized the executive-legislative approach to China policy. However, the period of diplomatic recognition under the Carter Administration exposed fractures within this alignment. Discontent arose over the adoption of the One China policy and perceived neglect of congressional input in negotiating terms with Beijing, particularly regarding Taiwan, leading to frictions between Congress and the executive branch. During the Reagan presidency, Congress continued initially to express concerns over Taiwan's security in the context of Washington's and Beijing's evolving relationship. Following a shift in the Administration's policy from a China-first to an Asia-first orientation, congressional assertiveness toward the executive increased. Sutter's analysis highlights a recurring pattern: as he observes, "although at various times a number of members of Congress were enthusiastic boosters of the Administration initiative toward China, an overall pattern of Congress serving as an obstacle to president efforts to engage more deeply with China at the expense of other American interests and values occurred repeatedly."[52] Following the Tiananmen Massacre and the conclusion of the Cold War, political scientist Jian Yang argues that three factors – *constituency*, *partisanship*, and *committee* – help explain the growing involvement of members of Congress in shaping U.S. foreign policy.[53] This increasing activism mirrors the role of Congress in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when it played a critical role in debates over relations with Communist China and the U.S. approach to the Kuomintang in Taiwan.[54]

[52] Robert G. Sutter, *Congress and China Policy: Past Episodic, Recent Enduring Influence* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2024). Sutter's earlier works on similar themes have also been influential. These include "The Crisis in U.S.-China Policy, 1991: The Role of Congress," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, vol.10, no.4 (1991): pp.3–23; *"*The U.S. Congress: Personal, Partisan, Political*"* in Ramon Hawley Myers, Michel Oksenberg, and David L Shambaugh (eds.), *Making China Policy: Lessons from the Bush and Clinton Administrations* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001); "Congressional Pressures and US-China Policy," *Foreign Service Journal*, vol.82, no.5 (May 2005): pp.24–29.

[53] Jian Yang, *Congress and U.S. China policy, 1989-1999* (Huntington, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2000), p.14.

[54] As the studies by Nancy Bernkopf Tucker and Thomas J. Christensen reveal. See Ibid. Bernkopf, *Patterns in the Dust* and Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Scholarly analyses have underscored the critical role of Capitol Hill in advancing human rights as a central pillar of American foreign policy, predating the Carter Administration. Congress played a pivotal part in institutionalizing human rights considerations and shaping the U.S. stance toward both allies and adversaries. Among the most significant contributions to this discourse are the works of Sarah Snyder, Barbara Keys, and William Michael Schmidli, published in *Diplomatic History*.[55] These studies examine congressional initiatives to integrate a moral dimension into foreign policy, particularly within the Cold War context under the Nixon, Reagan, and Carter presidencies. Snyder's contribution, in particular, highlights the influential role of Representative Donald M. Fraser (D-MN) during his tenure as chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Organizations and Social Movements. Fraser's leadership was instrumental in driving legislative reforms that restructured the State Department and formally entrenched human rights within U.S. foreign policy. As Snyder notes, "Congressional efforts in the mid-1970s established a strong foundation upon which Jimmy Carter Administration could build and ensured that attention to human rights would endure beyond Carter's presidency."[56] Fraser's critique of the Cold War framework, which he believed impeded the alignment of American foreign policy with moral imperatives, mirrors his commitment to reimagining U.S. international engagement through the lens of human rights. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study, as Congress assumed a central role in addressing human rights violations in China following the Tiananmen Square massacre. Congressional hearings served as a critical platform for legislators advocating for sanctions, alongside human rights advocates, Chinese dissidents, and student activists. These deliberations often advanced the human rights agenda further than the Administration's initial cautious approach, proving the legislative branch's influence in shaping U.S.-China relations during this period. Shifting his focus to the 1980s, Rasmus Søndergaard examines how members of Congress, spanning both liberal and conservative factions, pressured the Reagan Administration to confront human rights considerations in its foreign policy. Søndergaard's *Reagan, Congress, and Human Rights* concludes that, while the Administration's commitment to human rights was largely "strategic, highly selective, and only truly enthusiastic when

[55] Sarah B. Snyder, "'A Call for U.S. Leadership': Congressional Activism on Human Rights," *Diplomatic History*, vol.37, no.2 (April 2013), pp.372-397; Barbara J. Keys, "Congress, Kissinger, and the Origins of Human Rights Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History*, vol.34, no.5 (2010): pp.823–851; William Michael Schmidli, "Institutionalizing Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy: U.S.-Argentine Relations, 1976-1980," *Diplomatic History*, vol.35, no.2 (2011): pp.351–78. Key' and Snyder's important monographs on this topic are cited elsewhere in this introduction. See also William Michael Schmidli, *Freedom on the Offensive: Human Rights, Democracy Promotion, and U.S. Interventionism in the Late Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022)

[56] Ibid. Snyder, "'A Call for U.S. Leadership'," p.372.

combined with anti-communism," the persistent influence of Congress ultimately reshaped the debate "from whether human rights concerns should have a place in U.S. foreign policy to what role they should play."[57]

Beyond Congress, this project undertakes a comprehensive investigation on the role of non-governmental actors through extensive archival research. At Columbia University's Center for Human Rights, the collections of major advocacy organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, serve as valuable sources for understanding the dynamics of human rights activism in shaping U.S.-China policy. Similarly, the archives of the AFL-CIO, housed at the University of Maryland Library, along with issues of the *AFL-CIO News Magazine*, provide critical materials to analyze the intersections between labor rights advocacy and U.S. foreign policy. The role of Chinese students in the United States, particularly their rapid organization into an effective lobbying body through the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars, is explored through petitions, correspondence with the Administration and Congress, prepared statements for congressional hearings, and related documentation provided to key policymakers. This study further incorporates analyses of media coverage and student-run newspapers such as *The Stanford Daily*, *The Columbia Spectator*, *The Harvard Crimson*, and *The University of Chicago Magazine* to contextualize their advocacy efforts. Business lobbying efforts are examined through reports and correspondence from influential groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce – its Beijing and Hong Kong branches, – the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Foreign Trade Council, and the U.S.-China Business Council. Notably, the bimonthly publication of the U.S.-China Business Council, particularly the "Letter from the President" column, provides valuable insights into the strategic considerations and policy priorities of the business community in their engagement with U.S.-China relations.

This research engages with a substantial body of literature to examine the involvement of third-party actors in shaping Washington's China policy, while also addressing the complex array of interests at stake. Foundational works include congressional reports and analyses authored by Asia Specialist Kerry Dumbaugh,[58] alongside two pivotal edited volumes: *U.S.*

[57] Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard, *Reagan, Congress, and Human Rights: Contesting Morality in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p.262.
[58] These reports published for *Congressional Research Service – The Library of Congress* include "Ten Years in U.S.-China Policy: Interest Groups and their Influence, 1989-2000," Order Code RL30768, December 12, 2000; "China's Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) Status: Congressional Consideration, 1989-1998," Order Code 98-603 F, August 1, 1998; "China's Prospects After Tiananmen Square: Current Conditions, Future Scenarios, and a Survey

Policy Toward China (Robert Sutter, ed.) and *After the Cold War* (Robert Ross, ed.).[59] These contributions have been invaluable in building the geography of the broader spectrum of actors influencing U.S.-China relations beyond the executive and legislative branches. Additionally, this study aims to address gaps in the existing scholarship by highlighting underexplored or insufficiently examined yet significant actors. Among these are the above-mentioned Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars, Human Rights in China, and the AFL-CIO youth chapter, Frontlash. By investigating their roles and contributions, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse forces shaping U.S.-China policymaking during the post-Cold War period. The research also incorporates media coverage of the events under examination, which additionally provides a crucial lens for assessing shifts in American public opinion. It draws on a variety of major and local newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the *San Francisco Examiner*, among others, as well as the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post*.

III. Unipolar, yet not Triumphalist. Reassessing the End of the Cold War

The United States emerged from the Cold War with an uncontested position of global hegemony, exerting unparalleled influence on the international stage. This period appeared to validate the supremacy of the American liberal democratic model, founded on principles of collective security, and signified a transformative shift in U.S. foreign policy, as if the trajectory of history itself had reached its "end."[60] This vision was initially articulated by President George H. W. Bush through the concept of a "new world order" justifying the Gulf War intervention in 1991 and was subsequently reaffirmed by the Clinton Administration.[61] Acknowledging the necessity of integrating Beijing into this emerging global framework despite its domestic and political challenges, President Bill Clinton embraced the prevailing assumption that economic liberalization and integration into the global market would ultimately facilitate political reform in China. This approach, consistent with the policies of his

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of Expert Opinion," Order Code 91-137 F, January 15, 1991; "Hong Kong: Sino-British Disputes and Implications for U.S. Interests," Order Code IB93057, July 19, 1993.

[59] Robert G. Sutter, *U.S. Policy Toward China: An Introduction to The Role of Interest Groups* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998); Steven M. Teles, "Public Opinion and Interest Groups in the Making of U.S.-China Policy," in Robert S. Ross (ed.), *After the Cold War: Domestic Factors and U.S.-China Relations* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998): pp.40–69.

[60] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

[61] George H. W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the End of the Gulf War," (March 6, 1991), online at Miller Center, University of Virginia, https://millercenter.org/the presidency/presidentialspeeches/march-6-1991-address-joint-session-congress-end-gulf-war (last accessed September 2022).

predecessors, reflected a broader confidence in the transformative power of the U.S.-led liberal international order. Clinton articulated this perspective during his 1997 state visit to China, the first by a U.S. president since the Tiananmen Square crackdown. In a press conference alongside President Jiang Zemin, Clinton addressed human rights concerns, asserting that China was "on the wrong side of history." Despite the persistent obstacles that precluded a fully normalized relationship between the two nations, Clinton stressed the imperative of continued engagement, emphasizing that Washington and Beijing must "keep pushing forward."[62]

Despite the aspirations of U.S. leaders, China demonstrated reluctance to fully embrace the principles of what is commonly referred to as *Pax Americana*. In this regard, Daniel Sargent's conceptualization of Washington's post-World War II role is described as "a hierarchical configuration of international relations, in which the United States exercises singular responsibilities for order."[63] But it was only with the collapse of the Soviet Union that the United States, to borrow from Sargent's metaphor, assumed the role of the central force in a global scheme resembling a solar system dominated by a single sun. This newly reconfigured international order was marked by a distinctive form of influence, with American reach described as "difficult to depict on a map […] a diffuse geographical construction, not a zone of coherent territorial control."[64] This system, however, was characterized by several inherent paradoxes, three of which, as highlighted by Sargent, are particularly relevant to this research. First, the United States, while actively participating "in the competition among states for resources and influence," it also played a central role in shaping the international framework. It was both an "interested player" and a key authority in setting the rules of the global system, and its power functioned as the "institutional framework for international order," namely *Pax Americana*. Second, building on Charles Maier's conceptualization of "empire of production" and "empire of consumption," Sargent sheds light on the shift in the United States' role in the global economy.[65] While until the 1970s the U.S. acted as a major provider of resources to its allies, supporting a U.S.-led international order, from the 1980s onward, the United States

[62] Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton (1997, Book II), October 29, 1997, pp.1445–1452, the U.S. Government Publishing Office, online at www.gpo.gov (last access September 2022).
[63] The term *Pax Americana* was first introduced by Ronald Steel, *Pax Americana* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1977) and later revisited by Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[64] Daniel Sargent, "*Pax Americana. Sketches for an Un-diplomatic History," Diplomatic History*, vol.42, no.3 (2018): pp.358–359.
[65] See Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

became the world's leading consumer. In Sargent's words, "this marked a reversal from the earlier period, when resource outflows sustained *Pax Americana*, to a new era in which the United States relied on inflows of resources to maintain its dominant position and responsibilities within the global political system."[66] The final paradox lies in the juxtaposition of Washington's global ambitions with domestic institutional constraints, particularly in the post-Cold War period. As the United States sought to expand and consolidate its leadership in a reconfigured international order, it simultaneously faced growing "internal political and, especially, institutional dysfunctionalities." Congressional resistance, in particular, emerged as a critical impediment to the advancement of the institutional framework supporting U.S.-led global governance. Unlike the post-World War II era, when bipartisan consensus facilitated transformative initiatives such as the Marshall Plan, the post-Vietnam and, even more so, the post-Cold War periods were characterized by legislative obstructionism and a gradual withdrawal from international commitments. This domestic resistance is evident in key moments of congressional opposition to major international agreements. The difficulties in securing approval for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change in 1997, and the rejection of U.S. membership in the International Criminal Court in 1998 reflect a broader reluctance to engage in multilateral frameworks. More recently, challenges in advancing trade agreements such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) further illustrate this trend.[67]

These three paradoxes are particularly salient in the context of Sino-American relations during the early Cold War period, with the economic paradox being especially significant. As Giovanni Arrighi observes, the U.S. response to the economic crises of the early 1980s – seeking to mobilize global financial resources to simultaneously address a deep recession and escalate the arms race with the Soviet Union – resulted in the United States becoming "the greatest debtor nation in world history." This transformation marked a significant shift, as the U.S. became increasingly reliant on East Asian credit, labor, and commodities to sustain its economic power. Arrighi contends that "this shift of the center of world-scale processes of capital accumulation from North America to East Asia may well turn out to be the most

[66] Ibid. Sargent, "Pax Americana," p.370.
[67] Ibid. Sargent, "Pax Americana," p.371-372.

significant legacy of the Cold War."[68] This reorientation became particularly evident in U.S.-China relations, where, by the late 1980s, a nascent yet growing interdependence began to emerge. Although still in its embryonic stages, the foundations of this relationship were apparent in the American political discourse, notably in the presidential advocacy for engagement with China rather than condemnation following the events of June fourth, and the influential support of the business lobby. Over time, this dynamic would develop into what Mario Del Pero characterizes as an "indispensable, contradictory, and dangerous" relationship, encapsulating the complexities and tensions that define contemporary Sino-American interdependency.[69]

Following the conclusion of the Cold War, China's explicit rejection or tacit disregard for full adherence to bilateral or international agreements appeared to reflect its strategic positioning vis-à-vis Washington's hegemonic influence. This approach, as Christopher Layne and others have argued, would later crystallize into a substantial challenge to the *Pax Americana*. Layne argues that "it is the big, impersonal forces of history – the relative decline of American power, and the emergence of a risen China – that explain why the *Pax Americana*'s days are numbered."[70] While this shift may not have been fully realized at the time, the early dynamics within China and its evolving approach to the United States suggest the emergence of tensions that would later develop. As Arne Westad humorously noted in his lecture at Yale's *The Twentieth Century: A World History* class, China followed the *Sinatra way* – it did things its own way.[71] This concept is similarly captured in the idea of the "Chinese variant," as discussed by Francesco Benvenuti and Silvio Pons. They argue that this variant, which diverged from the path of the Soviet Union and offers partial explanations for its collapse, represented "an attempt to imperceptibly moderate the original ideological ambitions of a communist state, gradually assuming the international posture of a 'normal' country, a more or less normal nation-state." It involved dividing the process of reform into distinct phases – "respectively, economic and political change" – while attempting to maintain "a stable, predictable framework of domestic and foreign political relations." Notably, as they highlight,

[68] Giovanni Arrighi, "The World Economy and the Cold War, 1970–1990," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War – Volume III: Endings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): pp.23–44.
[69] Mario Del Pero, "La Relazione tra Usa e Cina: Indispensabile, Contraddittoria e Pericolosa," *Il Giornale di Brescia*, November 18, 2021.
[70] Christopher Layne, "The U.S.-Chinese Power Shift and the End of the Pax Americana," *International Affairs*, vol.94, no.1 (January 2018): pp.89–111.
[71] Ibid. Westad's series of lectures at Yale University, *The Twentieth Century: A World History,* 2024/25 academic year.

political reforms were "confined to internal rationalization and a tightening of discipline within the governing apparatus."[72]

During the period under examination, a prevailing belief among American policymakers – perhaps better described as an aspirational assumption – was that the *Chinese variant* represented a provisional strategy for navigating the destabilizing effects that had dismantled the Soviet bloc. This perspective held that China's approach was primarily designed to manage domestic unrest and prevent disorder within its vast and complex state, with the expectation that it would eventually converge with the liberal international order. Within this context, Fritz Bartel's contribution for *The Cambridge History of America and the World* series – as well as his monographs – offers an initial valuable framework for analyzing the interplay between American unipolar dominance and the anticipated integration of China into the post-Cold War global system. Bartel observes that, for American policymakers, "the end of the Cold War was, above all, a self-affirming experience," with both China and Russia playing key roles in reinforcing this perception. He argues that policymakers operated under the conviction that "Russia and China would consent to U.S. leadership of the international system because they were destined to become democratic capitalist states, and they were destined to become liberal democratic capitalist states because of the transformative effects that the US-led liberal international order would have on their societies, economies, and polities." The collapse of communism, Bartel argues, fostered a belief that "there was only one true path to global power. Russia and China would either take that path by accepting US institutions and hegemony, or they would become so weak and backward that their resistance to American primacy would not matter." Bartel challenges this optimistic outlook, concluding that "neither belief held true. Rather than being complementary convictions, uncontested American primacy and the preordained spread of democratic capitalism turned out to be contradictory illusions during the post-Cold War period." He further notes that "though the connection was never made explicit, there was an unspoken alignment between the projected duration of a unipolar world order and the schedule of China's inevitable democratic transformation. The United States' material dominance of the international order might only last a few decades, but by the time it ended,

[72] Francesco Benvenuti and Silvio Pons, "The End of the Soviet Communism," in Silvio Pons and Federico Romero (eds.), *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War. Issues, Interpretations, Periodizations* (London, New York: Frank Cass, 2005): pp.208–209.

China would be a capitalist democracy that accepted the United States' military and diplomatic leadership of the international system."[73]

Such assumptions, deeply embedded in the strategic outlook of the post-Cold War era, ultimately failed to account for the complexities surrounding China's rise and its divergence from the trajectory envisioned by American policymakers. While the capitalist economic model ultimately prevailed in China – although a very peculiar and *sui generis* capitalism – the anticipated political liberalization and pluralism did not materialize to the same extent as economic openness and commercial integration. As Westad observes in *Restless Empire*, "if the race to modernize be better run with Nike trainers, then the Chinese Communists would put them on (especially if the shoes themselves were made in China)."[74] This Chinese paradox emerged within the broader context of what Hal Brands, in *Making the Unipolar Moment*, identifies as a unipolar international system defined by American primacy. Brands characterizes the United States in this period as "the world's sole superpower – the only international actor with truly global reach, and a country whose unmatched military, economic, and diplomatic capabilities gave it a vast margin of power and influence over any competitor."[75] However, the Tiananmen Square crackdown partially disrupted this vision, creating a perception "that U.S. policy might actually be feeding a monster" resistant to conforming to the norms and values implied by American-led unipolarity. Although this perception proved short-lived, it left an enduring legacy of distrust. Arguably, this legacy – despite its complex and contingent origins – can be seen as a precursor to the discourses surrounding the emergence of a "new Cold War" in later decades, though often marked by oversimplified and ahistorical interpretations.[76]

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[73] Fritz Bartel, "The Illusions of the United States' Great Power Politics after the Cold War," in David C. Engerman, Max Paul Friedman, and Melani McAlister (eds.), *The Cambridge History of America and the World – Volume IV: 1945 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022): pp.537–59. For a more comprehensive analysis, see Fritz Bartel, *The Triumph of Broken Promises: The End of the Cold War and the Rise of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022); Nuno P. Monteiro and Fritz Bartel, *Before and After the Fall: World Politics and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[74] Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire. China and the World since 1750* (London: Vintage Books, 2013).

[75] Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment – U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post- Cold War Order* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2016), p.2.

[76] For a comprehensive examination of the ongoing debate among historians and international relations scholars regarding the possibility of a "new Cold War" between Washington and Beijing, see Charles Edel and Hal Brands, "The Real Origins of the U.S. China Cold War," *Foreign Policy*, June 2019; Arne Westad, "The Sources of Chinese Conduct. Are Washington and Beijing Fighting a New Cold War?" *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2019; Thomas J. Christensen, "There Will Not Be a New Cold War; The Limits of U.S.-Chinese Competition," *Foreign Affairs*, March 2021; Mario Del Pero, "The US-China Rivalry is not a New Cold War, and It's Dangerous to Call it That," *The Guardian*, July 20, 2022; Martin Jacques, "If US-China Competition is not a New Cold War,

The period under examination – during which Beijing charted its own developmental course while simultaneously benefiting from economic and strategic engagement with Washington – marked a critical juncture in the United States' redefinition of its national security framework. As Andrew Preston asserts, national security is an "invented tradition," shaped by both tangible and intangible perceptions of threat.[77] In this light, the debates surrounding China policy in Washington were deeply embedded in this evolving security paradigm.[78] Melvyn Leffler's observation that "foreign policy became national security policy when officials believed (for whatever reasons) that developments abroad might endanger the preservation of core values at home" is particularly relevant here.[79] The constraints posed by the Tiananmen Massacre and its aftermath presented a significant challenge to American national security thinking. First, the events demonstrated that capitalism and democratic values were not inherently intertwined, as China selectively embraced economic liberalization while rejecting political pluralism. This undermined the assumption that economic engagement would inevitably lead to political reform. Second, the crisis exposed internal divisions within Washington – across the Administration, Congress, and lobbying groups – over how foreign policy should be formulated and, specifically, how to respond to China's actions. Third, the unfolding dynamics underscored the growing interdependence between the United States and an emerging power that fundamentally – though ambiguously – resisted, or at times even rejected, U.S. global hegemony. Taken together, these developments forced American policymakers to confront the complexities of an evolving international order in which the assumptions of unipolar dominance were – or could – increasingly called into question. What, in other words, began not to function anymore was the widespread and overly shared messianic belief within the United States that China could be fully changed or "saved."[80] Borrowing from Warren Cohen's analysis, in the aftermath of Tiananmen, China ceased to serve as "an

Then What," *Global Times*, July 22, 2021; Minghao Zao, "Is a New Cold War Inevitable? Chinese Perspectives on US–China Strategic Competition," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol.12, no.3 (Autumn 2019): pp.371–394.

[77] Andrew Preston in Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse (eds.), *H-Diplo Roundtable XIX-40 on Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security*, 1920-2015, 18 June 2018.

[78] In this regard, Hugo Meijer's study of U.S. export control policy on military-related technology offers a critical examination of how the United States sought to balance its national security imperatives with economic interests in its relationship with China. Meijer contends that, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown and the end of the Cold War, "the changing patterns at the structural, relational, and domestic level coalesced in eroding the capacity of the United States to effectively control the flow of defense-related technology to the PRC." See Hugo Meijer, *Trading with the Enemy: The Making of U.S. Export Control Policy Toward the People's Republic of China* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[79] Melvyn P. Leffler, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism. U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920-2015* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), p.24.

[80] See James Mann, *The China Fantasy: How our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression* (New York, NY: Viking, 2007).

opportunity for the inflation of American self-esteem," as it previously had, and instead emerged as a persistent source of apprehension and, at times, a perceived strategic threat.[81]

IV. Agencies and Contingencies. A New Plurality in Washington's China Policy

A defining aspect of this research is its dual emphasis on the macro-level analysis of global events and structural dynamics, alongside a micro-level exploration of the human dimension in policymaking. By examining how individuals' personal backgrounds, value systems, and contextual constraints shaped their roles in U.S. foreign policy decision-making, this work seeks to call attention to the intricate interplay between individual agency and broader geopolitical forces. This approach offers a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complexities underpinning the policymaking process. While acknowledging that individual actions must be interpreted within the context in which they occur – and that any analysis inherently carries some degree of bias when framed through individual perspectives – this research argues that although individuals cannot choose the historical circumstances into which they act, they retain the agency to determine how they respond to those circumstances.[82]

This study draws on existing scholarship that explores Sino-U.S. relations beyond the confines of formal diplomatic interactions and grand strategy considerations, pointing up the roles of individual actors and non-governmental organizations in shaping U.S. foreign policymaking toward China. Such scholarship sheds light on the significance of societal interactions and people-to-people exchanges as critical components of the bilateral relationship. A notable component of this literature examines how individuals – predominantly Americans, though not exclusively – encountered life in China, often resulting in profound shifts in their perceptions and challenging preconceived notions of the country, which were frequently shaped by romantic, exotic, or more often caricatured representations. A significant contribution to this field is Terry Lautz's *Americans in China*, which traces the contemporary history of U.S.-China relations from the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to the present. In the attempt to offer an original perspective of this story, Lautz adopts a biographical lens, examining the experiences of thirteen Americans who, whether intentionally

[81] Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China. A History of Sino-American Relations* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press), p.196.
[82] "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past," Karl Marx and C. P. Dutt, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Marxist Library: Works of Marxism-Leninism* (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1935).

or inadvertently, became deeply involved with China, motivated by diverse ambitions and personal aspirations. As Lautz observes, "China was more than just another place; it was an idea, a cause, a revolution, a civilization. Some were born in China, others were driven by curiosity and adventure; some perceived China as an existential threat, others as a socialist utopia, and still others sought to improve U.S.-China relations for non-ideological reasons."[83] Lautz's work builds on the foundation laid by Jonathan Spence's *To Change China*, which provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical interactions and cross-cultural exchanges between Western "advisers" and China since their first encounters in the Seventeenth Century. Spence's narrative examines a range of figures, from Jesuit missionaries to engineers, physicians, and revolutionaries, all of whom sought to reform and modernize China according to their own perceived superior ideals. These efforts, often rooted in paternalism – and, at times, even outright racism – were shaped by the belief that their models of progress and development could be applied to China, despite the complexities of the country's own cultural and political context. However, in many instances, these efforts resulted in disillusionment, as the Chinese adeptly appropriated these exchanges to further their own interests, often benefiting more from selective adaptation than the Westerners themselves.[84] This theme is similarly explored in David Hollinger's *Protestants Abroad*, which focuses on American Protestant missionaries who aimed to spread Christianity and Western values around the globe. Immersed in diverse cultural environments, these missionaries were frequently confronted with challenges to their own perspectives, leading to a critical reevaluation of their beliefs.[85]

While recognizing the agency of individuals and non-governmental organizations, historians have also underlined the pivotal role of government institutions and the complex interplay between hierarchical directives and grassroots initiatives. Notably, Elizabeth Ingleson's *Made in China* contextualizes the early stages of China's integration into global capitalism, highlighting the leading part played by an unprecedented convergence of interests between Chinese policymakers and U.S. business leaders. As Ingleson observes, "China's convergence with global capitalism took shape in the 1970s because some U.S. businesspeople, with the encouragement of Chinese policymakers, began to see trade with China as a means of accessing cheap labor rather than a place to absorb U.S. goods. In the process, they

[83] Terry Lautz, *Americans in China: Encounters with the People's Republic* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022).
[84] Jonathan Spence, *To Change China: Western Advisers in China, 1620 – 1960* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1980).
[85] David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

reconfigured what it meant to even speak of 'U.S.-China trade.'"[86] From a methodological standpoint, Pete Millwood's *Improbable Diplomats* offers a complementary approach. While Ingleson focuses on the economic foundations of Sino-U.S. relations, Millwood examines cultural and scientific diplomacy during the years leading up to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1979. Shifting attention from professional diplomats to transnational societal interactions, Millwood highlights the significance of exchange programs involving athletes, musicians, physicists, and other individuals. He argues that these exchanges were "a critical factor in the successes and failures, the progress and setbacks, that marked the eight years of negotiations during Washington and Beijing's rapprochement, culminating in diplomatic recognition in 1979."[87]

Millwood's work centers on the activities of two prominent non-governmental organizations established in the mid-1960s: the National Committee on United States-China Relations and the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the PRC. These organizations were instrumental in fostering people-to-people exchanges and cultivating mutual understanding between the United States and China, a mission that gained further legitimacy through the Nixon Administration's recognition of their strategic relevance to the evolving rapprochement with Beijing. Similarly, Fabio Lanza's *The End of Concern* examines the trajectory of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS), a collective of young academics committed to rethinking the study of Asia – particularly China – in the United States and Europe as a politically engaged and transformative discipline. Inspired by Maoist principles of egalitarianism, collective action, and anti-imperialism, CCAS sought to challenge conventional frameworks of modernity and development by advocating for alternative models rooted in China's revolutionary experience. Lanza situates CCAS's intellectual and political endeavors within the broader context of the "long sixties," a period he identifies as a rare moment in recent history when China, owing to its revolutionary context, became a focal point for transnational dialogues on intellectual and political transformation. By highlighting the intersection of political commitment and scholarly production, Lanza's work sheds light on the

[86] Elizabeth O'Brien Ingleson, *Made in China: When US-China Interests Converged to Transform Global Trade* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2024).
[87] Pete Millwood*, Improbable Diplomats. How Ping-Pong Players, Musicians, and Scientists Remade US-China Relations* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

broader significance of CCAS's contributions to the reimagining of academic and political discourse during this transformative era.[88]

Ingleson's, Millwood's, and Lanza's complex emphasis on economic, cultural, and academic dimensions provides a nuanced framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of Sino-U.S. relations in their contemporary early stages. While these studies focus on a transformative period in U.S.-China relations – characterized by the need for both nations to reimagine their relationship and codify a new vocabulary for dialogue after two decades of sustained Cold War confrontation – this research extends the analysis to a later critical juncture. This subsequent period, marked by disruptions to the initial framework of cooperation, nonetheless retained key elements from the earlier phase that continued to shape the trajectory of bilateral relations. Simultaneously, it introduced new concerns and complexities, reframing future projections and redefining the parameters of engagement between the two nations. The perspectives presented throughout the chapters of this research result both from a deliberate effort to examine the personal stories and contributions of the actors involved in the events under study and from the availability of sources that document their experiences, including opportunities to conduct interviews with them. This study seeks to extend beyond – while still incorporating – the political and diplomatic narrative of U.S.-China relations, developing a nuanced, multifaceted account that encompasses a range of perspectives and factors influencing the bilateral relationship.

"A Middle Way for the Middle Kingdom" attempts to bring together multiple narratives to explore the varied interpretations of China during a period of profound transformation. It examines how these divergent perspectives among key actors shaping Washington's foreign policymaking contributed to the rough times in the bilateral relations. For some, China was embodied by the pro-democracy students who initiated the 1989 protests and by those trained at America's best institutions who sought refuge in the United States, viewed as the potential architects of the nation's future leadership. For others, it was exemplified by dissidents and activists exposing systemic abuses within a society thought to be advancing its modernization beyond mere economic reform. Still others saw China in the reformist faction led by Deng Xiaoping and later Jiang Zemin, who, despite the political setback of the Tiananmen crackdown, were believed to advocate for continued reform and engagement with the United

[88] Fabio Lanza, *The End of Concern: Maoist China, Activism, and Asian Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

States and the "West." Alternatively, China was also perceived as represented by market-oriented local officials and entrepreneurs, spearheading the nation's economic opening and its integration into global markets. The varying answers to these interpretations among the actors involved in U.S. response to China reveal why, after June 4, 1989, the "middle way" that had previously facilitated a unified U.S. stance during the two decades following normalization became increasingly untenable. The fragmentation of perspectives regarding China's identity and developmental trajectory highlighted the complexities and challenges of formulating a cohesive policy framework amidst competing visions and priorities.

This study traces the experiences, contributions, and points of view of key figures in Washington. It begins with George H. W. Bush, whose nuanced understanding of China, cultivated during his tenure as chief of the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing in the mid-1970s, not only deepened his personal interest in the country but also reinforced his belief that few in Washington possessed the strategic acumen necessary to manage the complexities of Sino-American relations during a time of significant transformation within China. Although Bush entered office with a promising outlook for U.S.-China engagement, his Administration's efforts were soon undermined by a series of unforeseen events that disrupted his carefully calibrated strategy, thereby complicating the trajectory of bilateral relations. Similarly, American diplomats such as Winston Lord, James Lilley, and J. Stapleton Roy, each of whom had personal ties to China, operated during a period when the practice of diplomacy was temporarily constrained by the micromanagement of foreign policy in Washington and the unprecedented proliferation of actors striving to influence the terms and rhetoric of U.S.-China relations. The narrative also highlights the journey of Nancy Pelosi, a freshman congresswoman from California, who, in the late 1980s, represented the district with the largest Asian-American population in the United States. Confronted by skepticism and preconceptions on Capitol Hill, Pelosi sought a platform through which she could assert her political presence. Supported by her Chief of Staff, Judy Lemons, and by young but dynamic staffers, Pelosi seized on the significant impact of the Tiananmen Square protests and their global broadcast. The images of the crackdown, seen in American homes and prominently featured in media outlets, provided her with an opportunity to assert her voice in the national discourse, thus marking her emergence as one of the most outspoken and increasingly radical figures when China was on the congressional agenda.

This work also examines the role of individuals who, prior to June 1989, had limited awareness of China but were thrust into the debate over Sino-U.S. relations as a result of the changing geopolitical climate. Sidney Jones, appointed executive director of Asia Watch just months before the Tiananmen Square crackdown, became a central figure in elevating human rights concerns related to China. Jones, alongside experts such as Mike Jendrzejczyk and Robin Munro, led a concerted effort to spotlight China's human rights violations, effectively influencing U.S. policymakers and the broader public. Another pivotal figure in this narrative is Cheryl Graeve, who assumed leadership of Frontlash, the youth chapter of the AFL-CIO. Despite her initial lack of in-depth knowledge about China, Graeve and her team launched a campaign to raise awareness among American consumers about the exploitative labor conditions in Chinese factories producing goods for the U.S. market. Their efforts gained widespread attention, with praise from human rights advocates, Tibetan groups, and even the Dalai Lama, while also drawing criticism from certain business circles in the United States. At the same time, the focus of this research also encompasses individuals who, prior to the June 4th crackdown, possessed limited knowledge of the United States and its political dynamics but, within a matter of months, emerged as influential actors within Washington's policy-making sphere. Among them were the leaders and spokespersons of Chinese student organizations, who skillfully attracted the attention and support of U.S. lawmakers and the broader public. While initially seeking refuge and protection from American institutions, they simultaneously endeavored to amplify the struggles of their peers in China. Over time, however, they increasingly recognized the strategic advantages of remaining in the United States, capitalizing on the professional opportunities that their new prominence afforded them.

Conducting research in contemporary history presents certain challenges, particularly the delays in the declassification of relevant archival materials. These include not only government records but also documents from non-governmental organizations, such as those related to the China-focused activities of Human Rights Watch, held at Columbia University, some of which remain inaccessible to researchers. However, a notable advantage of focusing on the early 1990s is the ability to engage directly with key figures from the period, many of whom have not yet been extensively studied by historians or journalists. This research has been significantly enriched by interviews with influential individuals who played significant roles in the events under examination. These include J. Stapleton Roy, U.S. Ambassador to the People's Republic of China from 1991 to 1995; members of Nancy Pelosi's staff, such as Chief of Staff Judy Lemons, William Quinn, and Craig Middleton, respectively legislative assistance

and press secretary; distinguished China scholars like Warren Cohen and James Mann; human rights advocates including Sidney Jones of Asia Watch and Xiao Qiang of Human Rights In China; labor union representative Cheryl Graeve; and Chinese student leaders such as Liu Yong Chuan and Ciping Wang. Finally, in addition to these firsthand interviews, valuable sources for this research include several oral history projects that offer firsthand accounts of key events and policymaking processes.[89] In sum, this study explores the intersection of personal motivations, grassroots activism, and institutional dynamics in shaping U.S. foreign policy toward China during a landmark juncture. It posits how individuals and organizations, often driven by moral, political, or business imperatives, played significant roles in the evolving discourse surrounding U.S.-China relations during the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square protests.

V. From Tiananmen (June 1989) to Clinton's Impossible Gamble (June 1994)

The research spans from June 1989, when images of the Chinese military suppressing pro-democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square became a prominent feature in American media, invariably altering public perception in the United States, through June 1994, culminating in President Bill Clinton's decision to decouple the annual renewal of Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status from human rights conditions. This period allows for a detailed examination of both the immediate and medium-term U.S. responses to the Tiananmen Square crackdown under two distinct presidential administrations, those of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. It also facilitates an analysis of the increasing influence of Congress and interest groups in shaping U.S.-China policy during this time, as well as the difficulties in balancing human rights imperatives and economic growing interdependencies.

The dissertation is structured into four main chapters. While it largely follows a chronological progression of the events under examination, the structure and order of the chapters are primarily determined by the issues addressed in Washington and the key actors involved. Chapter One examines the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, focusing on the unexpected success of a bill introduced in the summer of 1989 by Representative Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco. The bill sought to ease visa restrictions for Chinese students and scholars in the United States, who would otherwise be forced to return to

[89] These include the George H.W. Bush Oral History Project at the Miller Center, University of Virginia; the Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training; the National Security Council Oral History Roundtable, Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland and the Brookings Institution.

China. This legislative initiative sparked a significant conflict between the Bush Administration and the Democrat-led Congress, crossing both party lines and ideological divisions. The journey of the so-called Pelosi Bill – initially voted by a plebiscite bipartisan majority and later vetoed by the president – witnessed an unprecedented domestic negotiation within the realm of U.S. China policy. This legislative confrontation not only elevated policy-making into the public domain, engaging a wider audience typically less involved in the nuances of foreign relations, but also presented a significant – and, especially, credible – challenge to the executive branch's long-standing primacy in determining the course of U.S. policy toward China. The chapter further explores the case of the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars (IFCSS) constituted in late July 1989 in Chicago and able to personalize the legislative *querelle* between the White House and Capitol Hill while learning how to master the codes of American politics. The study of their effort bridges the extensive literature on students' movements and activism in the United States and the studies of those scholars who have covered the American experience of Chinese students since the early 1920s.[90] The example of the students' lobbying activity aims at illustrating how, after June 1989, both established and emerging actors multiplicated while becoming influential in the context of widespread discontent and political opposition.

Chapter Two takes its initial steps from the early weeks of George H. W. Bush's presidency and the numerous challenges to his credibility as an assertive president. It contends that Bush's belief in his unique understanding of China – encompassing the promises of the 1980s market-oriented reforms, the geography of the country's interests, as well as the contradictions within

[90] A big portion of this literature focuses on the students' activism in the civil rights era between the early 1950s and the mid-1970s. Among others, see John N. Hale, *A New Kind of Youth. Historically Black High Schools and Southern Student Activism, 1920–1975* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Stefan M. Bradley, *Upending the Ivory Tower: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Ivy League* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018); Kathryn Schumaker, *Troublemakers: Students' Rights and Racial Justice in the Long 1960s* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2019). The history of Chinese students in the United States has been covered in Weili Ye, *Seeking Modernity in China's Name. Chinese Students in the United States, 1900-1927* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Ning Qian, *Chinese Students Encounter America* (University of Washington Press, 2002); Stacey Bieler, "*Patriots" or "Traitors"?: A History of American Educated Chinese Students* (New York, NY: East Gate, 2004). The topic of Chinese students in the United States and migration-related issues is covered in Lisong Liu, *Chinese Student Migration and Selective Citizenship: Mobility, Community and Identity Between China and the United States* (London: Routledge, 2016). For the study of other student groups and their influence see Matthew K. Shannon, *Losing Hearts and Minds: American-Iranian Relations and International Education During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017). See also Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). For a comprehensive analysis of how educational exchanges have influenced both U.S. diplomacy and global perceptions of the United States Richard P. Garlitz and Lisa Jarvinen (eds.), *Teaching America to the world and the world to America: Education and Foreign Relations since 1870* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

the CCP leadership – led to his reluctance to delegate or share his foreign policy prerogatives. This presidential style resulted in intense contention with the Democrat-led Congress, which sought an adequate outlet to express its dissatisfaction following the June 1989 crackdown. The chapter delves into the behind-the-scenes dynamics of the Bush Administration's efforts to retain control over China policy formulation, arguing that the president sought to maintain control over U.S. China policy by employing a foreign policy approach centered on personal diplomacy and confidential negotiations, a strategy that had fallen out of favor with both policymakers and the American public. It examines the annual renewal of trade privileges under MFN commercial status, which became a central domestic forum for challenging Bush's stance to the PRC. Members of Congress increasingly adopted stringent positions on China policy, emphasizing human rights conditions and moral imperatives. In contrast, the president sought to minimize these concerns, contending that an approach primarily focused on human rights would jeopardize the PRC leadership reformist faction led by Deng Xiaoping as well as the most progressive and market-oriented Chinese provinces and undermine the competitiveness of American businesses in China.

Chapter Three focuses on the rhetoric of human rights imperatives that gained prominence in the years following the Tiananmen Square massacre. It argues that the American fascination with China and the messianic projections directed toward the former Middle Kingdom during the 1970s and 1980s significantly intensified the impact of the televised crackdown on the American public. The suppression of peaceful pro-democracy demonstrators, who employed slogans and rhetorical frameworks resonant with American values, constituted a profound shock to those who had invested considerable faith in the idealized narrative of China that had shaped American public discourse in the wake of Nixon's rapprochement. This narrative, once dominant, suddenly appeared outdated, revealing the shared imagination of many Americans as little more than an illusion. The chapter further explores the intervention of third-party actors, including Human Rights Watch (HRW) and its Asia division, in contesting the Administration's restrained approach toward China. While HRW and its regional chapters experienced considerable growth and professionalization during the 1970s and 1980s, their focus had largely excluded the internal conditions within the PRC and the intricacies of its relations with Washington. By establishing a network of experts – including the opening of a branch office in Hong Kong and close collaboration with the newly founded organization Human Rights in China (HRIC) – these actors played a pivotal role in shaping a discourse that articulated widespread discontent and critically examined the complexities of U.S.-China

relations. The chapter concludes with a case study examining the exposure of illicit practices by the PRC government, such as the exploitation of forced labor in prison camps. These concerns were amplified by Chinese students and dissidents in the United States, most notably Harry Wu, whose bestseller *Laogai: The Chinese Gulag* brought international attention to human rights abuses in China. The chapter also investigates the activities of Frontlash, the youth division of the AFL-CIO, one of the most prominent U.S. labor unions. Through its seasonal "Toycott" campaign, Frontlash sought to heighten consumer awareness about the ethical implications of purchasing goods produced in China, where exploitative labor conditions were alleged to be widespread. These efforts witnessed the intersection of human rights advocacy and U.S. trade policy, highlighting the growing public concern over the moral dimensions of economic engagement with China.

Chapter Four investigates the growing economic interdependencies between Washington and Beijing, which progressively eroded the arguments of those advocating for the continuation of sanctions against China, particularly in the context of the annual MFN status renewal debate. As China became increasingly integrated into the American production and economic system, the chapter analyzes how American business groups mounted a successful lobbying campaign for the return of *business as usual*. These groups advanced a threefold argument: first, that economic sanctions would disproportionately harm regions in China where market-oriented reforms had been most enthusiastically adopted by local party officials and entrepreneurs; second, that the presence of American businesses in China had contributed to local economic development and improved the welfare of workers and their families, therefore cleverly shifting the focus of U.S. domestic debate from political to socio-economic rights; and third, that sanctions by the U.S. government would confer a significant competitive advantage to other economic powers, undermining the interests of American producers, exporters and importers, as well as workers and consumers. The chapter also examines the case of Hong Kong, by this time a critical economic hub, and explores how arguments surrounding its impending 1997 transfer of sovereignty from Britain to China were strategically employed to resist excessive calls for sanctions. Furthermore, it evaluates the early years of the Clinton Administration, with particular attention to the president's initial campaign pledges to adopt a strong human rights stance toward China. The chapter demonstrates how these commitments were gradually diluted as Clinton chose to decouple human rights conditions from trade policy, reflecting the shifting dynamics of U.S.-China relations. It highlights how deteriorating bilateral relations, jeopardized by a confrontational approach by the PRC leadership and diplomatic missteps by

the new Democratic Administration, led the president to prioritize a policy of constructive engagement. This recalibration included a rhetorical shift, increased reliance on personal diplomacy, and a growing acknowledgment of China's rising economic prominence and its intricate integration into the global economy.

Chapter 1

"Speaking Loudly Where the President Only Whispered"

Protecting Chinese Students and Scholars in the United States

PART 1

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Part 1

1.1 Claiming Congressional Prerogatives: The Pelosi Bill Breakthrough

"Okay, I'm locking you in this room until you come up with an idea," Judy Lemons, Nancy Pelosi's Chief of Staff from 1987 to 2002, gently intimidated two young members of her team on Thursday morning, June 8, 1989.[91] Four days had passed since the brutal repression of Chinese pro-democracy students and workers in Tiananmen Square. Lemons knew that, representing the largest Asian American community in the United States, Pelosi would be expected to express some form of indignation and disapproval regarding the events in China,

[91] Interview with Judy Lemons, Pelosi's Chief of Staff from 1987 to 2002, May 23, 2023. Lemons dedicated nearly three decades of service in the U.S. Congress since 1974, working as a staff member for three different representatives from the same California district: Phil and Sala Burton, as well as Nancy Pelosi. Throughout this period, she gained valuable experience while serving on two congressional subcommittees: the Subcommittee on National Parks and Insular Affairs and the Subcommittee on Labor.

or ideally, to take tangible actions in Congress.[92] Since one worked as press secretary and handled the Asia portfolio and the other was Pelosi's legislative assistance, Craig Middleton and William Quinn, both in their twenties and relatively new to their jobs, seemed suited to come up with a reasonable proposal for the San Francisco congresswoman. With her usual flight schedule, Pelosi would go back to California every Thursday night and then return to Washington D.C. on Sunday night for votes. While seated in Pelosi's office – as they would later reveal to their former boss – in the initial hour, the two young men pondered anxiously about the potential consequences of losing their jobs and the challenges they would face in meeting their rent obligations. In the second hour, their thoughts shifted to more ordinary matters, such as deciding what they would have for lunch. As the third hour unfolded, when the time difference with the West Coast finally allowed them, they seized the opportunity to make calls to immigration lawyers located in the San Francisco Bay Area, seeking valuable guidance. Eventually, at around 4:00 P.M. that afternoon, they managed to establish contact with two attorneys from California, Hope Fry and Martin Lawler, engaging in a meaningful conversation with them over the phone. "We have an idea," the door of Pelosi's office opened. "Great, that's all I asked. An idea. A step. Something," Lemons said, breathing a sigh of relief. "Maybe it doesn't come to fruition. Maybe we don't realize anything. But we have to try."[93] Little did they know it was just the beginning of a journey that would eventually radicalize their boss, Nancy Pelosi, turning the freshman congresswoman into a recurrent headache, from Washington's White House to Beijing's Zhongnanhai.[94] At the end of day, it was in fact China that catapulted her into a national figure.

Representative Sala Burton (D-CA) had died from cancer a couple of years before, in February 1987. She had succeeded her husband, Philip Burton, in Congress four years after his death. Foreseeing her imminent passing, she had endorsed Nancy Pelosi to fill her soon-vacant seat in the House. The group known as the "Burton machine," as referred to by *The Los Angeles*

[92] The 1990 Census reveals that Chinese represented 18.1% of the entire San Francisco City and County population, equal to 130,753 people out of 723,959, only second after those identifying as white (53.6% – 388,341) and before the Hispanic population (13.3% – 96,640) and the Black population (10.9% – 78,931). This data becomes even more revealing when juxtaposed with the figures from the 1980 census (12.1% - 82,244) and the 1970 census (8.2% - 58,696), illustrating a tripling of the Chinese population within a mere two decades. Data taken from the Bay Area Census website, online at http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/counties/SanFranciscoCounty70.htm (last accessed September 2023).
[93] Ibid. Interview with Judy Lemons, May 2023.
[94] The Zhongnanhai, located in Beijing, is a complex that functions as both the working offices and living quarters for the top leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the central government.

Times, mobilized in support of Pelosi.[95] She was already well-known in California's political Democratic circles, and she had previously helped raising money for the district senators.[96] However, this did not appear to ensure her definite triumph in a district where the voter demographic had significantly transformed due to an increase in Yuppies – young upwardly mobile professionals – and a thriving, politically engaged gay community that was anticipated to sway the balance of democratic support toward alternative contenders. With a focus on prioritizing increased funding for AIDS, Pelosi eventually emerged victorious in the Democratic nomination by defeating Harry Britt, openly gay and expected to garner support from the San Francisco homosexual voters, with a margin of 36.12% to 32.48%. Subsequently, she secured the seat by garnering a significant lead of 63.36% to 30.68% against the Republican candidate, Harriet Ross.[97]

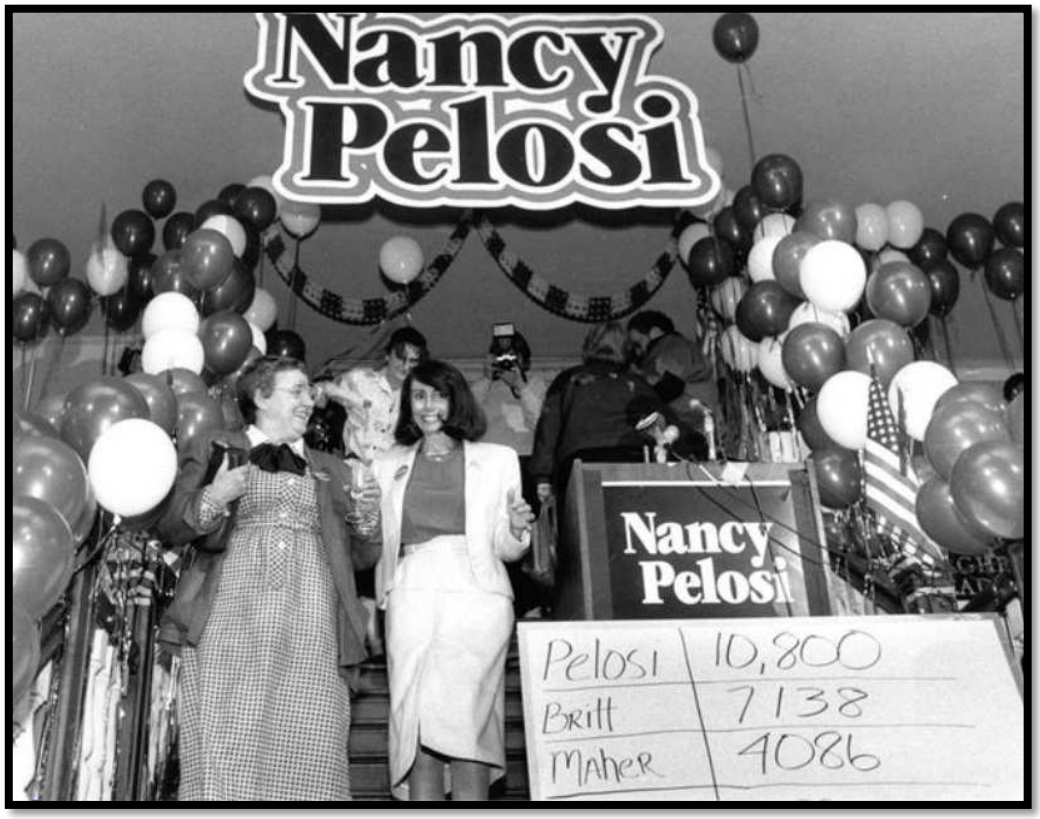

Figure 2. Photo credit: Hearst Newspapers via Getty Images in Kate Kachor, "Nancy Pelosi's journey from homemaker to political powerbroker," 9Honey, September 2024.

[95] Dan Morain, "Rep. Sala Burton, Who Replaced Husband in Congress, dies at 61," *The Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 1987.

[96] Pelosi had previously worked for Jerry Brown's 1976 democratic primaries campaign in Maryland, and she had later become active in the California State Democratic Committee. See Susan Page, *Madam Speaker: Nancy Pelosi and the Lessons of Power. A Biography* (New York, NY: Twelve, 2021). See also Ronald M. Peters and Cindy Simon Rosenthal, *Speaker Nancy Pelosi and The New American Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[97] Data collected by Our Campaigns – California District 5 – 1987 Special Election, online at https://www.ourcampaigns.com/RaceDetail.html?RaceID=170290 (last accessed September 2023).

While *The Los Angeles Times* portrayed Pelosi as "a 46-year-old mother of five who has raised large sums for her party's candidates," *The New York Times* described the newly elected congresswoman as "prominent in national Democratic circles as a fund-raiser and party organization worker."[98] However, due to her lack of previous experience in elected roles, there was uncertainty surrounding her potential performance on the Hill. "Her opponents paint her as a dilettante, a 'party girl from the party.' They assert that she has no ties to the special constituencies of San Francisco – homosexuals, blacks, Asians and other minorities," reported the *Times* in April 1987. Indeed, upon her arrival in Washington, Pelosi faced initial skepticism not limited to her curriculum. Reservations about her role as member of Congress were further heightened by the fact that Pelosi was the daughter of the former mayor of Baltimore, Thomas D'Alesandro Jr., and the wife of a prosperous San Francisco businessman, Paul Pelosi. Also, being a woman in the late 1980s did not help. Among the 435 representatives in the House, only 26 were women, casting a shadow of doubt on Pelosi's ability to navigate Washington's political landscape. "I think Nancy became an ideal target for people simply because she is so attractive. She's an eye–stopper," Lemons argued.[99] She was a good-looking glamorous wealthy woman, and people in Washington seemed only interested in her pedigree and appearance rather than what she had to say. "She was considered a freshman. Someone that people were not really paying attention to. She looked pretty. But she had no platform."[100] Lemons knew that after almost two years in Congress an idea was needed that could make "*Nancy*" step on a solid podium from which she could make her voice heard. In the late afternoon of June 8, 1989, Middleton and Quinn simply came up with the right one, without even fully realizing it. By 1992, this initiative had contributed to a notable shift in her public image. As John Jacobs observed on *The San Francisco Chronicle* in an article titled 'Not Just a Party Girl,' Pelosi had "shaken off the lightweight tag that dogged her early political career" and had grown into a legislator who championed issues for a "constituency of almost unimaginable variety and complexity," reflecting her expanding influence and political acumen.[101]

[98] Keith Love and Dan Morain, "Pelosi Wins Democratic Contest for Burton Seat," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1987; -, "Democrat Elected in San Francisco," *The New York Times*, June 3, 1987.
[99] "Judy Lemons – Oral History Interview: A Century of Women in Congress" by Grace Ethier, *Office of the Historian*, U.S. House of Representatives, July 19, 1989.
[100] Ibid. Interview with Judy Lemons, May 2023.
[101] John Jacobs, "Not Just a Party Girl," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 12, 1992, pp.14-21.

NOT JUST A PARTY GIRL

Critics tagged her as a political lightweight. But with her growing reputation as a Capitol Hill mover and shaker, and a key role at this week's Democratic National Convention, Nancy Pelosi has proven she's a contender.

BY JOHN JACOBS

For Democrats of a certain generation and activist bent, San Francisco's 5th Congressional District is sacred ground. It is one of the most militantly liberal districts in America, as well as one of the most ethnically, culturally and economically diverse. Labor leader John Shelley began the district's postwar tradition of progressive representation in 1949 when he was elected to Congress. Phillip Burton, who succeeded Shelley in 1964 after Shelley became mayor, pushed it further, converting the seat into a crusading national platform for landmark progressive legislation — not to mention old-fashioned power politics — for a generation.

Given that rich history, it was somewhat surprising when Sala Burton, Phillip's widow and successor who was herself suffering from terminal cancer, "anointed" a little-known Democratic Party fund-raiser named Nancy Pelosi as her 5th District successor. Pelosi seemed like an odd choice: wealthy, glamorous, a Social Register party insider who seemed on the surface more at home with Ann Getty Pacific Heights-types than with the warehouse workers, single mothers and AIDS patients who more typically characterize the district.

Only five people were in the hospital room that day in late 1986: Burton, her brother-in-law John Burton, veteran aide Susie Kennedy, longtime friend Agar Jaicks and Pelosi. Literally from her deathbed, Sala Burton questioned Pelosi on whether she was truly interested in the job. She would be 2,500 miles from her husband and five children. The hours would be long, the stress nonstop. She didn't need the money. Was she fully committed to serve?

Pelosi looked at the dying woman. "I expect you to get well," she said. "If you do not, I would be honored to succeed you."

Today, six years later, the slender, dark-haired, stunningly attractive 52-year-old Pelosi — the most popular politician in San Francisco, according to some polls — has moved faster politically than almost anyone could have predicted. When the Democratic National Convention opens tomorrow in New York, she will occupy a prominent role as co-chair of the platform committee, the same position Geraldine Ferraro held in 1984 before she was named Walter Mondale's running mate. New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, her close friend, put Pelosi on the list of running mates that he drew up for Bill Clinton to consider.

In rising to these heights, Pelosi has shaken off the lightweight tag that dogged her early political career. As chairwoman of the California Democratic Party in 1981-82, she seemed more like a cheerleader than a serious player: After a press conference, a reporter would search his notebook in vain for a quote of some significance. But if Pelosi's sound bites weren't impressive, her track record as a grass-roots activist and party organizer was. "In 1987, I had a history with Phil and Sala on the issues, a good rapport and a very political background," Pelosi said recently, explaining why she believed Sala Burton picked her. "I appreciated and respected Phil Burton's approach to politics. We could speak a shorthand. He knew where I was, and we were comfortable. I am a hard worker and diligent, and maybe Sala thought I could represent the district in their tradition."

Since her election in 1987, Pelosi has grown enormously. On Capitol Hill, she has reached out to champion issues for a constituency of almost unimaginable variety and complexity. Behind the scenes, her fund-raising experience and family wealth — her net worth is estimated at $10 million to $17 million, almost all from husband Paul Pelosi's family money, venture capital, equipment leasing and real estate development interests — allows her to move easily among checkbook Democrats and other powers who detested Phil Burton. Yet she shares Burton's commitment to the poor and disenfranchised: Her voting record is one of the most liberal in Congress. And her conciliatory and inclusive manner brings people together.

Both sides of Pelosi's life were on display at a recent reception

PHOTOGRAPH BY BARBARA RIES

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At home on the Hill: *Pelosi pauses outside the Capitol in Washington, D.C.*

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Figure 3. Photo credit: John Jacobs, "Not Just a Party Girl," San Francisco Chronicle, July 12, 1992, pp.14-21.

That day, locked in Pelosi's office "with just a telephone and a lot of coffee" while their boss was away, the two staffers were going on parallel tracks trying to come up with a suitable idea.[102] San Francisco lawyers Fry and Lawler had reached out to Quinn in the past and they had told him to give them a call should he ever have questions or doubts about immigration law and related policies. It was time to ask for a favor back. Coincidentally, the Californian immigration attorneys were scheduled to visit Washington D.C. during the upcoming weekend to attend the American Immigration Lawyers Association annual meeting. That Sunday, Quinn joined them for breakfast, during which they presented a proposal aimed at strengthening Pelosi's political platform while delivering a significant message to China. They suggested that the congresswoman introduce legislation to waive the two-year home residency requirement, a stipulation imposed on J-1 visa holders, thereby allowing Chinese students in the United States to remain eligible for residency.[103] As the end of the academic year approached, these students had already begun reaching out to representatives from the states where their host institutions were located, expressing their profound concerns about returning to China upon the completion of their academic programs. On Monday morning, the two staff members presented the proposal to Lemons, who found it persuasive. She instructed them to seek approval from the Legislative Director, Caroline Bartholomew, who, after some initial reluctance, ultimately granted her approval. Simultaneously, a young Chinese man named Chao, employed in the office of Congressman Jim Jontz (D-IN) across the hall, had developed a close relationship with Lemons over the preceding months. Chao had shared with her photographs that a friend of his had secretly captured while cycling through Tiananmen Square in Beijing. "It was the most awful bloodbath you could imagine where these young people were lying in mangled bodies and blood and that was just beyond anything that I could comprehend," recalled Lemons.[104] Those photos were about to make a great impact.

When the young staffers presented the legislative proposal to Pelosi the following day, she expressed uncertainty and questioned the appropriateness of becoming involved in the issue concerning the students. In the two years since her election, China had not been a prominent

[102] Interview with Craig Middleton, Pelosi's Press Secretary and Responsible for the Asia Portfolio, September 10, 2023. After working for Pelosi until 1994, Middleton was appointed Director of Government Affairs for the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy and, in 1997, he joined the Presidio Trust becoming Executive Director in 2001. Since 2017, Middleton serves as City Manager of the City of Belvedere in the San Francisco Bay Area.
[103] Interview with William Quinn, Pelosi's Legislative Assistant, June 13, 2023. After working for Pelosi from 1987 until 1990, Quinn went to Law School in Vermont and gained legal experience at the North Conway Private Firm Practice from 1993 until 1999 and later at the Brennan Lenehan Law Firm where he is Shareholder and Director since 2004.
[104] Ibid. Interview with Judy Lemons, May 2023.

focus of her legislative priorities, despite the fact that her San Francisco district community had a great interest in the country, particularly in matters of trade.[105] While certain individuals in the Bay Area, including those within the Asian American community, expressed support for the People's Republic of China, particularly those with strong business and family connections, it's worth highlighting that the Asian portfolio, which encompassed China-related matters, was managed by a young staffer like Middleton. Furthermore, immigration did not occupy a central position on Pelosi's agenda during this period. There were urgent issues and problems in the San Francisco district that needed to be addressed. At that time, her office was primarily engaged in international debates concerning Central America, with El Salvador and Nicaragua being a top priority.[106] The surge in pro-peace activism throughout the 1980s which generated from the long shadow of the post-Vietnam War and staunchly opposed U.S. backing of counter-insurgency efforts in Central and South America, had created significant openings for politicians like Pelosi who were at odds with the foreign policy approach of the Republicans.[107] As an example, the Sanctuary Movement, a religious and political campaign initiated in the early 1980s to provide asylum for Central American refugees escaping civil conflicts, had gained significant momentum in California, turning into a considerable preoccupation – and, therefore, opportunity – for Pelosi.[108] These factors likely contributed to the congresswoman's hesitation when Quinn and Middleton pitched her their idea. However, part of Pelosi's initial reluctance also stemmed from her usual working style. According to recollections from her staff members, "*Nancy*" was a pragmatic leader who refrained from introducing bills solely for

[105] As early as 1979, San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein had ventured to Shanghai to establish a Sister-City Program. By the onset of the 1980s, San Francisco had attained the distinction of being the U.S. city with the most substantial volume of trade in goods with China. See Wallace Turner, "Chinese Favor San Francisco for Renewed Trade," *The New York Times*, February 1, 1983.

[106] El Salvador had been the theatre of a bloody civil war that lasted almost twelve years from 1979 until 1992 fought between the military government headed by the Giunta Rivoluzionaria di Governo and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, a coalition comprising various left-wing group supported by Fidel Castro's Cuba and the Soviet Union. See Jeffrey R. Gould, "On the Road to "El Porvenir": A Revolutionary and Counterrevolutionary Violence in El Salvador and Nicaragua," in Gilbert M. Joseph and Greg Grandin, *A Century of Revolution. Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). The El Salvador turmoil had some relevant echo in California by the end of the 1980s, see Hector Tobar, "Civil War Turmoil from El Salvador Spills Over to L.A.," *The Los Angeles Times*, November 25, 1989.

[107] On the connection between the peace movement and human rights in the 1980s see Martin Ceadel, "The Peace Movement and Human Rights," in Pamela Slotte and Miia Halme-Tuomisaari (eds.), *Revisiting the Origins of Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.189–205

[108] The Sanctuary Movement was a religious-inspired humanitarian group active during the 1980s whose primary goal was to offer shelter and protection to Central American political refugees, as well as to oppose Washington's late Cold War policies in El Salvador and Nicaragua. See among others Peter Mancina, "The Birth of a Sanctuary-City. A History of Governmental Sanctuary in San Francisco," in Randy K. Lippert and Sean Rehaag (eds.), *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives. Migration, Citizenship and Social Movements* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp.205-218.

publicity – those known as communication bills – and if she believed they wouldn't lead to meaningful legislation. Conversely, she sought practical options that could realistically become law. "Any idea that I would pitch to her," Craig Middleton recalled, "she would ask me to give her the next five moves, game it up, and build a tree of possibilities."[109] This same meticulous approach would be applied to the bill aimed at protecting Chinese students.

Her Chief of Staff, Judy Lemons, played a pivotal role in those hectic days. She possessed a clear vision of the direction that the congresswoman's agenda should take and had unwavering confidence in Nancy Pelosi's political skills. She was probably the game changer, determined not to let this opportunity slip away. Recognizing the significance of the situation, Lemons was committed to seize the moment and maximize the potential of success for her congresswoman. She walked through the hallway and went to Chao to borrow his photos (refer to page 9). "*Judy, you can only have them for 24 hours.*" Chao, who had already made a deal to sell the photos to *Life Magazine*, conceded. Lemons took the photographs, went back to the office, and showed them to Pelosi. "And that's all she did. She closed the file and went directly to Representative Jack Brooks (D-TX), who at that time chaired the House Judiciary Committee. And she walked right into his office and said *Mr. Chairman, I want to show you these pictures. I have an idea and I'd like your support.* He jumped right on it. He said *Yes*. That's how the ball got rolling in those days. Those photographs just really sealed the deal and that made all the difference in the world," Lemons would recall thirty years after.[110] Undoubtedly, Chao's photographs played a pivotal role in shaping Nancy Pelosi's career on Capitol Hill. The debate over the protection of Chinese students and scholars in the United States allowed Pelosi to demonstrate her proficiency in counting votes, controlling the debate, and persuading colleagues, the press, and, ultimately, the American people. All three skills that the congresswoman was about to test in the upcoming policy-making battle against the White House, which is the focus of the following chapter.

[109] Ibid. Interview with Craig Middleton, September 2023.
[110] Ibid. Interview with Judy Lemons, May 2023.

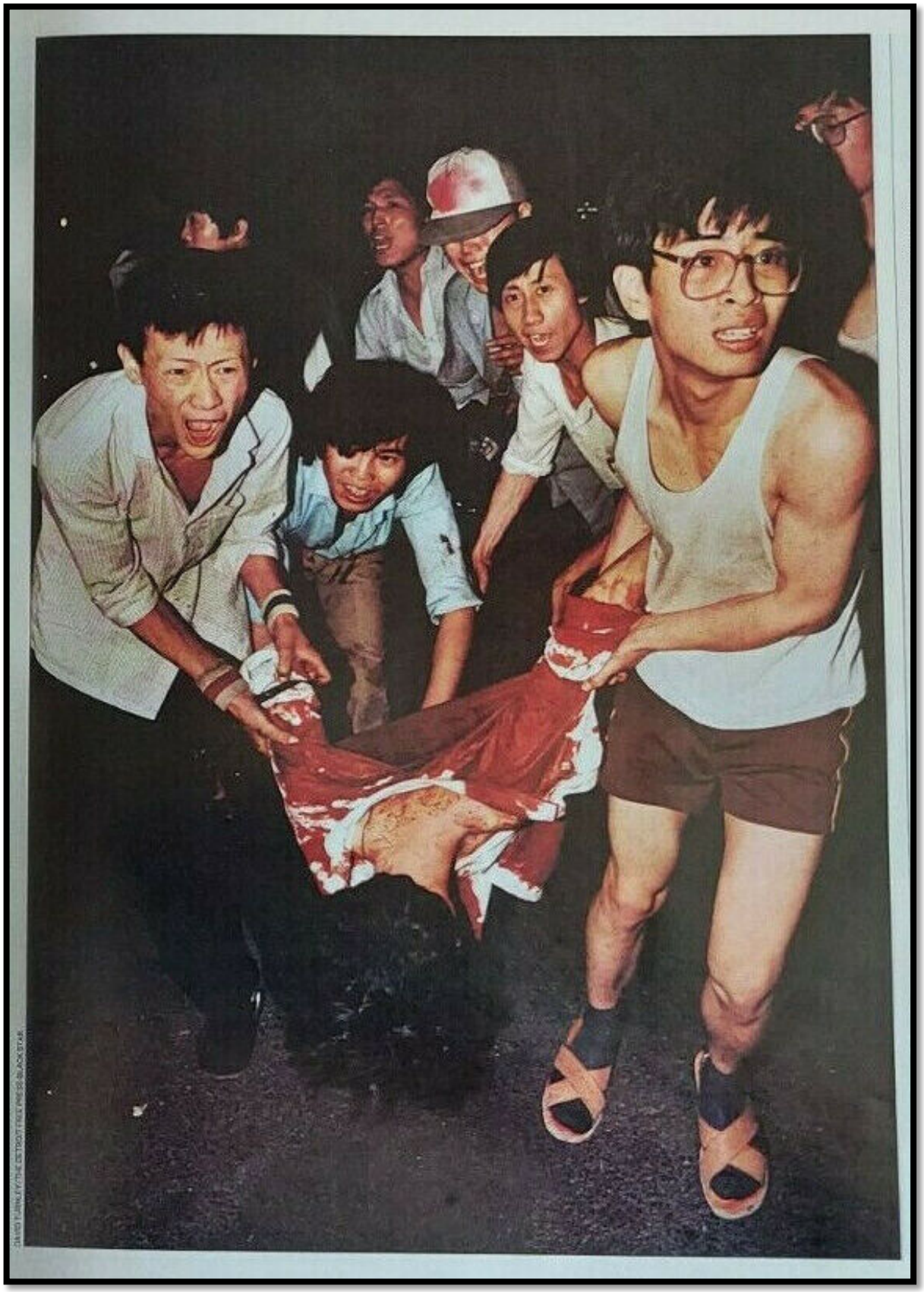

Figure 4. Photo credit: "China Blood," Life Magazine, July 1989 Issue, p.39.

At the time of the massacre, there were about 40,000 Chinese students and scholars in the United States of which 32,000 held a J-type of visa.[111] The J visa was strategically formulated to prevent a scenario where students, having received financial backing from their home government to pursue education overseas, might choose to remain in the foreign nation. This situation could lead to both a dearth of talent returning to their home country – a so-called *brain drain* – and a potential shortcut to bypass U.S. immigration criteria.[112] As part of this visa program, individuals were obliged to return to their home country for a minimum of two years upon program completion before becoming eligible to seek permanent resident status in the United States. Introduced by Pelosi in the House on June 21, 1989, the *H.R. 2712 Emergency Chinese Immigration Relief Act* eventually made its way through a multitude of legislative proposals. Moved by the compelling images coming from Beijing central square and recognizing the potential political advantage to be gained by taking a prominent stance in the debate against the PRC government, members of Congress were progressively putting forth several legislative proposals, each offering a different level of protection and support to the students.

As detailed in a memorandum filed within the records of Douglas Paal, Special Assistant to the President for Asian Affairs, at least eight other significant bills of note were introduced in either the House or the Senate in the weeks following the massacre. Inspired by Senator Slade Gorton's (R-WA) endorsement of permanent residency, the Kennedy-Simpson Bill would provide deferred departure for F or J visa holders from China along with the right to stay in the U.S. Drawing parallels between the Chinese nationals and individuals from El Salvador and Nicaragua, the Moakley Bill advocated for a temporary protected status to be granted regardless the applicant's proven legal status in the United States. Moving quickly from the House to the Senate, the language of the bill introduced by the Representative Joe Moakley (D-MA) was echoed by the Morrison Bill which would grant temporary protected status and work

[111] This number was often cited by both the State Department officials and members of Congress. Between 70% and 80% of these students were granted a scholarship sponsored by the PRC government while the rests financed their study abroad through private source or grants offered by American universities. See James Mann, "Bush Rejects Extension for China Students," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1989.

[112] As reported by Leo Orleans, working for the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC), the brain drain phenomenon had already become a concern for Chinese authorities prior to the Tiananmen crackdown. This concern was particularly heightened when not only privately funded individuals, but also those who had received government sponsorship, opted to remain abroad. See Leo Orleans, *Chinese Students in America: Policies, Issues, and Numbers* (Washington, D.C.: National Academic Press, 1988).

authorization not only to Chinese nationals but also to foreigners in a similar difficult situation. Likewise, the Kohl Bill bypassed the requirement of a legal status. Further proposals included the Scheuer Bill and the Barton Bill which provided a wide range of legal options for Chinese nationals in the U.S. through an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act.[113] Comparable measures had previously been implemented to safeguard individuals in the United States who had been displaced. An instance of this was the relatively recently introduced Cuban-Haitian entrant adjustment program.[114] Moreover, concessions had already been made for other groups like the Poles, Afghans, Ugandans, and Ethiopians who were in a voluntary departure status.

The Pelosi Bill – this is how the H.R. 2712 became known – progressively gained wide support in the House. The bill was co-sponsored by 259 representatives, of which 89 were Republicans. It waived the above-mentioned 2-year period of home country residence required by the Immigration and Nationality Act for those holding nonimmigrant status. It additionally provided J-1 visa holders employment authorization, while foreseeing an extension of their stay in the United States for up to four years.[115] Opening the hearing discussing the immigration status of Chinese nationals in the United States on July 20, 1989, Bruce Morrison (D-CT), acting as chairman of the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law, argued: "I think this is the first time I have seen such a broad bipartisan group of individuals coming before the Immigration Subcommittee and asking that large numbers of foreign nationals be permitted to stay in the United States for a long period of time, perhaps forever."[116] The journey to reach such a huge consensus was not an easy one. But Pelosi had her shoulders covered by non-submissive staff members and by some good friends on Capitol Hill. Jack Brooks was one of them. It happened in Congress that a great idea able to attract some headlines would be contended by several members trying to make enough changes to a bill so that they could call it their own, William Quinn explained talking about the bill's legislative journey.[117] The Pelosi Bill was not exempted from this mechanism, but Brooks, as Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, where the bill was first introduced, was determined to give Pelosi all the

[113] "Background Paper: Congressional Legislation Status Report," George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas H. Paal Files, China – Pelosi –1989.
[114] See Denise Blackburn, "Cuban/Haitians Entrant Program," *In Defense of the Alien*, vol.6 (1983): pp.189-199.
[115] H.R.2712 - Emergency Chinese Immigration Relief Act of 1989, https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/2712/text (last accessed March 2023).
[116] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, *Immigration Status of Chinese Nationals Currently in the United States Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law*, 101st Congress, 1st Session, July 20, 1989, p.85.
[117] Ibid. Interview with William Quinn, June 2023.

credits he thought she deserved. George Mitchell (D-ME), the Senate Majority Leader at the time, emerged as another prominent advocate of Pelosi and her bill. He displayed his support by co-sponsoring the Chinese Students Protection Act in the Senate, continuously commending Pelosi for her efforts in the House.

As the bill progressively gathered momentum, there was a notable competition among senators competing to be its sponsor in the Senate. Multiple senators reached out to Pelosi's office, expressing their interest in taking on that role. Ultimately, it was Mitchell who emerged as the victorious contender and secured the position as the bill's sponsor in the Senate where the bill was cosponsored by 74 members of which 26 were Republicans. But not everyone was that supportive, or at least enthusiastic, when the bill was first introduced in the summer of 1989. In the House, it was the case of Representative Stephen Solarz (D-NY), known as the *China Guy* due to his experience acting as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, who probably feared that the *status quo* with the PRC could be compromised by a bold action of Congress.[118] In the Senate, Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Alan Simpson (R-WY) who run the Judiciary Committee in tandem and, as mentioned above, who had introduced their own legislative proposal, could not be said to be big cheerleaders for the bill when it was first introduced. William Quinn recalled having a sit down with them where they tried to impose relevant changes that would have deprived the bill of its essence. "They looked at Nancy as a debutant – and I knew that what they wanted to ask me to do was to remove the provision that would have allowed students to stay in the U.S. without returning for two years."[119] They would have preferred to defer the matter to the Executive – especially Simpson – and support Chinese students on a case-by-case basis. It was hard for Quinn to back them off, but for Pelosi their requests were simply not negotiable and her colleagues, Kennedy in particular, would soon change their mind.

Not many bills survive the legislative path, but the Pelosi Bill did. It was finally approved by a large bipartisan majority in the House on July 31 and the Senate on August 4, 1989. The bill was endorsed by a significant number of both Democratic and Republican members of Congress not ultimately given the strong connections forged by Chinese students in the United States within just two months. Craig Middleton, who spent considerable time with them, noted that "the students did an extraordinary job in personalizing the issue so that people could see

[118] Ibid. Interview with Craig Middleton, September 2023.
[119] Ibid. Interview with William Quinn, June 2023.

the faces of the young Chinese who would be sent back to the PRC if the bill had not passed" (as discussed further in Part Two of this chapter).[120] As a result, numerous members of Congress, regardless of their political affiliation, publicly backed the bill. To provide a few examples, Representative William Clinger (R-PA) had engaged in multiple discussions with Chinese students attending Penn State University and believed that the Pelosi Bill was firmly rooted "in the best tradition of the United States and reflects our national goal of promoting democracy and human rights."[121] Similarly, Representative Thomas Petri (R-WI) was of the opinion that the Pelosi Bill would contribute to "the winds of change blowing from the West." Likewise, Representatives Patricia Schroeder (D-CO) and Ben Jones (D-GA), after meeting with Chinese students respectively enrolled at the University of Colorado and Emory University, offered their full support to the bill, being confident that it would significantly benefit their precarious situation in the United States.[122]

The Pelosi Bill received strong support from a diverse array of institutions and organizations across the United States. More than fifty presidents of colleges and universities nationwide endorsed the bill, including prestigious institutions such as the University of Colorado, Princeton University, Texas A&M University, Harvard University, and Purdue University, among others. The heads of leading American universities expressed their backing for the bill because they recognized that Chinese students, as noted by David Pierpont Gardner, President of the University of California, felt "apprehensive and personally at risk" when contemplating a return to their home country.[123] Additionally, the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), as stated by its Executive Director Warren Leiden in a letter to the Subcommittee, declared its support for the bill. AILA believed that the legislation not only aligned with American immigration policies but also helped overcome "legal obstacles that hinder Chinese nationals from regularizing their status."[124] The bill garnered further endorsement from various organizations with differing natures and scopes. Some organizations were closely tied to China in their mission, such as the Asian American Bar Association, the Chinese American Civic Association, and Human Rights in China (HRIC), which was founded in March 1989 and reported the sympathy of Chinese students in both the United States and

[120] Ibid. Interview with Craig Middleton, September 2023.
[121] Letter to the President by William Clinger, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Counsel's Office, Lee Liberman Files, China.
[122] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law*, July 20, 1989.
[123] Letter to the President by the President of the University of California, December 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, H.R. 2712 Veto Comments.
[124] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law*, July 20, 1989, p.28.

China for the bill. Moreover, several organizations representing a broad cross-section of American society also lent their support, including the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations, the American Jewish Committee, and Freedom House, among others. This widespread backing confirmed the bill's significance and resonance within American society.

Presenting her bill on July 20, 1989, Pelosi drew a *fil rouge* between the purpose of the legislation and a three-decade history of persecution against scholars and intellectuals in China. As the Cultural Revolution had witnessed, those belonging to the cultural and academic sectors of Chinese society were among the main targets of imprisonments and purges during times of domestic turmoil, believed to be likely to weaken the central power.[125] Pelosi's inscription of her bill into the problematic tradition of China's history of crisis echoed the analysis proposed by Glenn Shive, Director of the China Office of the Institute of International Education based in Hong Kong and filed within the records of James Shaefer, Assistant Director and Special Assistant to the Deputy Assistant to the President for Public Liaison. "The Cultural Revolution," wrote Shive, "had left Chinese universities without the capacity to produce a new generation of teachers and scholars. Older faculty were hopelessly obsolete, middle-aged faculty were cowed and dispirited by campaigns and rustications, and younger teachers had mostly memorized Mao Tse-tung thought through their college years. Universities and research establishments were far below the task of training the technocrats who would lead the modernization of China."[126]

Starting in the late 1970s, given the largest capacity of American universities to absorb the new students in terms of educational offer and financial resources, the exchanges between China and the United States were expected to eventually provide the Chinese young generation of students with a major opportunity to advance their skills in the field of science and technology. They would, therefore, give back to their government a valuable source of

[125] "History has taught us that the Chinese Government singles out scholars and intellectuals for persecution in times of internal conflict. During the purges of the cultural revolution, China lost a significant percentage of its most highly educated and capable scholars. We know that only China's best and brightest are given the opportunity to study in the United States and can be certain that most of them would be subject to some form of repression. The mere fact that these nationals have spent time in the United States, the leading democratic force in the world, makes them the target of suspicion of prodemocracy involvement," Pelosi claimed during the hearing. Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law*, July 20, 1989, p.29.

[126] Glenn Shive, Director IIE/China, "Sino-American Exchanges After Tiananmen," Institute of International Education Hong Kong, December 4, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Students – Documents.

modernization, while advancing the strategic partnership with Washington against the Soviets.[127] From the outset, these exchange programs began to reveal the potential risks associated with opening China to the outside world in general, and to the United States in particular. The first risk, as pointed out by Shive, was the anticipation of a brain drain, as students became increasingly reluctant to return to their home country after studying in the U.S. The "return to China after study in America," wrote Shive, "began to appear like a public fiction that everyone speaks but no one believed."[128] The second risk was related to China's apparent difficulty "to absorb the cultural ideas and organizational values that the students would learn while studying their science lessons in American universities."[129] While science and technology were considered objective and less influenced by cultural bias, life in the United States was not, and students began to recognize the advantages of living in a prosperous democracy.

What was even more significant, and potentially threatening from the perspective of the Chinese government, is that these programs began to change China from within. "Study abroad fever swept Chinese universities and threatened to turn them into virtual preparatory schools for overseas graduate programs. Chinese faculty who was to teach new courses of the reform era extended their studies overseas while those who had not left overstretched. Students spent much of their study time cramming for TOEFL in the hopes of following their teachers and friends abroad. Foreign study began to erode indigenous graduate programs, not contribute to them."[130] As these dynamics unfolded, the June crackdown gave the students the *why* not to come back, while the Pelosi Bill provided them with the *how* to do so. According to the congresswoman, the bill aimed to provide a safe haven for the most talented and promising members of a new generation of Chinese students and scholars. These individuals had been sent to the United States with the objective of accelerating the process of bridging the gaps left by Mao's reforms. However, they now found themselves facing accusations of counter-revolution merely for residing in a Western country. In the congresswoman's view, it was the responsibility of the United States to safeguard these Chinese students who had been drawn by the advantages of living in the U.S. and who had become a significant engine of Washington's

[127] On the topic of how cultural diplomacy played a significant role in the Cold War rivalry see Liping Bu, "Educational Exchange and Cultural Diplomacy in the Cold War," *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 33, n. 3 (December 1999), pp.393–415; on U.S.-Soviet cultural exchanges see Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003).
[128] Ibid. Shive, "Sino-American Exchanges After Tiananmen."
[129] Ibid. Shive, "Sino-American Exchanges After Tiananmen."
[130] Ibid. Shive, "Sino-American Exchanges After Tiananmen."

late Cold War cultural diplomacy. "They spoke up because they took the head of the message we sent," argued Pelosi in Congress.[131] Over time, they had developed a strong affinity for Western ideals, had embraced freedoms, and had availed themselves of academic opportunities while residing in the United States. This transformation had made them a source of concern for their home country, and it was imperative to ensure their protection from their government's actions. These arguments were reinforced by the students themselves. "We do not seek to remain as a guest in this country merely because we faced repression when we left," argued Zhao Haiqing, a student representative from Harvard University, speaking in July 1989 before the House Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law. "Rather, it is in large part because we have been guests in this country that we face repression if we return home at this time."[132]

The success of the Pelosi Bill, among other competing bills, can be attributed to several key factors. According to William Quinn, it stood out as the best-written and most comprehensive bill. Quinn noted that the House Legislative Counsel, a key authority in Washington's legislative process, expressed a strong preference for the Pelosi Bill, deeming it the most suitable option to move forward. "*This is the bill. This is the one. There are others out there but there are problems with those bills, in terms of the legislative language. This is the bill that should go forward*," Quinn recalled the conversation with the counsel thirty years later.[133] One additional reason for its success was that the Pelosi Bill was relatively modest in terms of language and provisions, especially when compared to other legislative proposals, especially those aiming at granting instant permanent resident status to Chinese students. Moreover, Chinese young nationals themselves embraced the Pelosi Bill, believing it had a better chance of passing on Capitol Hill.[134] Another crucial factor was Nancy Pelosi's ability to build a bipartisan movement on Capitol Hill specifically addressing issues related to the PRC, which culminated in the creation of a Working Group on China.[135] Craig Middleton

[131] House Session, C-SPAN, October 18, 1990, online at https://www.c-span.org/video/?14559-1/house-session (last accessed September 2023).
[132] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law*, July 20, 1989, p.153.
[133] Ibid. Interview with William Quinn, June 2023.
[134] As explained by Zhao Haiqing, Spokesperson of the students in Congress, to James Mann, China Specialist of *The Los Angeles Times*. In James Mann, *About Face. A History of America's Curious Relationship with China from Nixon to Clinton* (New York, NY: Random House 1999).
[135] The Working Group on China was initiated by Representatives Nancy Pelosi and Frank Wolf. It functioned as a congressional caucus, and it addressed issues related to the PRC abuses of human rights. Its members "drafted letters, circulated information, and developed legislation designed to keep China from achieving what they perceived to be its goals with the United States unless significant improvements in its human rights practices were accomplished first." See Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U. S. -China Relations 1989-2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), p.328.

explained that in the wake of the Tiananmen crackdown, "everybody [on the Hill] wanted to be associated with some sort of solution or reaction to it."[136] This movement grew significantly, with Nancy Pelosi, even as a freshman congress member, leading a new outbreaking congressional initiative. Pelosi, supported by a team of young and idealistic staff members – one of whom, Craig Middleton, later reflected, "I liked the fact that on Capitol Hill, a relatively insignificant staffer could make a difference" – played a pivotal role in challenging the established hierarchy that had traditionally shaped Washington's diplomatic engagement with the PRC leadership during the late Cold War era.[137] This shift in strategy marked a significant departure from prior approaches, ultimately influencing how the United States responded to critical developments in China (refer to Chapter Two).

The legislative trajectory of the Pelosi Bill – initially passed by an overwhelming bipartisan majority in Congress but subsequently vetoed by President George H. W. Bush – represents a pivotal moment in the protracted confrontation between the Executive branch, bipartisan congressional efforts to impose sanctions on China, and the expanding influence of non-state actors in shaping U.S.-China policy. This dynamic, which persisted through at least 1994, shed light on the post-Tiananmen complex interplay of domestic and international pressures on American foreign policymaking. The following chapter investigates these developments by focusing on Washington's early response to the Tiananmen Square crackdown, particularly its approach to safeguarding Chinese students residing in the United States. The chapter situates this analysis within the broader historiography on the resurgence of congressional engagement in foreign policy during the late Cold War mentioned in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, emphasizing the unprecedented involvement of Capitol Hill in China-related matters post-1970s normalization. It contrasts the Administration's cautious strategy – designed to maintain stability in U.S.-China relations – with the assertive stance of Congress, which framed pro-democracy Chinese activists as vital interlocutors in shaping Washington's policy toward Beijing. The chapter also examines the formation and activities of the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars (IFCSS), established in Chicago in July 1989. The IFCSS not only symbolized the legislative tension between the White House and Congress but also showcased the capacity of new advocacy groups to navigate and

[136] Ibid. Interview with Craig Middleton, September 2023.
[137]Ibid. Interview with Craig Middleton, September 2023. Middleton argued that Pelosi and her team were determined not to let the PRC leadership dictate U.S. foreign policy and rejected the claims that by passing the bill, China would be lost. "From our perspective, whatever the Administration would do, it was pre-approved by China," said Middleton, who added: "They (China) could do what they wanted to do. We could not control them. But we could control what we did."

influence the American political system. This analysis bridges the extensive literature on U.S. student movements and activism with studies on the experiences of Chinese students in the United States, tracing back to the early 20th Century. The lobbying efforts of the IFCSS illustrate the proliferation of both established and emergent actors whose influence grew amidst widespread political dissatisfaction and opposition. Additionally, the chapter addresses concerns regarding the safety of Chinese students in the United States, who faced surveillance and intimidation by foreign authorities on the American soil. It concludes by analysing the progression toward the 1992 Chinese Students Protection Act, which codified and expanded the provisions outlined in President Bush's 1990 Executive Order, proving the ultimate influence of Capitol Hill on foreign policy-related dynamics.

1.2 Retaining Presidential Authority over China Policy: Bush's Veto Against the Bill

President Bush attentively monitored the progression of the Pelosi Bill from Capitol Hill, observing its growing momentum as it advanced with increasing political force, posing a direct challenge to the Administration's foreign policy authority. Since the day following the massacre, the president had worked on two fronts seeking, on the one side, to establish a direct line of communication with his *lao pengyou* (old friend) Deng Xiaoping and, at the same time, on the other, trying to address the concerns of Chinese students in the United States, together with the renewed vivacity of Congress on China matters and the outrage of the American public. On June 5, 1989, Bush, together with his National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft, his White House Chief of Staff, John Sununu, and his Press Secretary, Marlin Fitzwater, met in the Oval Office with four Chinese students from Georgetown University, George Washington University, and the University of Maryland. The press was allowed only during the first half of the meeting where students shared their concerns about the situation in China and the president, from his part, assured them of his commitment to helping Chinese students in their promotion of democracy while, at the same time, carefully weighting words not to upset the PRC authorities in Beijing.[138] In the talking points prepared for President Bush for his meeting with the Chinese students, he was advised to emphasize his commitment to supporting democratic movements both in China and globally, while commending the students for their "courage and restraint" in upholding these principles. At the same time, he was instructed to stress the importance of maintaining and strengthening U.S.-China relations, stating, "I want

[138] Pool Report of the President's meeting June 5 with four Chinese students – *The Washington Times*, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Student Organization.

you to know how much I value the relationship the people of China have built with the United States. It is one that I want to continue and develop."[139]



Figure 5. "Meeting with the Chinese Students," June 5, 1989.
Photo credit: George H. W. Bush Presidential Library.

On that same day, in response to the events unfolding in China, the president issued a directive to the Attorney General, Dick Thornburgh, to provide protection to all nationals from the People's Republic of China residing in the United States as of that date. In compliance with the directive, the attorney general promptly granted deferred enforced departure status for a period of one year, until June 5, 1990, to approximately 73,000 Chinese students studying in the U.S. and nearly 250,000 Chinese visitors or businesspersons in the country at that

[139] Memorandum for Bren Scowcroft from Douglas Paal on Presidential Meeting with Chinese Students, June 5, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas Paal Files, China – U.S. January-July 1989.

moment.[140] Initially, the directive appeared to offer a satisfactory compromise. It allowed for a display of compassion and support for the students' plight without excessively interfering in China's internal affairs. There existed a measure of optimism surrounding the anticipation that this strategy would strike the right balance between the students' requests and the PRC leadership's frustration. Nevertheless, as events unfolded, those initial hopes gradually diminished. The developing circumstances and the reactions from diverse stakeholders would soon cast doubts on the efficacy and sufficiency of the presidential directive.

The measure – under the name of *Enforced Deferred Departure Program* – effectively shielded Chinese nationals in the United States from being compelled to return to their home country against their own will during a period of major turmoil back there. However, in order to obtain this status, applicants were required to declare their unwillingness to return to China and permanently relinquish their existing lawful status, even if it had not yet expired. As *The Washington Post* illustrated, "students who took delayed departure would be prevented under U.S. law from renewing their visas for much longer periods under employer sponsorship and other programs available to some immigrants, [making the EDD program suitable] only for those few students who had exhausted all other options and were about to be deported."[141] Due to these challenges and the potential consequences for their families back in China, very few Chinese nationals were willing to avail themselves of this program. As a result, a month after the Bush Administration had announced the EDD plan, and despite the chaos and uncertainty in which the students seemed trapped, the Immigration and Naturalization Service disclosed that "only a few students have applied for the program […] and that its restrictions, which prevent a student from seeking other options to extend an expired visa make it a last resort."[142] By the end of June, almost a month after the program had been started, only 25 Chinese nationals had applied in San Francisco, the district with the highest Chinese population in the U.S., 2 in Los Angeles and San Diego, 15 in Washington, 3 in Philadelphia, while in New York "the response was *not overwhelming*."[143] As argued by the spokesperson of the Chinese students in the United States, Zhao Haiqing, "the reason we do not appreciate the program is that it is not flexible and once we are in that, we are locked into it. We will not be able to come

[140] Directive of the Attorney General Dick Thornburgh to Department of Justice Commissioner Alan Nelson, Office of the Attorney General, June 6, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Student Organization.
[141] Jay Mathews, "Chinese Students in U.S. Shun Extended-Stay Plan," *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1989.
[142] Ibid. Mathews, "Chinese Students in U.S. Shun Extended-Stay Plan."
[143] Valerie Basheda and Lee May, "Extended Visa Offer to Chinese Called 'Catch-22'," *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1989.

out and we have the tremendous fear that by the end of this one-year period, it is very possible we are forced to go back."[144] According to the Lawler & Lawler law firm based in San Francisco, these first measures put into play by the Administration "harmed rather than helped Chinese nationals [requiring them] to become *illegal aliens* incapable of adjusting or changing their status."[145]

Hence, it became clear right away that the initial actions taken by the Administration had been overly cautious and lacked the necessary boldness. The American media gradually observed the program's shortcomings in terms of its reception and the number of applications it received. The EDD, characterized as a *Catch-22* due to its contradictory logic, eventually sparked considerable dissatisfaction among the students.[146] As a result, Chinese young nationals increasingly viewed Congress as the branch of government better equipped to offer a comprehensive and satisfactory range of solutions to address their concerns. "If we apply for [the EDD program], we will lose everything. We will be forced to go home," sentenced Yu Mao-Chen, a graduate student at UC Berkeley, to a *Los Angeles Times* reporter.[147] Such dynamics, this research argues, played a significant role in sparking a notable resurgence of Congress' engagement with China-related issues in the months following the massacre. This momentum swiftly propelled the above-mentioned legislative proposals – the Pelosi Bill in particular – into the spotlight. By force of circumstance, the president's authority in shaping U.S. China-policy decisions was gradually being overshadowed.

Around mid-November 1989, as the Pelosi Bill successfully passed both the House and the Senate supported by a solid bipartisan majority, rumors of a potential presidential veto started to circulate with increasing frequency. Worried that these rumors might have some basis of truth, in late November 55 senators, later joined by a further 15 colleagues, of which about 30 were Republicans, signed a letter addressed to President Bush urging him to sign into law the bill and disregarding the idea of vetoing it. The letter was originated by senators Bill Armstrong (R-CO) and Ted Kennedy (D-MA). Armstrong, acting as the Republican policy committee

[144] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law*, July 20, 1989.
[145] Martin J. Lawler was (and still is) one of America's leading immigration lawyers specialized in investor visas, family-based visas, asylum, and deportation defense. Lawler & Lawler Law Office, Letter to Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, January 19, 1990, Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.20.
[146] Inspired by Joseph Heller's satirical war novel, the expression Catch-22 refers to "a frustrating situation in which one is trapped by contradictory regulations or conditions," Collins Dictionary, online at https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/catch-22 (last accessed September 2024).
[147] Ibid. Basheda and May, "Extended Visa Offer to Chinese Called 'Catch-22'."

chairman, had taken a prior initiative by introducing an amendment to the Senate version of the bill. This amendment aimed to establish a provision that would grant political asylum or refugee status to Chinese nationals whose family situation was likely to be subjected to China's *one couple, one child* policy. In their letter, the senators addressed three key arguments put forth by those in favor of a potential presidential veto of the Pelosi Bill. First, there was a concern that the Chinese government might suspend the exchange program if the Pelosi Bill became law. In response, the senators urged President Bush not to yield to what they saw as cynical blackmail from Beijing. Second, even though most of the president's advisers believed that the measures proposed by Congress might hinder the restoration of peaceful relations with China, the senators emphasized that the Administration's top priority should be the protection of the students. They stressed the young Chinese nationals' vulnerability and the need to address their concerns through concrete legislative terms. Third, there was an argument that the attorney general's deferred departure program covered the provisions outlined in the bill. However, the senators pointed out that this program might not be suitable for the students who feared retribution once it ended and they were required to return to China. Because of these legitimate worries, many of these students had already scaled down their pro-democracy activities. The senators argued that the bill offered them the security they needed to plan their lives and pursue their aspirations for a more democratic future in China. Lastly, the senators drew a comparison between the pro-democracy movements in Eastern Europe and China. They insisted that the president should not apply double standards in his approach to these two regions. They noted that, just as the United States had celebrated the courage of the peoples of Eastern Europe in their recent democratic successes, supporting the students of China in their ongoing struggle was equally important. "Mr. President, we understand your desire to strike the proper balance between maintaining ties with Beijing and being faithful to those who promote democracy. We urge you not to aid the campaign of intimidation and harassment that the Chinese authorities have waged against these students by vetoing this bill," concluded the letter.[148] In essence, the senators emphasized the significance of protecting the Chinese students, despite potential political and diplomatic considerations, and invited President Bush to stand by them in their pursuit of democratic ideals.

The press contributed to raising the warning of a presidential veto. "In the Middle Ages, Europe's churches were places of inviolable sanctuary for the persecuted. As the cathedral of

[148] Letter to the President by U.S. Senators, November 28, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Legislative Affairs, James Renne Files, China.

democracy, the United States has provided similar refuge for those courageous enough to act in defense of human rights," wrote *The Los Angeles Times*.[149] It was in the U.S. finest tradition – and it was inscribed in its messianic mission – to offer an alternative, a shelter, to those escaping from their own country. In the past, it had been the case of "Poles victimized by czarist usurpation and Irish Fenians struggling under the yoke of British imperialism, visionary Zionists and Hungarian freedom-fighters, early Korean opponents of Japanese militarism and the first champions of Czechoslovak freedom."[150] It was now time for the young Chinese, whose U.S. – inspired ideals were being denied – and physically crushed – by their own government, to be protected through a firm action of Congress. Vetoing the bill, the president was likely to "incur lasting shame."[151] By being permitted to remain and reside in the United States, Chinese students were provided with the opportunity and resources to continue their dissent. Their experiences in a democratic environment led them to appreciate its benefits, thereby rendering them a perceived threat to their home government. "If they admire the ideals of democracy, why should our democratic government put them back in the clutches of a system that would embrace them like Venus flytrap?" it was questioned on the press.[152] If that was not enough to sustain the Pelosi Bill, there were, among many others, humanitarian reasons why "it would be wrong for the president to veto this legislation [and] the fate of the students compelled to return may well be grim," sentenced the *New York Post*.[153]

President Bush had not been able to offer a valid solution through his Extended Deferred Departure Program and "he knows full well – or has every reason to know – that few Chinese students have been naïve enough to apply for EDD's "protection."[154] The president's actions were depicted by *The New York Times* as a "modest clemency program for Chinese students" compared to the "humanitarian approach" provided by Congress. The Administration was criticized for "parrot Beijing" by asserting that the provisions aimed at safeguarding the students should take into account the chirurgical two-decade development of diplomatic relations with the PRC. These arguments were seen as serving the immediate interests of Chinese hard-liners and, in turn, appeared to "insult America's commitment to human rights."[155] According to the *New Hampshire Union Leader*, the president looked

[149] "A Matter of Honor," *The Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1989.
[150] Ibid. *The Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1989.
[151] Ibid. *The Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1989.
[152] Cal Thomas, "Playing Checkers with Chinese Students' Lives," -, November 30, 1989.
[153] "Don't force students back to China," *New York Post*, November 30, 1989.
[154] Jim Finnegan, "Sign It, Mr. President!" *Union Leader*, November 30, 1989.
[155] -, "Overriding a Chinese Veto," *The New York Times*, November 29, 1989.

"intimidated."[156] Bush was about to veto the bill for the mere reason of pleasing the PRC leadership. "Why would Bush veto such bill?" asked the *Daily News*. "Simply because the Chinese are demanding that he do so – and threatening to chill other relations with the U.S. if he fails them," it was concluded.[157] Stretching between the demands of the students and the warnings of the PRC leadership, the president seemed not to have please anyone. Bush was portrayed as a "contortionist" by the press and believed to be subjected to the State Department "who appear to be suffering from that professional disease known as *clientitis*."[158] Leaning towards the decision to veto the Pelosi Bill, as the State Department was believed to be advising in those hectic weeks, and ignoring the diffuse sentiment of the American people, the president was said to go against the interests of the United States. "President George Bush appears ready to abandon American support for basic human rights in exchange for improving U.S. relations with the tyrants in Beijing who massacred their own people just six months ago in Tiananmen Square," sentenced the *Burlington Free Press*.[159]



Figure 6. Sandy Grady, "From Bush to mush: president is irrelevant in China."
Image credit: Asbury Park Press, May 25, 1989.

[156] Ibid. *Union Leader*, November 30, 1989.
[157] -, "Don't betray the Chinese students," *Daily News*, November 30, 1989.
[158] -, "When Peking demands, say no," *The News and Courier*, November 30, 1989.
[159] -, "Help Chinese Students," *Burlington Free Press*, November 30, 1989.

However, the Administration faced external pressures that were difficult to ignore. A series of confidential cables exchanged towards the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990 between the American Embassy in Beijing and the White House provide insight into the diplomatic entangling and complexities arising from the Pelosi Bill. These cables revealed significant irritation among Chinese officials following the passage of H.R. 2712, as well as a sense of unease among American nationals in China regarding the handling of events in Washington. Over the preceding two decades, it had become increasingly rare – and perhaps even implausible – for Congress to exert decisive influence over the direction of the United States' China policy. Through a message to the State Department dated November 16, 1989, Ambassador James Lilley put forth his hesitation on the actions taken on Capitol Hill. Despite finding the Congress' willingness to protect the Chinese students *understandable*, Lilley believed that Congress should have acted earlier, right after the massacre in June, and that the bill was likely to put in jeopardy the U.S. position when compared to that of its allies. "As usual, the timing is bad," the Ambassador wrote in his cable. "Too bad Congress couldn't have gotten its act together in August. Now we find ourselves running in the opposite direction from most of our allies and giving additional jolts to the Chinese just when we have some chance to turn things around a bit."[160] What was even more alarming in Lilley's view, was the whole purpose and outcomes of the bill. "People seem not to understand that it was in fact because of these exchange programs that we have been able to exercise tremendous influence on the Chinese political scene," the Ambassador claimed.[161] Allowing the students in the United States beyond their visa expiration could ultimately disrupt the flow of a young generation of Chinese educated in the West likely to soon replace the elderly leadership in Beijing. "To throw this out or to provide the excuse for others to stop it is, to say the least, short-sighted," concluded Lilley.[162]

The November cables illustrate a series of reciprocal allegations, in which the Chinese leadership, on one hand, criticized the U.S. Congress for its management of a pronounced anti-China campaign. They accused President Bush of duplicity and of not taking sufficient actions to mitigate the campaign. In an interview granted to the French periodical *Le Figaro* in September 1989, Li Peng had forthrightly accused the president of capitalizing on the

[160] "PRC sanctions and student bills," Cable from Ambassador Lilley to Under Secretary Kimmitt and Assistant Secretary Solomon, November 16, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas H. Paal Files, China – U.S. October – December - 1989.
[161] Ibid. Lilley's cable, November 1989.
[162] Ibid. Lilley's cable, November 1989.

prevailing social and political turmoil within China. "An individual in close proximity to the President of the United States informed me that the president is pleased that the American system can derive benefit from the recruitment of skilled individuals from among the Chinese student population," the Chinese Premier contended.[163] Meanwhile, on the opposite side, U.S. officials were attempting to persuade the Chinese counterparts of the president's endeavors to address the matter in the most balanced way possible. After the bill was approved in both the House and Senate, the Chinese government, in the person of Vice Foreign Minister Liu Huaqiu, had issued a warning to the American Embassy that the PRC leadership might publicly criticize Washington harshly through the national press: "The U.S. Congress, bent on having its own way, openly adopted this anti-China bill, thus furthering poisoning the climate for our bilateral relations. Such perverse action, if not checked promptly, will inevitably bring serious consequences to these relations."[164] Behind the scenes, as the cables reveal, the Chinese leadership was said to be willing to take some steps forward, such as restoring the Fulbright Program which had been temporarily suspended right after the massacre.[165] Given that a majority of students were sponsored by government grants and were considered a significant resource for China's modernization initiative, PRC officials argued that the exemption from the two-year home country service requirement, as provided by the Pelosi Bill, would lead to a financially burdensome consequence that China could ill afford during a time of considerable instability.[166] Actions taken in D.C. could "cost the PRC many millions, provoke a substantial brain drain, and the difficulties provoked by [the Congress' actions] would represent a violation of commitments undertaken by the U.S. concerning the return of students."[167] Back in Washington, the message was well received.

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[163] Li Peng's interview for Le Figaro is mentioned in Jim Hoagland, "We Should Be Listening to China's Exiles," *The Washington Post*, September 26, 1989.

[164] "Chinese protest passage of Pelosi Bill," Cable from the American Embassy in Beijing to RUEHC /SECSTATE November 24, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas H. Paal Files, China – U.S. October – December - 1989.

[165] The Fullbright Program was established in 1946 with the aim of promoting the exchange of students and scholars globally. It provided grants assigned to each country within the network for foreigners wishing to study or do research in the U.S. and Americans wishing to go abroad. Among others see Sam Lebovic, "From War Junk to Educational Exchange: The World War II Origins of the Fulbright Program and the Foundations of American Cultural Globalism, 1945–1950," *Diplomatic History*, vol.37, no.2 (April 2013): pp.280–312.

[166] It should also be mentioned that the Chinese government had not entirely cut ties as far as the exchange program is concerned. A December NSC memorandum stated that "high-cadre children seeking student visas do not appear to be limited by their parents' professed orthodoxy. Recent applicants have included the children of hard-liners, education officials, and diplomats, as well as the children of officials fallen from grace." NSC Memorandum for Douglas Paal on Chinese Leaders criticize the U.S. but send their Children there to study, December 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas Paal Files, China Sensitive - 1989.

[167] "Vice Fon Min links Fulbright suspension and Pelosi amendment," November 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas H. Paal Files, China – U.S. October – December - 1989.

Before making a final decision on whether to veto the bill, President Bush solicited additional information from Brent Scowcroft regarding H.R. 2712. He requested a detailed analysis of the potential advantages and disadvantages of vetoing the legislation. According to the National Security Advisor, there were several justifications for a veto. First, Scowcroft argued that the measures already taken in June had made congressional actions unnecessary. The president's measures, in his view, had addressed the concerns surrounding the Chinese students' safety. Second, he emphasized the importance of maintaining flexibility in relations with China, a country with a unique and strategic significance. He believed that the micro-management of foreign policy attempted by Congress could hinder the Administration's ability to effectively navigate this delicate relationship. Although the Chinese leadership had "made a tactical mistake" publicly declaring that they would retaliate against future students and Fulbright exchanges, as well as opposing the entrance of the international Peace Corps, if the Pelosi Bill was not stopped, Scowcroft believed that the Chinese were not inclined to sever ties with Washington completely. He advised the president to work towards keeping the door open for continued engagement.[168]

However, Scowcroft acknowledged that a veto would likely trigger a political upheaval on Capitol Hill. The Pelosi Bill had garnered unprecedented bipartisan support, and the president could face accusations of siding with the elderly hardliner and repressive Chinese leadership over the young students advocating for democracy and freedom. One particularly challenging aspect related to the Chinese students in the U.S., Scowcroft pointed out, was that many of these students had no intention of returning to China. They viewed the legislation as an opportunity to obtain a green card, which ran counter to the principle of the exchange program which instead intended to encourage them to return home as agents of modernization and political reforms. At the same time, however, they were "well-organized, smart and attractive," Scowcroft warned, anticipating that "there are plans to protest against a veto by declaring a hunger strike with maximum publicity."[169] As we will see, these students increasingly became a vocal and powerful lobby group, capable of influencing the balance of foreign policy decisions. Their actions and advocacy would play a significant role in shaping the direction of U.S. policy toward China during this critical period. J. Stapleton Roy, serving as Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, shared a viewpoint similar to that of Scowcroft. He believed

[168] Memorandum for President Bush by Brent Scowcroft on the Pelosi Bill, November 27, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas Paal Files, China – U.S. October – December – 1989.
[169] Ibid. Memorandum for President Bush by Brent Scowcroft on the Pelosi Bill, November 27, 1989.

that "the Pelosi Bill effectively would reward those Chinese nationals already in the U.S. with immediate access to immigrant status."[170] His concern extended to the potential permanent loss of young talents in China. Moreover, Roy expressed worry about the broader implications of the bill, particularly the risk of jeopardizing the aspirations of thousands of scholars currently in China who sought to experience the American academic environment. He also considered the desire of thousands of Americans to work and study in the PRC.

In the lead-up to the decision on H.R. 2712, various agencies within the Administration offered their recommendations to the president, which reflected different perspectives and considerations. As for the Department of Justice, it initially opposed H.R. 2712. However, it later advised the president to sign the bill into law. This change in stance was influenced by the bipartisan popularity of the bill, making a veto override likely. The Department of Justice also expressed concern about the unfavorable legislative context, suggesting that litigating the president's constitutional prerogative to exercise the veto at a particular time of the year – namely, during the Christmas congressional recession – would carry legal and procedural risks. Additionally, there was a recognition of the emotional impact of the Tiananmen Square crackdown among the American public, which could lead the Supreme Court to question the validity of the veto and potentially weaken the president's authority over China policy.[171] The State Department held a different view and recommended disapproval of H.R. 2712. Its perspective was based on the belief that the bill's passage would antagonize the Chinese leadership, hindering the two-decade-long efforts to establish educational ties between the United States and China while, at the same time, damaging the diplomatic relations. They anticipated that the Fulbright program and the flow of students would be halted, as menaced by the PRC government. This would result in the loss of a strategic channel for bringing modernization to China. The National Security Council also recommended disapproval of H.R. 2712, aligning with the State Department's position, and claiming that the passage of the bill would irritate the Chinese leadership, transforming "a mutually beneficial exchange program

[170] Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft by J. Stapleton Roy, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas Paal Files, China-Pelosi 1989.

[171] "The events at Tiananmen grabbed the American public's attention and seemed to shift Americans' views of China within a short period of time. Just months before the massacre, a Gallup poll found 72% of Americans expressing a very or mostly favorable view of China, but this plummeted to 34% by August 1989. About half of Americans in a July 1989 Times Mirror survey said they had seen the now iconic photo of a lone demonstrator standing in front of a column of tanks on Beijing's Chang'an Avenue." See Richard Wike, "How America's opinion of China has changed since Tiananmen," *Pew Research Center*, June 3, 2014, online at https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2014/06/03/how-americas-opinion-of-china-has-changed-since-tiananmen/ (last accessed October 2023).

into an institutionalized brain drain." [172] These differing recommendations shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of the decision facing the president. They highlighted the competing interests and potential consequences associated with the bill's approval or veto. Ultimately, the president would need to weigh these recommendations and consider the broader implications for U.S.-China relations, domestic politics, and constitutional authority before making a final decision.

Although supporting "the humanitarian principles underlying H.R. 2712," Bush announced on November 30, "such legislation puts America in straitjacket and can render us incapable of responding to changing circumstance."[173] The president informed to have directed the attorney general and the secretary of state to provide additional guarantees to the Chinese nationals in the United States already protected by the EDD program issued in June right after the massacre. These provisions included:

1. Irrevocable waiver of the 2-year home country residence requirement which may be exercised until January 1, 1994;
2. Assurance of continued lawful immigration status for individuals who were lawfully in the United States on June 5, 1989;
3. Authorization for employment of Chinese nationals present in the United States on June 5, 1989;
4. Notice of expiration of nonimmigrant status, rather than institution of deportation proceedings, for individuals eligible for deferral of enforced departure whose nonimmigrant status has expired.[174]

These actions echoed those outlined in the Pelosi Bill making, in the words of the president, the legislation passed on Capitol Hill "unnecessary."[175] In his memorandum of disapproval issued on the same day, the president reiterated that he possessed "sufficient authority to provide the necessary relief for Chinese students and others who fear returning to China in the near future."[176] While the Pelosi Bill was reportedly designed to protect only Chinese students

[172] Recommendation for Pocket Veto of Pelosi Bill, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas Paal Files, China-Pelosi 1989.
[173] "Statement by the President," White House Office of the Press Secretary, November 30, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas Paal Files, China-Pelosi 1989.
[174] Memorandum of Disapproval, November 30, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas Paal Files, China-Pelosi 1989.
[175] Ibid. Memorandum of Disapproval, November 30, 1989.
[176] Ibid. Memorandum of Disapproval, November 30, 1989.

and scholars in the U.S., Bush's provisions extended to all individuals targeted by government actions involving persecution and intimidation in their home countries, encompassing coercive family policies and similar issues. The president reclaimed his prerogatives to exercise flexibility in managing American foreign policy towards China. He expressed concern that a law passed by Congress could potentially obstruct the beneficial flow of students, which had mutually benefited both Washington and Beijing over the past decade. He emphasized his desire to see these educational exchanges continue, as they aligned with the national interest of the United States in promoting the exchange of technical skills and ideas between Chinese and American citizens.[177] In light of all the above reasons, Bush vetoed the Pelosi Bill on November 30, 1989, confirming the predictions that had been circulating in the preceding weeks.

Bush remarked to journalists that the heightened emotional response from Capitol Hill was inappropriate for matters of foreign policy-making. "I do think that there's some indignation about students, there is some feeling – I'm talking about the Congress now – there's a lot here – of empathy with the students right here. But I think there's also a dose of political rhetoric up there that certainly has diminished the other side," Bush said at the press conference held in January 1990, following the Christmas recession.[178] As per the president's perspective, a significant concern with the Pelosi Bill was its limited focus solely on the current students within the U.S., neglecting the potential impact on future generations of Chinese students aspiring to pursue studies and research in American universities. This aspect, according to him, rendered the bill problematic if not potentially risky. "The price of the Pelosi Bill," warned the president, "is lost opportunity for the Chinese scholars of tomorrow."[179] The bill was short-sighted, an element that the president was not willing to tolerate. As was the case when the student exchange program was re-established in the late 1970s, foreign policy choices implied looking at the long-term consequences of those same actions. "When the Congress passed the Pelosi Bill last fall, I was faced with a choice. If I signed the bill, the students would still be safe, but China would retaliate and cut off future student exchanges."[180] If the bill had been signed into law under the weight of emotions – something that the president said he understood but could not agree with – the exchange of students, knowledge, and ideas would eventually be compromised and Congress would have "only itself to blame."[181] Furthermore, the

[177] Ibid. Memorandum of Disapproval, November 30, 1989.
[178] Press Conference by the President, January 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of the Press Secretary, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Students.
[179] Ibid. Press Conference by the President, January 1990.
[180] Ibid. Press Conference by the President, January 1990.
[181] Ibid. Press Conference by the President, January 1990.

Administration also dismissed two significant warnings outlined in a memorandum issued by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) in January 1990, which compared H.R. 2712 with the presidential actions taken after the veto.[182] Firstly, the CRS comparison asserted that the Administration's actions were susceptible to legal challenge. However, the Administration disagreed with this assertion, stating that the attorney general's directives "benefit PRC nationals and harm the legal interests of no one."[183] Secondly, despite the CRS' denial, the benefits offered by the Pelosi Bill, such as work authorization, the presumption of lawful status, and notification of the expiration of stay, would only remain in effect as long as the Administration's deferment of enforced departure was in place.

The leadership in Beijing was promptly apprised of the measures undertaken by the president. On the morning of November 30, Under Secretary Robert Kimmitt met with the PRC Ambassador Zhu Qizhen disclosing the decision to veto the Pelosi Bill. "The president had just made the decision and wished Ambassador Zhu to hear before it became public," a secret cable addressed to the American Embassy in China reveals.[184] The State Department official had highlighted that Bush, in spite of the bill enjoying substantial bipartisan backing in Congress, contentious coverage in the domestic press against his actions, and an unfavorable public opinion, had indeed chosen to veto it. Kimmitt explained that the president was on the brink of implementing administrative measures to ensure the inclusion of a similar provision as outlined in the Pelosi Bill. These measures would be extended to all foreigners residing in the United States, not just the Chinese, who harbored concerns about potential retaliation or persecution from their respective governments. By doing so, Bush would eventually regain full control of foreign policy and of the relationship with China. "The president has tried to be mindful of PRC concerns as well as the sentiments of the American people and Congress and [wished] to put relations on track as soon as possible," concluded the Under Secretary.[185]

Simultaneously, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Das Anderson, during his conversation with PRC Embassy Minister Zhao Xixin, outlined the challenging atmosphere in Washington in which the president had made that controversial choice. Bush

[182] Congressional Research Service Memorandum, January 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, -
[183] "Response to 1/22/90 memo comparing H.R. 2712 with the administration's immigration relief plan for nationals of the People's Republic of China," January 24, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of the Chief of Staff, John Sununu Files, H.R. 2717 / Chinese Students
[184] "President Vetoes Pelosi Bill: Chinese Informed," December 7, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas H. Paal Files, China – U.S. October – December – 1989.
[185] Ibid. "President Vetoes Pelosi Bill," December 7, 1989.

had done "a bold thing and taken a great risk in vetoing the Pelosi Bill in the face of tremendous political pressure."[186] The additional actions taken by the president shouldn't be perceived in Beijing as efforts to restrict the flow of students between the two nations. Instead, they were intended to provide the Administration with greater flexibility compared to what would have occurred if the Pelosi Bill had been enacted into law. This flexibility aimed to prevent Congress from excessively interfering in the management of relations with China. "By doing what he did, the president met the moral imperative, but retained control of the management of the U.S.-China relationship," Anderson assured the Chinese.[187]

However, back in the United States, the moral implications and timing of the presidential veto came under scrutiny, particularly in major American newspapers. The veto decision had been made a few days before the momentous gathering of President Bush and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in Malta.[188] During their meeting, as reported by Jack McKinney in the *Philadelphia Daily News*, President Bush "presumed to lecture [the Soviet leader] about human rights."[189] However, given that the veto was primarily driven by the desire to maintain foreign policy authority, as the president had told journalists on his flight to Malta, rather than an objection to the bill's actual content, it was clear that Bush had lost any credibility he may have had to impart lessons on safeguarding human rights. "I want to keep control of foreign policy as much as I can. Opposition is quite an emotional feeling, but I'm going to protect the office of the president," Bush was reported to have said aboard the Air Force One.[190] *The Washington Post* questioned the reasons that had led the president to wait six months after the massacre to present a viable alternative to safeguard Chinese students in the U.S. This delay was seen as undermining the arduous and bipartisan efforts of Congress to pass legislation that

[186] "Das Anderson and Minister Zhao meet re Pelosi Bill," December 5, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas H. Paal Files, China – U.S. October – December - 1989.
[187] Ibid. "Das Anderson and Minister Zhao meet," December 5, 1989.
[188] The Malta Summit, occurred about three weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall, is commonly regarded as one of the major steps in the process leading up to the end of the Cold War. See among others Svetlana Savranskaya and Thomas Blanton, "The Malta Summit, 1989," in S. Savranskaya and T. Blanton, *The Last Superpower Summits: Reagan, Gorbachev, and Bush. Conversations that Ended the Cold War* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016): pp. 479-569. For a brief summary on how historians have offered different interpretations about the summit, see Joshua Shifrinson, "The Malta Summit and US-Soviet Relations: Testing the Waters Amidst Stormy Seas," *Wilson Center CWIHP E-Dossier Series*, no. 40, online at https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-malta-summit-and-us-soviet-relations-testing-the-waters-amidst-stormy-seas (last accessed September 2023). For a study of what is portrayed as a Cold War "history of lost opportunities" and a recollection of the key moments when leaders in both the United States and the Soviet Union made crucial decisions for the relationship between the two superpowers see Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2007).
[189] Jack McKinney, "Red China & Blue Blood," the *Philadelphia Daily News*, December 4, 1989.
[190] Tom Raum, "Bush Vetoes Bill to Extend Chinese Students' Visas," *The Associated Press*, November 30, 1989.

had progressively garnered public support.[191] Meanwhile, *The New York Times* ran a headline titled "Bush's Coldhearted China Card," highlighting the pattern of the president's use of his veto power in matters involving China. Just a few weeks prior, the president had exercised his veto to block a measure that authorized funding for the State Department. His veto was triggered "solely because it contained a provision imposing moderate economic sanctions on China."[192]

The president was reported to have grown increasingly confrontational with Congress. *United Press International* remarked, "President Bush says he is offering 'the hand of cooperation' to Congress. But it looks more like a clenched fist."[193] Presenting himself as the designated authority for managing foreign policy, Bush criticized Capitol Hill for having left significant domestic matters unresolved, while asserting that Congress was meddling in this handling of relations with China. He highlighted his proposed reduction in the capital gains tax rate, a $1.2 billion anti-crime package, and his plans to revise the 1970 Clean Air Act as examples of important domestic issues that had not been adequately addressed by Congress.[194] As for American educational institutions, in a memorandum addressed to White House Communications Director David Demarest, Bush's Deputy Assistant Sichan Siv reported a mixed reaction to the president's veto. While the American Council of Education, the representative body for higher education institutions, urged its members to endorse a critical letter, the Institute of International Education, the oldest and largest educational exchange organization, expressed its intention to back the president's stance. Meanwhile, NAFSA, the association representing international program officers from universities across the nation, appeared to be inclined towards supporting the president's decision, but had expressed some hesitancy.[195] Critiques also emerged from legal firms, including Arent, Fox, Kintner, Plotkin & Kahn, which represented a significant number of Chinese students in the U.S. on a pro bono basis. They labeled the actions taken by the President as "extremely vague" and requested

[191] -, "On China: A Kowtow," *The Washington Post*, December 3, 1989.
[192] -, "Bush's Coldhearted China Card," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1989.
[193] Thomas Ferraro, "Bush's extended hand looks like a clenched fist," *United Press International* (*UPI*), January 9, 1990.
[194] Ibid. *United Press International*, January 9, 1990.
[195] Memorandum for David Demarest from Sichan Siv on the reactions to the President's veto of the Pelosi Bill, December 4, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Students – Documents.

further elaboration "so that the student leaders could consider it and consult with their supporters in the Congress on an informed basis."[196]

Regarding the Chinese American community across the United States, Deputy Assistant to the President Sichan Siv informed Sununu that it was divided on the Pelosi Bill. As the people within the Administration were effortlessly working to lobby them, support for the president's actions had however increased.[197] That was the case of the Chinese Americans in San Francisco, whose commercial interests and activities could be greatly impacted by a cooling of relations with Beijing – something that Nancy Pelosi had to deal with while sponsoring her bill –, the Chinese American Chamber of Commerce and the Chinese organization such as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, to cite a few. "As Chinese Americans, we speak with compassion for these students [but] as American taxpayers and voters, we speak with the interest of the United States in mind," wrote Douglas Toy, Chairman of the Guangdong Benevolent Association based in Washington D.C., to Senator Mitchell in January 1990.[198] The reaction of some other Chinese communities in the United States, particularly those less involved in trade interests with China, was notably different. "I don't think this decision is a surprise, because President Bush has had good relations with the Chinese leaders, the hard-liners," said Mike Young, editor of *China Spring*, a monthly Chinese exile magazine published in New York.[199] "We know that for the United

[196] Letter to Boyden Gray by Arent, Fox, Kintner, Plotkin & Kahn, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Records Management, China.
[197] Memorandum from Sichan Siv on New Information for Gov. Sununu's Meeting with Chinese American Leaders, January 22, 1990, White House Office of the Chief of Staff, John Sununu Files, H.R. 2717 / Chinese Students.
[198] Letter from the Guangdong Benevolent Association of Greater Washington to Senator George Mitchell, January 19, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of the Chief of Staff, John Sununu Files, H.R. 2717 / Chinese Students.
[199] The *China Spring* magazine was first issued in late 1982 during China's campaign against bourgeois liberalization, a period marked by the purge and expulsion of many leading intellectuals from the Chinese Communist Party. One of its founders, Wang Bingzhang, had the distinction of being among the first students from China to earn a Ph.D. in the United States. He made the significant decision to abandon his medical career and fully dedicate himself to overseas pro-democracy activities. The magazine quickly evolved into a potent tool for amplifying the voices of dissent among Chinese students and scholars. These individuals had, in the meantime, united under the umbrella of the cross-national organization known as the Chinese Alliance for Democracy (CAD). The CAD emerged as one of the most vocal groups within the growing expatriate community and played a pivotal role in shaping an international network. This network linked students and scholars across various regions, including North America, Southeast Asia, and major Chinese cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Through these extensive connections, *China Spring* issues circulated among Chinese students dispersed throughout the world. The magazine became a vital means of communication and solidarity for those advocating for democracy and reform within China, fostering a global community of like-minded individuals dedicated to their cause. Among others, see Geoffrey Crothall, "China Spring," *Index on Censorship*, vol.17, no.6 (June 1988): pp.7-9; Richard Bernstein, "Student from China Defects to Establish New Rights Journal," *New York Times*, November 18, 1982. As shown by Chen Jie, political scientist at the University of Western Australia, the experence of both CAD and IFCSS is part of a long tradition of Chinese exiles' activism. Chen Jie, *The Overseas*

States, the national interest is more important than human rights."[200] Concerning the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars (IFCSS) – the advocacy organization established in the summer of 1989 by Chinese students and scholars in the United States, as outlined in Part Two of this chapter – the group's representatives, including President Liu Yong Chuan, Vice President Han Lian Chao, Government Relations Delegate Huang Yuangeng, and Congressional Lobby Delegate Zhao Haiqing, accompanied by their attorney Wides Burton, conducted a meeting with President Bush on November 30.[201] The arguments presented by the president were not deemed sufficiently persuasive by the IFCSS representatives. The day following the meeting, Zhao Haiqing, while addressing the press, characterized the Administration's actions as "a tragedy."[202] Zhao believed that the key factor behind Bush's veto was the opposition of the Beijing government to the Pelosi Bill, suggesting that this played a significant role in shaping the Administration's decision-making process. This perspective highlighted the considerable influence exerted by Beijing's leadership over the White House and exposed the problematic tension between national interests and human rights concerns that Congress was poised to address.

1.3 A "Misguided" Approach. The End of Secret Diplomacy and the Rise of Human Rights

Despite the congressional recess in December 1989, this period proved to be a pivotal moment in the trajectory of subsequent events. CNN revealed that Brent Scowcroft had undertaken a covert trip to China in July 1989, less than a month after the Tiananmen Square massacre, despite the official suspension of high-level exchanges between American and Chinese officials. Scowcroft, accompanied by Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, had traveled to Beijing without the knowledge of not only the American public and Congress but also significant portions of the State Department and the National Security Council. The post-Cold War era, however, exhibited a reduced tolerance for diplomatic secrecy, in stark contrast to the secret nature of Kissinger's landmark visit to China in the early 1970s. The White House's justifications, which emphasized the need to directly condemn the Chinese leadership and secure commitments to a more moderate approach, were largely

Chinese Democracy Movement. Assessing China's Only Open Political Opposition (Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2019).

[200] Peter LaBarbera, "Bill to let Chinese stay vetoed by Bush," *The Washington Times*, December 1, 1989.

[201] List of Participants for the Meeting with Chinese Student Leaders, November 30, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of the Chief of Staff, John Sununu Files, H.R. 2717 / Chinese Students.

[202] James Mann, "Bush Rejects Extension for China Students," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1989.

unconvincing. This dissatisfaction was further compounded by images from a second trip undertaken by Scowcroft and Eagleburger in early December, which was disclosed only after the American delegation had arrived in China. During this visit, Scowcroft was photographed raising a toast to Chinese officials, signaling the United States' desire to renew dialogue with the PRC. These images intensified the frustration of those who felt the Administration had been too conciliatory in the aftermath of the massacre. *The New York Times* reported that Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell was *astonished* when he learned about the trip. "At that time," Mitchell recalled, "the president was saying there could not be business as usual with a government that took such actions. Yet this is increasingly what seems to be happening."[203]According to Senator Paul Simon (D-IL), who harshly condemned the trips, "the Administration officials placed diplomacy above principle, and, without principle, we can have no diplomacy."[204] It was precisely the perception that secrecy as a style of foreign policy was now anachronistic that infused in Congress a boost to move beyond the rear of Sino-U.S. relations.[205] The revelation of the secret July trip thus provided Congress with significant leverage during the January discussions on overriding the President's veto.

On Capitol Hill, events unfolded swiftly despite the impending holiday season. The vote on the veto was strategically scheduled as the first item on the agenda when Congress reconvened following the Christmas recess, highlighting both its urgency and importance. On January 23, 1990, the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs, chaired by Senators Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Paul Simon (R-IL), and Alan Simpson (R-WY), convened a final hearing – entitled Chinese Students in America and Human Rights in China – in advance of the vote on the Pelosi Bill veto. This hearing exemplified the divergent views held by Congress, Chinese students, the former U.S. Ambassador to China, and the Administration on the issue of protecting Chinese students, which animated the broader debate. Senator Kennedy, Chairman of the Subcommittee, opened the works by urging his colleagues to override the veto as the best way to send a clear message of disdain to the Chinese leadership, to offer legal certainty to those who had exposed themselves against their government, and to reassess Congress's role. When it came to the making of U.S. foreign policy toward China, Kennedy

[203] Maureen Dowd, "2 U.S. Officials Went to Beijing Secretly in July," *The New York Times*, December 19, 1989.
[204] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, *Immigration Status of Chinese Nationals Currently in the United States Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, January 23, 1990, p.6.
[205] The secret trip was discussed in Congress by Deputy Secretary Larry Eagleburger. See U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy Toward China Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, February 7, 1990.

promised that Congress's attitude had changed, and it would not give a blank check to Bush. Citing President Reagan on the Soviet Union, the senator argued: "President Bush says, *Trust me*. We say, *Trust but verify*," as to signify the awakening of the Congress on the China matter.[206] On the same line was Senator Simon, who condemned Bush's style in conducting his policy toward China. "The president had injected secrecy in what had previously been a policy of strength and international condemnation of the repression in the People's Republic of China," the senator from Illinois declared in his written statement to the Subcommittee. Much different was the stance of his colleague in the Subcommittee on Immigration, Senator Simpson. Not only sustaining the veto would compromise two-decade continuous educational ties with China, impeding Chinese students from taking part in university programs in the United States in the future, he argued, but those advocating for a veto override were not considering the effects of that decision on U.S.-China relations at a global level. "How in the world are going to deal with issues like global warming and nuclear proliferation and the sale of arms to the Middle East when you close off from discussion one-fifth of the world's population?" demanded Simpson.[207]

However, as the August vote had clearly demonstrated, not all Republican senators were in unanimous agreement with the president, as indicated by Simpson's position. Concerns over the president's actions had already emerged. In a private letter dated November 29, a day before the veto was announced, Gerald Solomon (R-NY) expressed his thoughts to the president, suggesting a shift in the United States' stance towards China. Solomon argued that Washington had been too accommodating to the Chinese leadership for a long period, and it was now essential to confront the reality of this ambiguous relationship. "I suppose it can be argued that we all must share a little responsibility for at least encouraging the Chinese government to believe that human rights violations in that country are not important," Solomon wrote in his letter.[208] He pointed out that since the re-establishment of normal relations under the Nixon presidency, China had been given a sort of immunity from the human rights criteria that were instead applied to other nations. He asserted that everyone bore a degree of responsibility, including both Republicans and Democrats, the media, and the American public, with only a few exceptions. "The well-documented evidence of ongoing repression and human rights

[206] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.2.
[207] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.4.
[208] Letter from Representative Gerald Solomon to President Bush, November 29, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Students – Documents.

violations in China was systematically ignored, soft-pedaled, or denied for years," he lamented.[209] The events of the June massacre had exposed a different reality, and China should no longer be excused.

Slade Gorton, Senator from Washington State, is another example of those Republicans on Capitol Hill siding against the president's actions. At the January hearing, Gorton suggested that Chinese students in the United States should be seen as the best modernization engines for the PRC. Those students were being trained in the field of science and technology and Beijing could not do without them. Overriding the veto and passing the Pelosi Bill would send a clear message to the Chinese leadership, "providing Beijing with incentives to encourage these talented individuals to return home rather than wait for their educational programs to expire."[210] Not only China could "ill afford to lose its best and brightest" but also no alternatives to the American training programs existed, according to Gorton, who implied a certain superiority of the U.S. academic field compared to any other nations. What is mostly remarkable about the senator's statement is that, as it would be the case a couple of years later during the debate on the 1992 Chinese Students Protection Act (discussed at the end of this chapter Part One), Gorton began to portray the students not only as the victims of the brutal initiatives of their government back in China but instead as an economic resource for the United States. "And if worst came to worst for those students, and they all stayed here permanently," concluded Gorton, "my rough guess is they would probably increase the gross national product of the United States by about 1 percent by reason of their skills. They are exactly the kind of people we would like to have as Americans."[211] The Republican senator eventually turned into a valuable wingman for Pelosi who rejected any charge of partisanship and defended her bill defining it as *modest* and in compliance with U.S. immigration law.

Following the congress members' declarations, Winston Lord took the floor. He had previously served as the American Ambassador to China under the Reagan Administration from November 1985 until a couple of months before the Tiananmen Massacre. He had left office in Beijing amidst significant disagreement with the new Administration, marked by criticism regarding the outcome of Bush's inaugural presidential visit to China in February 1989, which had spiralled into a major controversy.[212] "I am generally against congressional

[209] Ibid. Letter from Representative Solomon, November 29, 1989.
[210] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.11.
[211] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.9.
[212] George H. W. Bush's first official visit to the People's Republic of China as U.S. President in February 1989 had indeed turned into a sensitive diplomatic matter. The American Embassy had included Fang Lizhi, a Chinese

micromanagement of foreign policy and the rigidities often introduced by tactical legislation," debuted Lord.[213] There was a line, however, that the Administration had crossed in handling its China policy and that the former ambassador, who would be generally inclined to leave foreign policy decisions to the executive branch, could not tolerate. "In my view the Scowcroft journey, in substance and style, destroyed that balance. In the process, it also shattered the broad bipartisan consensus on China policy that we had enjoyed for twenty years through five administrations."[214] For this reason, Lord urged Congress to override the veto in order to restore a hierarchy of interests and priorities in the making of U.S. foreign policy toward China. The vote against Bush's veto would send a clear message to the president about who the Americans stand for – namely the students representing the future of their country – and, especially, it would be seen "as a referendum on our posture toward the current Chinese regime."[215]

Meanwhile, the Administration should continue dialog with the Chinese leadership, "avoiding tawdry symbolism" and making clear its intention to promote freedom and condemn violence.[216] According to Lord, in the months following the Tiananmen Square massacre, the situation in China had deteriorated rather than improved, particularly with regard to freedoms and human rights protections. The lifting of martial law, still a reality in Tibet, had been fictitious since police still spied on Chinese people believed to have taken part in the protests, while those labelled as counterrevolutionaries were being harassed and made the subject of intimidation. A large number of the people arrested in those turbulent days of June were in jail despite cosmetic gestures of prisoners' release. The activity of local and foreign journalists remained curtailed, and the broadcast of Voice of America was very much confined and limited. In his testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, Lord suggested that politicians like Bush and Simpson failed to grasp that China should be treated similarly to the

astrophysicist and prominent advocate for pro-democracy ideals since the mid-1980s, and his wife in the guest list of a banquet where various representatives from different sectors of Chinese society were invited. His presence, however, raised concerns among Chinese authorities who threatened not to attend the dinner should the couple be there. In an attempt to navigate this delicate situation and avoid upsetting the PRC leadership while not backing down entirely, the Embassy agreed that Fang Lizhi and his wife would be seated at a table far from the Chinese officials. Unfortunately, the couple never made it to the dinner venue because the Chinese police prevented their attendance. The incident became widely reported in the American press and posed a significant embarrassment for the Bush Administration. Despite the guest list had been pre-approved twice by the White House, the blame for the issue was directed at the American Embassy's handling of the situation, particularly its then-Ambassador Winston Lord who left office shortly after this incident. See Nicholas D. Kristof, "Beijing Stops Key Dissident from Meeting with Bush," *The New York Times*, February 27, 1989.

[213] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.65.

[214] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.66.

[215] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.65.

[216] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.69.

countries within the Soviet sphere of influence, as all people share "universal aspirations."[217] According to Lord, China was not significantly different from those nations in this regard.

The ambassador's point of view had been emphasized back in December in a quite harsh op-ed on *The Washington Post*. There was a fundamental misconception at the base of the relationship with China. "What we have here is not just a double standard," wrote Lord, "but cultural, if not racial, bias, however unintentional and unconscious."[218] There was in the United States a tendency to think of Chinese people as much different from the Americans or the Europeans in terms of aspirations and personal tendency to freedom and individual rights. Such a populous country should prioritize stability over rights to make reforms succeed. Following the normalization, Lord, who had been working within Kissinger's National Security Council, conceded that there had been a double standard in human rights matters when comparing the attitude toward China and other major powers like the Soviet Union.[219] But the PRC represented a fundamental anti-Soviet resource and, most importantly, the country had been making leaps and bounds in terms of modernization and adherence to Western norms and ideals. "With many of these premises now overturned, it is time to shelve the double standard," sentenced Lord.[220]

While the Cold War context may have justified a specific approach to foreign policy – where secrecy was considered a valuable and accepted instrument – the events in China and elsewhere had significantly disrupted this established framework for decision-making. The Tiananmen massacre had come to show the dark side of the Chinese leadership who, until June 1989, had somehow found a balance between the hardliners and the reformists. Trying to maintain the *status quo* of the relationship and giving credit to the former who had unleashed the army against the students, Bush was "gambling" with the future of Sino-American relationship and appeared to be willing to "inflate the significance of cosmetic gestures," Lord argued.[221] The protests had however also let emerge a promising sector of Chinese society who

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[217] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.70.
[218] Winston Lord, "Misguided Mission," *The Washington Post*, December 19, 1989.
[219] The quintessential example of the Cold War's human rights double standard can be observed in Jeane Kirkpatrick's op-ed titled "Dictators and Double Standards," which was published in *Commentary*, a magazine renowned for its conservative viewpoints. Kirkpatrick, who would later become the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations under Reagan's presidency, vehemently criticized President Carter's human rights policy, contending that it applied uniform pressure on both allied and adversarial nations, thereby jeopardizing U.S. national security. Instead, reasoning through Cold War categories, Kirkpatrick advocated for the selective application of the human rights criteria toward dictators who were aligned with the United States. See Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictators and Double Standards," *Commentary* (1979), pp.34-45.
[220] Ibid. Lord, *The Washington Post*, December 19, 1989.
[221] Ibid. Lord, *The Washington Post*, December 19, 1989.

appreciated individual rights and freedom. U.S. foreign policy-making, Lord believed, should be primarily directed at these people. By doing so, Washington would eventually avoid the "frequent tension between the imperatives of strategy and morality, between preserving peace and promoting human rights." It would, in other words, "align with China's future."[222]

Two representatives from the Administration were scheduled to present statements that day. However, Senator Kennedy, while introducing the panel—which was to include Richard Schifter, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, and Bill Cook, General Counsel-Designate of the Immigration and Naturalization Service—expressed regret over the short-notice cancellation of Schifter's testimony. Despite this, Schifter's draft speech is preserved in the records of the Bush Library in College Station, Texas. According to the draft, Schifter identified three primary reasons for the Administration's opposition to Congress overriding the presidential veto. First, the Administration argued that the existing presidential measures already offered Chinese nationals a level of protection equal to, if not greater than, what the Pelosi Bill aimed to provide. Second, the Administration expressed concerns that H.R. 2712 could jeopardize the continuation of exchange programs with China, which were considered integral to the overall U.S.-China relationship. These academic agreements were seen as a valuable direct channel for promoting Western ideas and values while assisting China in its efforts to transition from a long history of introspection and isolation. Although only the Fulbright program had been suspended by the Chinese government in response to the sanctions following the Tiananmen Square massacre, Shifter assured that discussions about resuming the program had already commenced. Third, the Administration argued that challenging presidential foreign policy authority would undermine the credibility of the United States as a consistent and responsible player on the world stage. Shifter contended that if the president could not maintain a wide degree of flexibility in handling foreign matters, this would eventually compromise the perception of U.S. global leadership in the eyes of other international actors.[223] During the hearing, Bill Cook became involved in a contentious debate with Senator Kennedy and IFCSS representative Zhao Haiqing. Cook addressed the criticisms regarding the feasibility of the presidential measures, which were reportedly fraught with legal uncertainties and had led to difficulties for American universities in processing the necessary

[222] Ibid. Lord, *The Washington Post*, December 19, 1989.
[223] Statement by Richard Schifter, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, -

paperwork for students. He characterized the issue as driven by "intense emotionalism," arguing that it was "subject to misinterpretation and unnecessary concern."[224]

Later that day, a bipartisan group of representatives held a joint press conference outside of Capitol Hill to inform reporters of their willingness to override the veto. "We will vote not as Democrats and Republicans, but as Americans," announced Representative Richard Gephardt (D-MO).[225] According to the representative of Missouri, it was the Congress' responsibility to take care of those students who had been moved by the same revolutionary human spirit that had inspired America's greatest founding fathers like Tom Paine, Sam Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. "Tomorrow," Gephardt forecasted, "the spirit of Tiananmen Square will live again on the House floor when we send a message that will be heard from the Oval Office to the Forbidden City."[226] The president had "simply made a mistake," according to Representative Mickey Edwards (R-OK), "but the American Congress and the American people stand very strongly with those people in China who wish to get the same rights of democracy and liberty that mean so much to us."[227] Edwards' words were echoed by his colleague Senator Slade Gorton (R-WA) when stating that "the forces of democracy are in favor of this veto override" and that "there is certainly strong Republican sentiment in favor of an override."[228] Whether or not it would be strong enough to reverse the veto, Gorton could not guarantee.

The following day, on January 24, 1990, the House overrode the veto by a vote of 390 to 25 as many on Capitol Hill expected. Right before the vote, the congressmen's declarations on the House floor had anticipated the bipartisan wave that was about to collide with the veto. "Congress will speak loudly where the president would only whisper," thundered Bob Matsui (D-CA).[229] According to Joe Barton (R-TX), whose district was home to Texas A&M University in College Station hosting about 400 Chinese students, the students should be protected by a law rather than an administrative measure as they requested. Similar to Gephardt's statement at the press conference, the Republican congressman from Texas

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[224] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.127.
[225] "Override of Veto on Chinese Student Status," January 23, 1990, C-SPAN, https://www.c-span.org/video/?10754-1/override-veto-chinese-student-status (last accessed March 2023).
[226] Ibid. C-SPAN, January 23, 1990.
[227] Ibid. C-SPAN, January 23, 1990.
[228] Ibid. C-SPAN, January 23, 1990.
[229] *Congressional Records*, 101st, January 24, 1990, online at https://congressional-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/congressional/result/congressional/congdocumentview?accountid=10226&groupid=106481&parmId=186FF396FD6&rsId=186FF37F033 (last accessed May 2023).

compared the young Chinese nationals in the U.S. to American founding fathers: "the students could someday, possibly, be Jeffersons, Madisons, Monroes, and Washingtons, of their country," he anticipated.[230] As in the best tradition of the United States' power projection and civilizing mission, the students were envisioned as potential ambassadors of a redemptive intervention back in China. Once trained in American leading institutions and learned to appreciate U.S. political and cultural values, the expectation was for them to apply American categories such as representative institutions, the balance of power, and the protection of individual rights into the context of the PRC. In a hyper-idealistic Jeffersonian idea of global replicability of American-inspired representative system, Chinese students could serve as a healing force within a system that had demonstrated its limits and dysfunctions.



[230] Barton seemed particularly attached to the students of his district who had reached out to him soon after the massacre in order to urge the congressman to support the Pelosi Bill. Between June and July 1989, Barton received some like 800 letters per week and that was "second only to the catastrophic health care problem," said Barton in Congress. Growing concerned with their situation and believing they should be increasingly part of the local community, Barton felt appropriate that some student representatives could take part in the 4th of July celebration at the A&M campus where he was supposed to deliver a keynote speech. While at first the students were hesitant in welcome the congressman's invitation fearing repercussion from the Chinese authorities in the Consulate in Houston, they then informed Barton that four or five student leaders who had already appeared in the media would participate. The day of the celebrations, 200 to 300 went to the university stadium and sat in a special place. "At a certain part, in the program I recognized them and asked for a round of applause. The students stood up. The citizens began to applaud. The citizens stood up. They began to applaud the Chinese students and then the students began to wave American flags. For literally 5 minutes, the students stood there. They were crying. They were excited. The participants in the fireworks display were excited, it was just amazing, just amazing," recalled Barton at the hearing on July 20, 1989. Ibid. *Congressional Records*, January 24, 1990.



Figure 7. Press Conference outside of Capitol Hill, January 23, 1990.
Video frames credit: C-SPAN.

This vote had been anticipated by the White House and did not come as a surprise. In a memorandum to John Sununu, it was said: "We have been re-contacting House Members over the last few days. It is their unanimous view that we have no chance of sustaining the veto in the House. In general, they: 1. Disagree with what we have done and/or do not understand why we have done it; 2. Note that the Scowcroft/Eagleburger trips to China have exacerbated our problems; and 3. Note the lack of action by the Chinese in response to the president's actions."[231] The Republican members of the House in Congress stood, in fact, united against the decision to veto the Pelosi Bill, and they became increasingly vocal in expressing their concern and frustration. In the days leading up to the vote, the list of representatives opposing the veto continued to grow. Congressman Duncan Hunter (R-CA) cautioned the Administration that House Republicans were unanimously in support of H.R. 2712, and the Administration would be fortunate if it could gather ten votes in favor of sustaining the veto. Meanwhile, Congressman Jerry Lewis, also a Republican from California, believed that the president "doesn't have a snowball's chance in hell" and stated that he had never been more certain, in all his years in Congress, that his decision to oppose the veto was the right one to make. Congressman Newt Gingrich (R-GA) intended to seek guidance from the Chinese community he represented and from the former Democratic president of his state, Georgia, Jimmy Carter. He voiced concerns, suggesting that the White House might not fully grasp the extent to which

[231] Memorandum for John Sununu from Nick Calio on the Veto Override of Chinese Students Bill, January 5, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Legislative Affairs, James Renne Files, China.

its stance on the issue was misaligned with the sentiments of the American people. On a similar line, Congressman Bob Walker (R-PA) warned about the Democrats' determination "to bring down the president on earth" on a foreign policy matter following the massive victory Bush had reported – which was criticized by China – with the American invasion of Panama and the deposition of General Manuel Noriega.[232] The representative from Pennsylvania also claimed that the actions taken by the president had confused the Republican members who, in the meantime, had been skillfully courted by Chinese students. They "have an extremely sophisticated lobbying network. They sent every member of Congress a personalized Christmas card, thanking them for their vote on the bill," he noted. Furthermore, Congressman Bill McCollum (R-FL) rejected the logics of party loyalty, firmly believing that the veto would eventually cause "lasting ill-will."[233]

Several other Republican House members opted to stand behind the president's decision, yet they still voiced reservations or later expressed regret. Congressman Bob Mitchell (R-OH) acknowledged that sustaining the veto could come with a substantial political cost, but he was willing to assist the Administration. Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI) conveyed significant doubts about the president's stance but committed to supporting him on this matter. He also expressed hope that his support might lead to favorable gestures from the president, like an invitation to a White House dinner (!). Congressman Lamar Smith (R-TX) voiced considerable frustration that his attempts to aid the Administration with the veto were disregarded. He believed that he could have garnered support if the White House had provided greater cooperation to bolster his efforts.[234] Although most of these comments had been expected, some others came like a thunderbolt. *How can he do this?* read a note written next to the January 18 White House News Summary which reported strong criticism from Newt Gingrich, the House Minority Whip. His vehement condemnation of the veto, referred to as the president's "single and inexplicable disaster," indicated not only a significant break between the Republican Party and the White House on the China matter but also a willingness to lead a challenge against Bush's decision.[235]

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[232] See Steven Erlanger, "Fighting in Panama: Beijing; China Calls U.S. Strike in Panama A Violation of International Law," *The New York Times*, December 22, 1989.
[233] "Comments from House Republicans," January 26, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Legislative Affairs, James Renne Files, China.
[234] Ibid. "Comments from House Republicans," January 26, 1990.
[235] White House News Summary, January 18, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, -

If there was no room left to lobby the House in favor of the president's veto, the Administration had to quickly move all its energies to the Senate, where the outcome of the vote seemed not as certain. On January 11, 1990, a memorandum sent to the White House Chief of Staff John Sununu reported six moves already taken to convince Republican senators to sustain the veto. Deputy Assistant Sichan Siv was on his way to San Francisco to lobby the local Asian American community which, as Pelosi's effort witnessed, was among the most influential in the United States. In the meantime, Bush should talk to the Asian American leaders – a meeting with 180 representatives was scheduled the following day – urging them to leverage their representatives in Senate and in their local newspapers.[236] On the media note, the memorandum warned Sununu that both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* sided against the veto and suggested contacting prominent figures in the China-related debate such as former President Richard Nixon and Carter's NSC official Michel Oksenberg, to invite them to write op-ed in favor of the president's moves for other magazines like the *Times* and the *Post*. Further national and local newspapers – the memorandum talked expressively about the "Inquiry" column on *USA Today* – would then be targeted. Finally, a booklet explaining Bush's strategy on China and the reasons to override the veto would be distributed among members of Congress and the press.[237]

Furthermore, on January 17, a memorandum sent by Bush's Assistant for Legislative Affairs, Frederick D. McClure, informed the president that "in conjunction with the Offices of Legislative Affairs at the National Security Council and Department of State, my staff and I spoke directly with 37 Republican Senators, out of the 45 representing the GOP. Attached are recommended telephone call memoranda for six key senators (Kit Bond, Dave Durenberger, John Heinz, Bob Kasten, Arlen Specter, and Phil Gramm), including the views expressed by these senators in our conversations. The calls we made were to gather information and were not "hard sell" conversations."[238] McClure suggested that the Secretary of State and the Chief of Staff should contact "key senators" who were still undecided about the vote. All of the six

[236] The list of the attendees included representatives of the Chinese American Citizen Alliance, the Asian American Congressional Forum, the Chinese American Music Society, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, exponents of the religious and academic sectors. "Perspective Attendees Briefing on H.R. 2712 with Chinese American Leaders, January 22, 1990 – 5 p.m. Room 180, Old Executive," White House Office of the Chief of Staff, John Sununu Files, H.R. 2717/Chinese Students.
[237] Memorandum for Governor Sununu from Deb Amend on the veto override communications plan, January 11, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of the Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Students – Documents.
[238] Memorandum for President Bush from Frederick D. McClure on the Pelosi Bill Override, January 17, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Legislative Affairs, James Renne Files, China.

senators were in the "leaning no" category and, therefore expected to vote to override the veto. Senator Bond (R-MO) said he was willing to listen to the Administration's arguments; and so Senator Durenberger (R-MN). The president was suggested to mention that the senators' state colleagues, Jack Danforth from Missouri and Rudy Boschwitz from Minnesota, would sustain the veto. Senator Heinz (R-PA) was willing to reconsider his position against the veto only if the Chinese would take dramatic action to reverse their present repressive policies. Senator Kasten (R-WI) mentioned he had some political problems and needed some good reason to vote with the president. Senator Gramm (R-TX) initially indicated that he was in the "no" category. His comments were that he "was outspoken on this issue early on." He believed that the Administration could possibly turn the issue around, "but that it is not worth the huge amount of political capital it would take."[239]

A few days later, the president was asked to make further telephone calls. Among the senators Bush should talk to was Senator Gordon Humphrey (R-NH) whose "leaning no" position had been probably influenced by senators Jesse Helms and William Armstrong. The senator from New Hampshire, known for his anti-abortion position, could be leveraged by mentioning the inclusion in the presidential measures of a provision that prevented individuals from returning to countries where forced abortion or sterilization was practiced. Although he had anticipated he would probably vote against the veto, Bush was informed that Senator Connie Mack (R-FL) also desired to be a team player. The senator from Florida was concerned about the increasing partisan nature of the entire matter. Senator Malcolm Wallop (R-DY) expressed feeling "personally betrayed" by the president's secretive approach to handling China's policy after the crackdown on Chinese students. He requested assurances from the Administration that a similar foreign policy approach toward the PRC would not recur. As for Senator John McCain (R-AR), the recommendations anticipated, "there may be some emotional problem because of his Vietnam experience."[240] McCain was also among the Republican senators approached by former president Richard Nixon who was asked to get on board as China leading expert to gather votes in favor of Bush's strategy.[241]

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[239] Memorandum for the President from Frederick McClure, "Pelosi Bill Override (China)," January 17, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of the Chief of Staff, John Sununu Files, H.R. 2717 / Chinese Students.
[240] "Recommended Telephone Call by the President," January 24, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Legislative Affairs, James Renne Files, China.
[241] -, "Nixon lobbied Senators on Bill," *The New York Times*, January 26, 1990.

The president was provided with a list of arguments to present when reaching out to senators. Foremost, Bush was advised to rally the senators under the party banner, emphasizing that passing the Pelosi Bill into law would primarily benefit the Democrats. Furthermore, he was encouraged to highlight that his actions not only aimed at safeguarding Chinese students in the United States but also ensured the preservation of an open line of communication with the PRC leadership. The president should explain while talking to the senators that the PRC leadership was grappling with a delicate internal struggle between hardliners who advocated for isolationism from the West while repressing protesters' demands, and reformists who favored opening up the country and negotiating with the students. The president's actions should be seen as a means to navigate this challenging situation, avoiding exacerbating the power struggle in favor of the hardliners. Bush was advised to make clear that the passage of the Pelosi Bill could undermine the progress made over two decades to normalize relations with China, making it imperative to entrust foreign policy and China-related matters to his diplomatic expertise. Additionally, despite the highly criticized secret nature of the trips, the president was advised to defend his decision to dispatch Brent Scowcroft and Larry Eagleburger to China. He should emphasize the positive steps being taken by the Chinese leadership following the secret visit, including a reduction in propaganda attacks against the U.S., cessation of harassment of American diplomats, lifting of martial law in Beijing, admission of the first Peace Corps volunteers, willingness to reopen discussions on the Fulbright exchange program, and a commitment not to sell arms to Middle Eastern countries.[242] As a final move to bring the majority of the senators on his side, On January 24, 1990, at 8:15 A.M., a breakfast meeting with 37 Republican Senators was fixed on the president's weekly schedule. Once more the president was urged to reiterate the challenging political environment in which he had taken the decision to veto the bill. "If I signed the Bill, the students here would still be safe, but China would retaliate and cut off future official student exchange," the president should stress.[243] Additionally, the power struggle in China between reformists and hardliners was a delicate matter and Washington should be cautious in disrupted this already unstable balance. "My policy is beginning to work," Bush should assure. "Let me menage it!"[244]

[242] Ibid. Memorandum for the President, Attachment A and B, January 17, 1990.
[243] Memorandum from Brent Scowcroft, Points to be made at the Senate Republicans Breakfast on China, January 23, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Karl Jackson Files, -
[244] Ibid. Points to be made at the Senate Republicans Breakfast on China, January 23, 1990.

The debate on the Senate floor on January 25 reached high temperatures if compared to the mild climate that had reigned at the House. The congressional bipartisan effort in backing the Pelosi Bill seemed to have vanished in a matter of hours. Among others, a certain astonishment for how things had moved fast was expressed by Dale Bumpers (D-AR) who argued: "I do not understand how this bill could pass here, something like 97 to 0, and all of a sudden people who thought it was a wonderful idea, a great bill, are now saying we have to be loyal to the president."[245] The intense lobby machine set in motion by the White House seemed to be bearing the desired results. The Republican senators' back-to-front was led by Alan Simpson. According to the senator from Wyoming, the debate had lost its bipartisan nature when the Democratic party turned the matter involving the protection of the students into a battle against the president. Although the measures taken by Bush provided Chinese nationals with the same degree of protection guaranteed by the H.R. 2712, Simpson accused the Democrats of exploiting the issue with the sole aim of putting into trouble a popular president on the subject he was probably the best at, foreign policy. "It was an attempt by some to say *let us one-up George Bush*. How are we ever going to nail this guy? This is old 80 percent Bush. This guy is driving us crazy. He is the symbol of frustration for a great many. He does the right thing, and he includes the Democratic leadership in his discussions before he does the right thing," contested Simpson.[246] At a certain juncture in the debate, the Pelosi Bill had suddenly become polarized along partisan lines. Simpson held the belief that the bill was being exploited as a means to overtly garner Asian political backing and to critique the president and his approach to China. That was, according to Simpson, "a raw political tactic that should be repelled."[247] Overriding of the presidential veto would therefore result, according to the senator, into a political move against U.S. national interests. He invoked the words of former President Nixon, who had emphasized that foreign policy should aim at protecting American interests rather than solely addressing offended sensibilities or serving as a means of feeling noble. In Nixon's view, foreign policy should be a practical tool aimed at safeguarding U.S. interests while also contributing, where possible, to the betterment of lives worldwide.[248] As the debate leading up to the vote in the Senate intensified, a heated confrontation emerged between the chairmen of the Judiciary Committee. On the one side, Senator Simpson argued in favor of sustaining the

[245] *Congressional Records*, 101st Congress, January 25, 1990, online at https://congressional-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/congressional/result/congressional/congdocumentview?accountid=10226&groupid=106481&parmId=186FA283694&rsId=186FA206F76 (last accessed August 2023).
[246] Ibid. *Congressional Records*, January 25, 1990.
[247] "Veto of Chinese Students Bill by Senator Alan K. Simpson," January 23, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Legislative Affairs, James Renne Files, China.
[248] Ibid. *Congressional Records*, January 25, 1990.

veto, expressing regret that immigration issues, typically unrelated to party dynamics, were being exploited by a political faction to challenge President Bush's decision. On the other side of the debate, Senator Kennedy rejected his colleague's accusations of partisanship and stood in opposition to the veto.

The debate among senators over whether to override the veto resembled a fast-paced table tennis match, with arguments rapidly volleyed back and forth. While there were those who thought that the president could respond quicker and more efficiently than Congress (Thad Cochran, R-MS), others believed that Bush could not be trusted as his posture toward China was too "obscure and contradictory" (Al Gore, D-TN) and that by sustaining the veto Congress would apply human rights double standards to China, ignoring all the positive results that the American tough posture had brought to Eastern Europe (Dennis DeConcini, D-AZ). However, there were senators who found it surprising that a president with such high popularity could be challenged when giving his word (Frank Murkowski, R-AK) and those who believed that the president deserved "the benefit of the doubt" (Trent Lott, R-MS). Others insisted that the opposition to the veto by prominent Republicans like Slade Gorton and Newt Gingrich dismissed every charge of partisanship against the Democrats (Herbert Kohl, D-WI). Should the veto be sustained, some other senators argued, U.S. credibility would be compromised and the leadership in Beijing receive a waiver to keep conducting its repressive policy against dissidents (Paul Simon, D-IL). It was pointed out that there were important precedents of overriding a presidential veto, namely the congressional effort against Reagan's veto on sanctions on South Africa in 1986.[249] Standing tall against the president had resulted, according to the Senator from Illinois, in positive consequences not only in Cape Town but also in the near territories like Namibia where the forces toward independence had progressed. However, the senators opposing the president's veto, argued those sustaining the veto, were ignoring that the veto would compromise a positive attitude of Beijing on questions related to nuclear proliferation as was the case with the turnaround selling of Chinese M-9 medium-range missiles to Syria and Libya (Arlen Specter, R-PA) and they were dealing with China without a deep knowledge of that country (Ted Stevens, R-AK – who was a WWII veteran in China).[250]

In the meantime, the media had largely sided against the White House. According to major American newspapers, China could not be trusted, nor the promises of a president who, only

[249] See Steven Roberts, "Senate, 78 to 21, Overrides Reagans Veto and Imposes Sanction on South Africa," *The New York Times*, October 3, 1986.
[250] Ibid. *Congressional Records*, January 25, 1990.

based on his fourteen-month experience as Chief of the U.S. Liaison Office to the PRC in the mid-1970s, advocated for a personalized response to the Chinese leadership. While for *The New York Times*, by opposing the presidential veto, "Congress can nudge America's China policies back toward decency," *The Washington Post* believed that actions taken by the White House had "sent confusing signals about American reaction to the violence" and only an override could make clear what the U.S. stood for.[251] Media coverage across the country portrayed President Bush's actions as indicative of a leader entangled in the metaphorical quicksand of his own pride and stubbornness. If *Newsday* commented on a presidential approach to China all about "lip service and the bottom line," according to the *Dayton Daily News*, Bush had mistakenly radicalized the debate over the Pelosi Bill.[252] "Bush is proceeding as if he were walking on eggshells," pictured the Ohio newspaper. "But there is no threat of nuclear war here, no tenuously good situation that must be preserved. What's he so afraid of? A ban on student visas? Come on. That thinking is as small as it is dubious."[253]

On January 25, 1990, the majority of the senators, 62, voted to override the president's veto, sticking to their first plebiscitary approval of the H.R. 2712 in the summer of 1989. However, the required two-thirds majority was not reached, and the Pelosi Bill did not turn into law. The Senate's override had failed by only four votes. Those within the GOP who finally broke party line voting against the president's actions were the above-mentioned Slade Gorton of Washington, William Armstrong of Colorado, and Jesse Helms of North Carolina joined by Rudy Boschwitz of Minnesota, William Cohen of Maine, Robert Kasten Jr. of Wisconsin, Larry Pressler of South Dakota, and Pete Wilson of California, who was competing for governor and flew to D.C. to express his dissent. Senator Gorton, asked by journalists, had refused to reveal the names of the Republicans who had changed their positions at the eleventh hour. However, as reported by James Mann on *The Los Angeles Times*, congressional sources had disclosed that the senators convinced by the Administration's lobby effort included Alfonse D'Amato of New York, John McCain of Arizona, Charles Grassley of Iowa, James Jeffords of Vermont, and Mark Hatfield and Bob Packwood, both Oregon.[254] Scowcroft later reflected on the situation, noting: "We could count only five firm votes out of the 34 needed to sustain the veto. I've never worked so hard in my life." Emphasizing the unprecedented effort

[251] -, "On China, Trust is not enough," *The New York Times*, January 24, 1990; -, "Overriding the China Veto," *The Washington Post*, January 24, 1990.
[252] -, "Senate should act to protect Chinese students," *Newsday*, January 25, 1990.
[253] -, "On China, the issue is message; U.S. should send accurate one," *Dayton Daily News*, January 25, 1990.
[254] James Mann, "Bush wins battle on China students; Senate backs veto," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1990.

required to address the challenge posed by the Pelosi Bill to the Administration's foreign policy prerogatives, the national security advisor remarked on the extensive efforts made, highlighting the emotional nature of the issue. "We pulled out all the stops. But as an indication of the emotional aspect of this – and it was very emotional – Senator Pete Wilson of California got out of a sickbed and flew to Washington to cast a vote against us. This is a Republican Senator. That's a measure of the emotionalism and the difficulty we had. In the end we got, I believe, 37 votes."[255]

But who did really win? And exactly what? And who eventually lost? Following the vote in the Senate, the media offered varying interpretations of the months-long arm wrestling between the president and Congress. According to *The New York Daily News*, the real winner of this contention was Deng Xiaoping. In the recollection of the New Jersey newspaper, the PRC leader had "killed an act of Congress" thanks to the help of his "powerful lobbyist: George Buh."[256] Sarcastically described as "an extraordinary performance," the *Daily News* commented on the veto as if the president was a puppet in the skillful hands of the Chinese chairman: "With a combination of threats, cajolery and hints of tiny concessions, Deng manipulated an American president to the topsy-turvy point where Bush found himself warning that Congress – yes, the American Congress – would be to blame for further Chinese repression."[257] Failing to protect the young Chinese nationals rather than their leaders, *The Atlanta Journal* warned about the long term implications of Bush's manoeuvre. The Georgia newspaper predicted that "when the strongman goes, and the people he abused take over, we have often found that those people hate us almost as much as they hated him."[258]

In this regard, the Chinese word *kowtow* became quite recurrent in the chronicles. Used among others by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME), commentators started arguing that President Bush had *kowtowed* to China. "The old Chinese word "kowtow" describes the ceremonial act of prostration before the emperor as a sign of homage or worship," explained *The Buffalo News*.[259] *The Washington Post*'s analysis characterized the situation as rooted in an ancient Chinese tradition known as the *kowtow*. The kowtow was a deep, servile

[255] Interview with Brent Scowcroft, November 12, 1999, George H.W. Bush Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia.
[256] -, *The New York Daily News*, January 26, 1990.
[257] Ibid. Mann, *The Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1990.
[258] Richard Matthews, "President Bush has forgotten who 'China' really is," *The Atlanta Journal*, January 30, 1990.
[259] -, "Chinese have a word for it. Bush and Senate have kowtowed to China," *The Buffalo News*, January 26, 1990.

bow that symbolized the utmost deference and submission. In the context of the U.S.-China visa bill and the debate surrounding it, the article argued that the Chinese government was demanding this symbolic gesture of submission and abasement from the United States. According to this perspective, the issue was not primarily about students or visas; instead, it was fundamentally about moral judgment. The Chinese government was infuriated that the United States had dared to pass judgment on its methods for maintaining internal discipline, likely referring to the events at Tiananmen Square. The PRC leadership wanted the United States to capitulate publicly, to back down in a manner that the entire world could witness. In this context, a presidential veto of the visa bill was framed as an act of *kowtow*, a gesture of submission to the demands of the Chinese government.[260]

"What is Communist China for us to bow to in any degree?," demanded the *Chattanooga News-Free Press*, arguing that the PRC needed the United States much more than the other way round.[261] By vetoing the bill seeking to provide asylum to the Chinese students, Bush seemed to have let China go away with murder, applying a *Kissingerian*-kind of strategy that appeared outdated by now.[262] "The president subordinated U.S. foreign policy to the test of his prestige and the political loyalty of his fellow Republicans in the Senate," claimed *The Providence Journal*.[263] According to commentators, instead of praising the unanimous congressional condemnation of the massacre, the president had turned the debate over Pelosi's H.R. 2712 into a bitter partisan battle where the real losers would eventually be the Republican senators who had done the about-face. In this respect, not all criticisms were addressed to the president. The senators who had supported him should equally be blamed. *The Los Angeles Times* reported that "the Administration's spokesmen in the Senate – Bob Dole of Kansas and Alan Simpson of Wyoming – advanced the president's case in a rancorous and wholly partisan fashion" accusing the Democrats of "acting in pursuit of campaign contributions."[264] *Bush Won. Who Lost?* titled the former executive editor of *The New York Times* Abraham Michael Rosenthal, claiming that the president had been skillful enough to prevent the override of his veto. "He threatened, warned, cajoled, made deals, called in every chip, summoned the help of

[260] -, "Will Mr. Bush Kowtow?" *The Washington Post*, November 30, 1989.
[261] -, "What is Red China, Anyhow?" *Chattanooga News-Free Press*, January 25, 1990.
[262] After all, Nixon's National Security Advisor had justified the massacre in China arguing "since no government in the world would have tolerated having the main square of its capital occupied, a crackdown was therefore inevitable." See "Kissinger's View of China Crisis," *The Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 1989.
[263] Brian Dickinson, "What sort of signals is Washington sending the Chinese?" *The Providence Journal*, January 26, 1990.
[264] -, "Bush's very fragile China Policy," *Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1990.

every ally and vassal, until he whipped those Republican senators into line – all but eight of them."[265] The president had made them look – the Republican senators – like nothing more than his vassals. As reported by the New York newspaper, Senator Slade Gorton (R-WA) – one of the eight Republican Senators to not oppose the veto override – had commented on the "little enthusiasm for backing the president" among his party colleagues: "I know no one who was happy he vetoed the bill. Not a single person said that in public or private," he admitted.[266] The American people would eventually have the last word on the matter. "At primary or election time you don't have to remember all 34 of them, just your own man," wrote Rosenthal. "For New Yorkers, the name is Alfonse D'Amato."[267]

On a different line of reasoning, according to *The Evening Bulletin*, the blame should be extended to the Congress as a whole due to its effort in trying to exert its own foreign policy toward China just because protecting the pro-democracy students had become "fashionable."[268] This idea was reinforced by *The Dallas Morning News* according to which Congress seemed to "perceive the granting of immigration privileges as an easy thing to do – like handing out lollipops."[269] The Texas-based newspaper contended that Congress was conveying the wrong message allowing immigration policy to be held hostage by partisan politics, which in turn could lead to a rise in visa applications from various countries, including the Soviet Union. But president Bush was different from his predecessor, Ronald Reagan, and he would reclaim his foreign policy authority "against congressional imperialism with a simple stroke of the veto pen."[270] By retrieving his foreign policy prerogatives, UCLA Sinologist Richard Baum from the pages of *The Los Angeles Times* argued, Bush had contributed to "a victory of reason over emotion."[271] Although Congress's inclination to criticize China was reasonable, overriding the veto would compromise relations with Beijing. In the best scenario, it would have bolstered China's hardliners; in the worst scenario, "it would have opened the floodgates of mutual reprisal and recrimination."[272]

Beyond the debate over winners and losers, President Bush now faced a significant challenge: ensuring further positive improvements in the U.S.-China relationship. Until the

[265] Abraham Michael Rosenthal, "Bush Won. Who Lost?" *The New York Times*, February 1, 1990.
[266] Elaine Sciolino, "On China, Congress is Almost Assertive," *The New York Times*, January 28, 1990.
[267] Ibid. Rosenthal, *The New York Times*, February 1, 1990.
[268] Philip Terzian, "The China syndrome?" *The Evening Bulletin*, January 29, 1990.
[269] -, "China Vote. Senate should part ways with House on veto," *The Dallas Morning News*, January 25, 1990.
[270] -, "George Bush's sword," *The Washington Times*, January 29, 1990.
[271] Richard Baum, "A victory of reason over emotion," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1990.
[272] Ibid. Baum, *The Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1990.

time when the students in China would feel safe to return home, his Administration would bear full responsibility for implementing the promised measures to grant lawful status to Chinese nationals who wished to remain in the United States. As argued by Nancy Pelosi the day after her bill had ended its journey through the legislative process, "the burden that falls to the winner is now the winner has to perform, and the winner has to produce."[273] Although the supporters of the student bill had not achieved their initial goal, they had sent a powerful message, and they now awaited Beijing's next move. After all, Pelosi pointed out, the Chinese government had obtained what it had lobbied for. Hard to argue that it was a defeat for the San Francisco representative; quite the contrary. The veto served as the tip-off of Congress as a key player in the China debate and leading that was Nancy Pelosi. The battle against the White House had turned into an opportunity in terms of national profile for a freshman congress member welcomed with initial skepticism and hesitation on the Hill. "It was great for us," argued Craig Middleton.[274] In just six months, Pelosi had become the go-to figure in Congress whenever China was on the agenda. And the person who, more than anyone else, had contributed to this outcome was President George H. W. Bush.

According to Norman Peterson, Executive Secretary for the Liaison Group for International Educational Exchange, the Administration's failure to respond to the signals from Capitol Hill was unfortunate. The Administration had insisted on the adequacy of its arrangements while urging Congress to take no action. This stance was regrettable because there were other legislative options under consideration, such as a well-crafted safe-haven proposal – H.R. 2929 *Chinese Temporary Protected Status Act* – put in place by House Immigration Subcommittee Chairman Bruce Morrison (D-CT). This proposal, in Peterson's view, would have protected students from going back to China for several years without permanently eliminating their obligation to return.[275] In this process, the president had escalated the issue of student protection, turning the passage of the Pelosi Bill into an unexpected – and perhaps, evitable – clash between his Administration and Congress. While the considerable pressure from both Capitol Hill and the American public could have potentially been advantageous for Bush in negotiations with PRC officials, it appeared that Beijing was reluctant to make any concessions or take a step forward, which had the potential to further exacerbate domestic disagreements

[273] David Hoffman, "China Seen Beijing Pressed to Relent on Repression," *The Washington Post*, January 27, 1990.
[274] Ibid. Interview with Craig Middleton, September 2023.
[275] Norman Peterson, Getting Exchanges with China out of the Political Spotlight, January 8, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Stephen Rademaker Files, China.

within the United States. However, Nancy Pelosi was not the sole figure catapulted into the national political arena. Alongside her, the Chinese young nationals organized under the banner of the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars emerged as a quintessential example of the unprecedented proliferation of actors involved in shaping America's stance toward China. This marked a transformative moment in U.S.-China relations, with various actors exerting influence on the nation's foreign policy direction. The origins, activity, and importance of the IFCSS are the subject of the second part of this chapter.

Although the Pelosi Bill ultimately did not become law, it serves as a self-explanatory example of some quintessential features of post-Cold War America's preoccupation with China, namely bipartisan efforts against the Administration and the prominent use of human rights rhetoric. Regarding bipartisanship, Congress, spanning from Democrats to Republicans, was largely unwilling to grant the president the broad degree of flexibility that his predecessors – from Richard Nixon to Ronald Reagan – had enjoyed in their approach to Beijing. Instead, Congress began to closely scrutinize the Administration's actions, reflecting a desire for more active involvement in shaping U.S.-China policy. Nancy Pelosi, in defense of her bill, argued that flexibility would send the wrong message to both the Chinese government and students, who needed legal certainty. Senator Gorton, on a similar line, claimed that Bush's measures could be reversed in the same manner they were issued, despite offering a reasonable level of protection for the students. Congress members contended that a law passed by Congress would provide both the students and the PRC leadership with assurances of America's unwavering commitment to human rights.[276] In terms of human rights, the Tiananmen Square massacre brought to light the ongoing abuses committed by the Chinese government alongside the modernization process initiated under Deng Xiaoping. This revelation resonated in the United States, where both Congress and Chinese students employed a strong human rights rhetoric that China had previously been largely exempt from. This rhetoric and the efforts to promote human rights in China would eventually intersect with trade and commercial interests, further complicating Washington's response to Beijing.

1.4 Beyond the Pelosi Bill: Toward the 1992 Chinese Student Protection Act

The debate surrounding the legal status of Chinese students in the United States raised new concerns that had the potential to complicate U.S. foreign policy formulation and the broader

[276] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law*, July 20, 1989, p.59.

bilateral relationship. These concerns emerged during the legislative debate over H.R. 2712 and continued to evolve beyond the vote on the presidential veto. William Quinn, a staffer for Representative Pelosi, recalled his return to New Hampshire during the 1989 congressional summer recess. Following the bill's introduction at the end of June, Quinn was contacted by Chinese students at Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH. After meeting with approximately ten students in the basement of Collis Hall, where they inquired about how they could support the bill's lobbying efforts, Quinn subsequently received a phone call from the same students. They reported that their families in Beijing had been visited and questioned about their purported subversive activities, specifically their meeting with Quinn. "I was a 26-year-old nobody who worked with Nancy Pelosi, and I had the Chinese government visiting with the families of some of the kids I had met with," Quinn said. "And that was really an eye-opener for me. The government had taken notice of what we were doing in Washington and had sent minders out to the families to tell the kids to knock it off and stop their activities."[277]

In a matter of weeks, two alarming phenomena came to the forefront, which had a lasting impact on discussions related to China. Firstly, activities of surveillance and intimidation perpetrated by the Chinese Embassy through its consulates nationwide in the United States were first denounced in Congress by representatives of the IFCSS and by congress members who had increasingly begun to work along with them. On July 20, just over a month after the massacre, Barbara Boxer (D-CA) shed light on "the dark side to the wonders of the video age." The events in Tiananmen had undoubtedly revealed the unprecedented bond between technology and human rights.[278] Although crackdowns on student protests and major violations of individual rights had been a common practice in China, the extended media coverage of the June 1989's events exposed the American public to those brutalities as never before.[279] Media – with television playing the preeminent role – had "a positive effect in that it enabled [Americans] to share the inspiring fears of the Chinese students and immunized [them] against subsequent lies of Chinese rulers."[280] However, Boxer warned how modern technology was also favoring the illegal activities of Chinese authorities in their effort to tape and identify the students involved in pro-democracy activities against the PRC government across American

[277] Ibid. Interview with William Quinn, June 2023.
[278] Boxer here referred to the importance of the media in showing the atrocities going on in China which helped raising the concern of the American public and politicians. But a further example is the skillful use of computer-mediated communication by Chinese students in the U.S.
[279] Beside the media coverage, the American public was then outraged by the scale of the crackdown, the age of the protesters, and the claims they were making on shared ideals and values.
[280] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law*, July 20, 1989, p.55.

university campuses. "Whether we like it or not," the congresswoman argued, "the struggle for democracy in China has been taken to our shores, and we must respond."[281] These charges were confirmed by IFCSS representative Zhao Haiching who testified in Congress reporting on the pressure exercised by the Chinese consulates on those students who were marginally involved in pro-democracy activities turning them into all effects spies against the movement leaders. According to Zhao's testimony, a large number of students had stepped back from pro-democracy advocacy in the United States, fearing repercussions against them and their families back home. Rumors that some of them were collaborating with the embassy instilled widespread distrust among the students, compromising the efficacy of their claims against the PRC government.

Secondly, harassment of dissidents and ethnic minorities – including Chinese students in the United States – through an increasingly frequent delay and non-delivery of letters and packages was increasingly reported. According to a survey conducted by the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, one-third of the letters and parcels, both incoming and outgoing, had not gotten through the Chinese borders in the year 1989.[282] On November 9, 1989, when the mail interruption issue was debated in Congress, Li Lu appeared before the Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services. He was one of the leaders of the protests in Tiananmen, who had escaped China soon after the crackdown and was now on the PRC's *21 Most-Wanted List.* Lu denounced the harassment of his colleagues in the United States whose mail and letters had been seized in recent months. The use of American postal service had been used by the Chinese Embassy to threaten Chinese students in the U.S. who had been delivered envelopes containing AK-47 machine gun bullets – the same type of bullets used by the People's Liberation Army against the protesters in Beijing.[283]

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[281] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law*, July 20, 1989, p.59.
[282] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, *Mail Interruption Hearing before the Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services*, 101st Congress, 1st Session, November 9, 1989, p.4.
[283] "Harassment has increased since Tiananmen Square. Many students have been frightened and intimidated to prevent them from participating in demonstrations in the U.S. In August, students in Northwestern University received a letter containing an AK-47 machine gun bullet. I should say, I have seen the bullet and the envelope, and it is the same type of bullet which the Army used in Tiananmen Square. The students believe that the bullet was sent by a Chinese consulate, because this student, as I know, is the leader in the Northwest Students' Union, which is separate from the official Students' Union there, and he used to be in prison for five years in China. Other examples, include the students in Stanford, in Yale, in Notre Dame and others who have had their letters and mail confiscated," declared Li Lu at hearing. Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services*, November 9, 1989, p.31.

The mail disruption case is emblematic for at least two reasons. First, the November hearing was called to discuss the Chinese and Soviet charges of mail disruption as an attempt to harass ethnic minorities and dissidents. However, while it was ascertained that "the number of complaints received concerning Soviet practices has declined dramatically," the engagement by Chinese authorities in disrupting the regular flow of international mail had become increasingly alarming.[284] The comparison between the Soviets and the Chinese served many in Congress who advocated for a firm response to what had happened in Tiananmen. Sanctions would not have thwarted the two-decade efforts to bring Beijing and Washington closer together as the Bush Administration contented. They would have instead signaled that Washington was not willing to make any concession on individual rights. Similar to its posture towards Moscow, the U.S. would have based its external relations on severe scrutiny of foreign countries' human rights safeguards. Second, the mail interruption debate represents a clear example of the way in which the Tiananmen massacre and the following debate over China resulted in a recurrent exercise of widening the human rights basket. Discussing the right to communicate through international postal service without governmental obtrusion, Benjamin Gilman (R-NY) argued that "the government of the People's Republic of China is violating both the human rights of its citizens and the basic premise of international postal law."[285]

As the 1990s began, encounters with Chinese student leaders on Capitol Hill became a routine occurrence. During a testimony before the Joint Economic Committee, Zhao revealed that he had obtained secret documents allegedly associated with the Chinese government. According to a *Washington Post* article from May 1990, these documents contained records of government meetings in Beijing and were obtained from sources in Canada. This additional information, combined with the documents made available by Xu Lin, a Chinese diplomat who had defected in early 1990 while serving at the Chinese Embassy in Washington, shed light on the extent of Chinese authorities' surveillance and harassment of Chinese students studying overseas. The documents revealed that Chinese officials had categorized Chinese students studying abroad into five groups, "ranging from those who are loyal to the party to those who are the *reactionary core elements who actively organize and plan anti-government activities.*"[286] The pro-democracy leaders enrolled at American universities were referred as *ringleaders*, the same term used during the war against Japan to label the traitors. According

[284] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services*, November 9, 1989, p.1.
[285] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services*, November 9, 1989, p.4.
[286] David Hoffman and Lena H. Sun, "Chinese Strategy Targets Exchange Students," *The Washington Post*, May 11, 1990.

to the article, which was cited in Congress by Senator Paul Sarbanes (D-MD), Chinese authorities, through covert networks operating within American universities, had targeted around a hundred students deemed to be the most active against China. The Chinese Embassy had established "a campaign to keep files on them, revoke passports, terminate government stipends, restrict contact with family members, fire them from jobs back home and revoke their special student status."[287]

Xu Lin's revelations shed light on a disturbing pattern of behavior by Chinese authorities travelling to the United States. While they claimed to the U.S. State Department – in charge of issuing certain diplomatic visas – that their visits to American university campuses were to maintain contact with Chinese students, the true purpose, as Xu Lin exposed, was quite different. Chinese officials were using these visits as opportunities to recruit informants and intimidate pro-democracy activists among the Chinese student population.[288] Zhao also revealed that this spying and sabotage machinery extended beyond targeting students. It had also allegedly reached members of Congress. According to the IFCSS spokesperson on Capitol Hill, the Chinese Embassy had systematically organized a network in the United States, presumably consisting of individuals loyal to the Chinese government, to lobby Congress on various issues related to Sino-U.S. relations. These activities not only violated the rights of Chinese students but also had implications for the functioning of democratic activities in Washington and across the United States.[289]

On June 19, 1990, Xu Lin appeared before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations of the House of Representatives. It was the third time since the Nixon's normalization that Congress held a hearing regarding harassment of Chinese nationals in the United States, but this phenomenon seemed to have significantly increased following June 1989.[290] In his testimony, the former embassy official, who had been granted political asylum in the U.S., explained in detail the logic and *modus operandi* behind student harassment practices. Since students had gathered in Chicago in July 1989 to attend the First Congress of

[287] Ibid. Hoffman and Sun, *The Washington Post*, May 11, 1990.
[288] Ibid. Hoffman and Sun, *The Washington Post*, May 11, 1990.
[289] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.63.
[290] According to Representative Gus Yatron (D-PA), the previous two hearings had been held in 1983 and in 1988. See U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Alleged Intimidation and Harassment of Chinese Citizens in The United States Hearing before the Subcommittees*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, June 19, 1990.

the IFCSS (as discussed further in Part Two of this chapter), Chinese authorities in the United States were instructed to sabotage their pro-democracy activities. After the massacre, students in Chicago had openly broken ties with the PRC Department of Education by giving up on their membership in the Union of Friendship Associations of Chinese Students and Scholars in America, formally controlled by the PRC Embassy. They had come together under a new independent organization, elected their board of representatives through American democracy-inspired procedures, and decided on the future course of their actions while in the United States. Growing a sense of frustration towards those who were in all respects regarded as enemies, not only the Chinese officials instructed young students to monitor their colleagues' activities, playing *de facto* as spies. They also actively sought to taint the elections' results, voting procedures, and discussions at national and local meetings. Concerns about potential affiliations with the Communist Party among Chinese student leaders in the United States were present even during the early stages of the IFCSS. Ciping Huang, who participated in organizing the Chicago conference, recalled that rumors circulated among the students, suggesting that at least one candidate from each of the two competing pairs for the IFCSS presidency and vice presidency might have had connections to the Chinese Communist Party. Ultimately, the pair that emerged victorious faced suspicions regarding the vice-presidential candidate, whereas the defeated pair had their presidential candidate under scrutiny.[291]

Back in China, the Department of Education had in the meantime set up a special archive to collect records regarding those students who had become actively involved in overseas anti-PRC activities. Referring to private conversations at the embassy, Xu Lin told Congress that according to the Chinese authorities "the work on the exchange students must be viewed in terms of international struggle, diplomatic struggle, and political struggle" and that "the Department of Education has now become the Political Department of the Chinese Embassy in the United States."[292] Despite the allegations against the PRC, State Department officials present at the June hearing exhibited a degree of hesitation, which provoked frustration among congressional members. In particular, Stephen Solarz, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, engaged in a contentious exchange with Kent Wiedemann, Director of the State Department Office of Chinese and Mongolian Affairs. Wiedemann, who failed to provide substantial evidence to support his position, argued that some of the students' claims were "not

[291] Interview with Ciping Huang, IFCSS Leader, March 25, 2023.
[292] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Alleged Intimidation and Harassment of Chinese Citizens in the United States Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations, and on Asian and Pacific Affairs*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, June 19, 1990, p.36.

credible" and that the reported activities by the PRC did not constitute a "consistent pattern of harassment and intimidation." Conversely, Solarz deemed the State Department's stance "shocking and utterly unrelated to the body of evidence."[293]

The charges against the PRC government proved that a congressional effort was still needed, and that China was not a safe place for those who had spoken against the PRC government. As Senator Kennedy assured in the early months of 1990, Congress maintained a vigilant oversight of the Administration's initiatives. Numerous individuals, including those within the congressional body and within media circles, expressed disappointment that, as of March 1990, the commitments made by the White House had yet to materialize into an official Executive Order. An article published by *The Washington Post* on April 5, 1990, with the headline "Bush Never Issued Executive Order Protecting Chinese Students in the United States," highlighted this issue. It was reported that President Bush had relied solely on a directive from the attorney general, which had led to confusion and uncertainty among Chinese students about their legal status. In the months following the congressional failure to override Bush's veto, there was a perception that the White House was hesitant to enact measures promised to have the same efficacy – if not greater – of those contained in the Pelosi Bill.[294] Although the president had promised an Executive Order on several occasions, he had not followed through. To the point that the White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater was forced to clarify that although Bush had used that term, "in fact what he meant was the instructions to the Justice Department," concluding that the Executive Order was not the right tool to address the students' concern.[295]

This rhetorical back-and-forth caused concern among the students' representatives who denounced, among many others, the growing issues related to those Chinese students who had traveled abroad for research purposes – as requested by the program they were affiliated with

[293] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations, and on Asian and Pacific Affairs*, June 19, 1990, p.19.
[294] The implementation of the president's administrative alternative to the Pelosi Bill faced both substantive and procedural problems of which the INS was held responsible. A letter written by Burton Wides, Counsel to the IFCSS, invoking for a prompt intervention of the White House, read: "INS' handling of these issues has combined misinterpretation and apparent indifference to effective implementation of the program. The net affect has been to severely undermine protection for the students, to unnecessarily disrupt their academic programs, and to limit the availability of the administrative relief that the president assured the Congress would be even more effective than it has created, are hardly consistent with the pledges made to the Senate about the Administration's commitment to fully protect the interest of the students." Letter to C. Boyden Gray, Counsel to the President, from Burton V. Wides, Counsel to the IFCSS, March 21, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Stephen Rademaker Files, China.
[295] David Hoffman, "Bush Never Issued Executive Order Protecting Chinese Students in U.S.," *The Washington Post*, April 5, 1990.

– and encountered difficulties returning to the U.S. In a letter addressed to the Immigration and Naturalization Service Commissioner Gene McNary, the IFCSS counsels Burton Wides and Eleanor Pelta, who were associated with the Arent, Fox, Kintner, Plotkin & Kahn law firm, expressed their concerns. They pointed out the inefficiencies, contradictions, and challenges in implementing the administrative measures designed to protect the students, which, in practice, were falling short. Specifically, the lawyers warned McNary that the results of the president's administrative program were contingent on the Chinese government's actions. As an example, if certain students in the U.S. were denied passport renewals, and if the American authorities did not extend the passport waiver, Chinese nationals in the U.S. would be excluded from the benefits of the president's measures, as the application of those measures required a valid passport.[296] Due to all these difficulties, Nancy Pelosi and her staff were resolute in holding the Administration accountable, ensuring that it followed through on its promises. They actively lobbied the White House to guarantee that the commitments made to protect Chinese students in the United States were honored.[297] Pelosi effortlessly questioned the legal validity of the Administration's measures and urged the president to have an Executive Order or an Administrative Directive published in the Federal Register, as required by the Administration Procedures Act states.[298] Together with Senator Alan Dixon (D-IL), Pelosi warned that she would work to reintroduce her bill if the Administration had not moved forward. Criticisms also came from the Republicans, with William Armstrong (R-CO) urging the Administration to move boldly. [299]

At last, on April 11, 1990, almost a year after the Tiananmen Square massacre and following a draining foreign policy arm-wrestling with the Congress, the Administration enacted the promised Executive Order. It introduced two main provisions. Firstly, the extension of the deferral of enforced departure for Chinese nationals initially set to expire on June 5, 1990, was now extended until January 1, 1994. Secondly, it included measures to alleviate the problems caused by the Chinese government's revocation of passports belonging to Chinese

[296] Letter to Gene McNary, INS Commissioner from Burton Wides and Eleanor Pelta of the Arent, Fox, Kintner, Plotkin & Kahn on the "Implementation of the Executive Order on Nationals from the People's Republic of China," March 20, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Records Management, China.
[297] Ibid. Interview with William Quinn, June 2023.
[298] Letter from Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi to President Bush, March 13, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Records Management, China.
[299] David Hoffman, "Student's Bill May Be Revived. Lawmakers Seeking Safety for Chinese," *The Washington Post*, April 6, 1990.

nationals in the United States.[300] In anticipation of the Executive Order, President Bush also addressed claims that his November 30 directive did not have the same legal effect as an Executive Order and did not offer the same level of protection to Chinese nationals. The Executive Order, the president reiterated, aimed to clarify and strengthen these protections, addressing concerns raised during the legislative process and ensuring that Chinese nationals in the United States received the necessary legal safeguards.[301] Once again, it seemed that the effort put in place by bot the Congress and pressure groups such as the IFCSS had pushed the actions of the Administration beyond the president's will, disrupting the White House hegemony of China policy-making. "The president's April 11 Executive Order should give us some breathing room on the question of Chinese nationals in the United States," commented NCS Deputy Legal Adviser Stephen Rademaker in a memorandum to Brent Scowcroft.[302] However, students were still advancing doubts that, once enacted, the new measures would not put an end to the troubles encountered so far. Their lawyers lamented that the travel document issued by the INS to the students who had their passports expired would not be widely accepted by foreign governments. They were therefore lobbying the Administration to accord refugee status to the students. This status would offer various benefits, including permanent residence in the U.S. However, it would also make the students eligible for certain welfare and social service benefits, which could have financial implications for the federal government. "These facts," the NSC official claimed, "gave rise to suspicions that the Chinese are trying to use the travel document issue to upgrade their legal status and put themselves on the road to U.S. citizenship."[303] Again, Chinese students' concerns prompted Congress to take action when it felt that the Administration was being hesitant.

Introduced in the Senate on June 4, 1991, by Slade Gorton (R-WA), the *Chinese Students Protection Act* sought to give Chinese nationals covered by President Bush's measures the opportunity to seek permanent residency in the United States, releasing them from their current immigration limbo. The bill applied to approximately 80,000 Chinese who had lived continuously in the U.S. since April 11, 1990 – the date of the president's Executive Order –

[300] Executive Order: Policy Implementation with Respect to Nationals of the People's Republic of China, April 11, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Students – Documents.
[301] Statement by the President, April 6, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Students – Documents.
[302] Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft from Stephen Rademaker on the Impact of the President's April 11 Executive Order Concerning Chinese Nationals, April 17, 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas Paal Files, China – U.S. March – April – 1990.
[303] Ibid. Memorandum from Stephen Rademaker, April 17, 1990.

and who had not returned to China for longer than 90 days. The final draft of the legislation was reached following a yearlong negotiation at the end of which "all objections have been met due to an extraordinary degree of bipartisan cooperation to move forward on this measure," Senator Gorton argued.[304] Differing from the situation three years earlier with the Pelosi Bill, on October 9, 1992, President Bush signed the legislation into law.



Figure 8. "Remarks by President Bush at General Dynamics Fort Worth Division," September 2, 1992. Photo credit: GDFW This Week, vol.6, no.34.

Several plausible explanations exist for the relatively smooth legislative journey of Gorton's bill when compared to H.R. 2712. One is probably related to the upcoming presidential elections and the fact that the American public had shown extensive emotional participation in the Chinese students' protection effort. Another plausible rationale may be that the president had become disenchanted with the Chinese leadership's unfulfilled pledges regarding improvements in human rights practices, and he was unwilling to jeopardize his image with another unpopular decision. This argument gains support from the president's choice to sell American F-16 war aircraft to Taiwan in September 1992, despite Beijing's objections.[305] In a November 1999 interview, Brent Scowcroft described the sale of F-16s to Taiwan as a strategic maneuver to secure Texas's support in the 1992 presidential election as the southern state was majorly involved in the production of these aircraft. Scowcroft

[304] "Chinese Student Protection Act," *Congressional Records*, 102nd Congress, May 21, 1992.
[305] James Mann, "President to Sell F-16s to Taiwan, Officials Say," *The Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1992.

explained, "It happened because Texas appeared critical to the President's re-election. Keeping the F-16 plant open in Texas was a major step in putting Texas in the Republican camp." He further explained that the decision was communicated to the PRC government with minimal advance notice, following the finalization of the sale. "We justified it solely on the grounds that – given the attitude of candidate Clinton toward the Chinese as expressed in campaign speeches – we and the Chinese would be better off with President Bush still in the White House than with no F-16 sale, but President Clinton in the White House. We told the Chinese that."[306]

Additionally, according to Lei Zheng, "while the hyper-visible human rights discourse facilitated the passage of the protection act, it is important to recognize how an economic discourse favoring the deserving and desirable immigrants who were deemed beneficial to the United States also undergirded its passage."[307] Not only students were presented in Congress as the victims of the brutal human rights denial perpetrated by their government. They started to be seen as a resource for American society and economy. As Gorton argued introducing his bill, "if the students elect to remain in the United States, we will be the better for it. They are superbly educated, motivated and ready to work for this Nation. They possess a keen understanding of the American dream. These students will not be taking jobs from Americans, they will be creating new jobs, spawning new industries and contributing to American society."[308] As economic concerns took center stage in the relationship between Washington and Beijing, the human rights momentum seemed to give way to considerations of a different kind. Members of Congress increasingly framed the Chinese students' struggle as evidence of the allure of the American social and economic liberal paradigm. Along the same lines, an increasing number of students started to appreciate the financial benefits and professional opportunities that came with living in the United States. For instance, following the passage of the *Chinese Students Protection Act*, it seems that some IFCSS leaders began selling "immigration packages" for $200 each meant to provide their colleagues with bureaucratic support as they applied for permanent status.[309] This was a practice that caused major controversy and frustration within the Federation, signaling a watershed in the students' movement activity in the United States and in their commitment to cause of human rights.

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[306] Ibid. Interview with Brent Scowcroft, November 12, 1999, Miller Center.
[307] Lei Zheng, "The Chinese Protection Act of 1992. Student Immigration and the Transpacific Neoliberal Model Minority," *Journal of Asian American Studies*, vol.24, no.3 (October 2021): pp.444.
[308] "Implementation Date of The Chinese Student Protection Act," *Congressional Records*, 103rd Congress, July 01, 1993.
[309] Ibid. Interview with Ciping Huang, March 25, 2023.

Part 2

1.5 Chinese Students *Habitualizing* to Democracy: From University Campus to the Nation

On September 10, 1989, an op-ed penned by renowned American playwright Arthur Miller was published in the New York Times. In his article, Miller recounted his personal experience as the first foreign theatrical director in the People's Republic of China back in 1983. Despite initial fears, he highlighted the unexpected positive reception of his play *Death of a Salesman* by the Chinese audience.[310] This experience led Miller to reflect on the Chinese people's ability to preserve their cultural traditions while simultaneously embracing and appreciating foreign ideas and trends, a phenomenon particularly notable among China's younger generations. The op-ed, titled *Death in Tiananmen*, captured the prevailing American perception of their country as a torchbearer of democratic values and a messianic force toward China and elsewhere. According to Miller, America had become a symbolic "light-bearer" to the Chinese people. The gathering of Chinese students in the United States following the Tiananmen repression reflected "their confidence in America's support of the libertarian spirit that our nation has helped to engender in China and its stubbornly dedicated younger generation," wrote Miller.[311] No one like the Chinese students and scholars in the United States stood out as a prime embodiment of that quintessential spirit, becoming the focal point of the American people's longstanding mission to educate and influence others with their vision of the world.[312] They were seen as both deserving protection and, simultaneously, viewed as a potential vehicle to disseminate American models and values back to their home country, China.

Most students held a pragmatic perspective on the achievable reforms within their country. Despite acknowledging the distinctiveness of their homeland's circumstances, they maintained a belief in the potential contribution of certain aspects and values inherent in the American system towards the progress of their country. "There, democracy is a dream, but here it is a

[310] See Ou Rong and Qian Zhaoming. "'Death of a Salesman' in Beijing Revisited," *The Arthur Miller Journal*, vol.8, no.2 (Fall 2013): pp.57–76.
[311] Arthur Miller, "Death of Tiananmen," *The New York Times*, September 10, 1989.
[312] Here the reference is especially to the American missionaries' expeditions in China and Southeast Asia. See among others David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); John R. Haddad, *Cultures Colliding: American Missionaries, Chinese Resistance, and the Rise of Modern Institutions in China* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2023); John K. Fairbank, *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1974).

procedure. There is no way you can copy this system back to China. What is important is that the values you learn become part of yourself. This is crucial over the long term because institutions can always be destroyed. What are we doing is trying to learn and educate ourselves about democracy. We are trying to *habitualize* it, internalize its norms, so that it is natural to argue, to vote, to set up branches to oversee the decisions made," argued a Chinese graduate student at Stanford University.[313] Amidst the context of the 1989 debate surrounding the Pelosi Bill, an influential – yet often overlooked by historians – pressure group within Washington's China policymaking landscape came to the forefront: the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars (IFCSS). This Federation consolidated the efforts of Chinese student groups across American university campuses, which had begun mobilizing in response to the protests in China during the spring of 1989. The following section examines the dynamics through which Chinese students in the United States successfully established a well-organized and effective organization, leveraging innovative lobbying tools such as the Internet, while ultimately garnering significant support from both Capitol Hill and the American public. By pinpointing key locations on a virtual map of the United States, this analysis reveals how the students convened at a three-day conference in Chicago, leading to the formation of an influential lobbying group in Washington that played a critical role in shaping the platforms of opposition to the Bush Administration's China policy, starting from a momentous gathering in Boston.

Historiographically, , the focus on Chinese students' lobbying activity in the United States at the time of the suppression of the demonstrations, along with their congressional supporters, echoes the recent scholarly interest – exemplified by researchers like Matthew Shannon and Martin Klimke – in the impact of student movements on foreign relations.[314] Shannon's contribution explores the intersection of education and international relations, particularly examining how U.S.-Iranian educational exchanges during the Cold War influenced broader geopolitical dynamics. In contrast, Klimke's work sheds light on the transnational linkages between student protest movements in West Germany and the United States during the 1960s, defining their contribution to a global wave of activism that challenged prevailing political and social structures. This study also builds on the work of Jia Gao, whose monograph, *Chinese*

[313] Wendie Schneider, "Chinese Intellectuals Here Rethinking Concept of Authority," *The Stanford Daily*, November 16, 1989.
[314] See Matthew K. Shannon, *Losing Hearts and Minds: American-Iranian Relations and International Education During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017). See also Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Activism of a Different Kind, constitutes the only comprehensive examination of the Chinese student movement abroad.[315] Gao's analysis, which focuses on the efforts and strategies of Chinese students in Australia to extend their residency, explores the formation of a global student network. Within this context, one chapter of his work is devoted to Chinese students in the United States, a topic that this research aims to further explore and elaborate upon.

Since the onset of pro-democracy and anti-corruption remonstrations in China, Chinese students residing in the United States had vigilantly monitored the unfolding events, attempting to extend support to their compatriots back home from afar. Across American university campuses, Chinese student associations – traditionally conceived as social entities aimed at providing assistance to incoming students from China as they acclimate to their new environment in the United States, while also organizing cultural, recreational, and athletic activities – underwent a rapid transformation, getting increasingly involved in the events occurring in their home country. "Most of us are physics or chemistry students," claimed Shangyou Nie, a graduate student in geophysics at the University of Chicago, in the fall of 1989. "Most of us have no political ambitions. There was just a feeling that hit me and others – immediately – that we had to do something. We couldn't just sit back and watch what was going on." As their engagement abroad intensified, Nie remarked that, "for some of us, it became a full-time job."[316]

Prior to the June massacre, students generally exhibited support for the PRC government and the reform program implemented in the early 1980s. Discussion groups existed among students at prominent campuses such as Stanford, Berkeley, Harvard, and Yale, although they were not inherently anti-government in nature. Often, students, influenced by the assertive stance of their American counterparts in expressing their opinions and challenging authority, voiced their dissent against government policies. However, they consistently tried to ensure that their message was conveyed in a manner that was not perceived as disrespectful or, worse, antagonistic towards the government. "Coming here we realize there are other options than what we have now. Before, we were trying to help the government to overcome its problems, but now we realize the government cannot do what we want it to," argued Zhou Xueguang, a Stanford graduate student, in November 1989. "In China a very bad system arises out of an

[315] Jia Gao, *Chinese Activism of a Different Kind. The Chinese Students' Campaign to Stay in Australia* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013).
[316] -, "Tiananmen Square Brings New Roles for Chinese Student," *The University of Chicago Magazine*, vol.82, no.1 (Fall 1989).

optimistic view [of the people within the leadership]. In the United States you have a very cynical view, and, generally speaking, I prefer this. I think it is a more realistic view of human nature."[317]

As protests burgeoned in China and the PRC government escalated its hostility, culminating in the declaration of martial law on May 19, 1989, "Chinese students and scholars in the United States quickly organized to address the most pressing needs of the democracy movement — money and information." Initiating a significant fundraising campaign, they raised "tens of thousands of dollars by the time of the June massacre" dispatching them to demonstrators in China, "along with tents and garbage bags for the students living in the square."[318] From Boston to San Francisco, Chinese students and scholars rallied in the streets, often outside of Chinese consulates in the United States, to protest against the government in Beijing and make their voice be heard from afar in support of the demonstrations back in China. "I didn't care about my research or anything. The students at Tiananmen were willing to risk their lives," argued Han Zi, a Stanford graduate student. "Here, we did whatever we could to help. Money, time, brains — anything we could contribute we did."[319] According to the state-run *Xinhua News Agency*, by the spring of 1989, the Chinese government had designated both the Boston area and the San Francisco Bay as "disaster areas." This classification was prompted by the escalating activism of Chinese students enrolled at major American universities such as Harvard, Stanford, and UC Berkeley. Their increasing expression of discontent towards the leadership of the PRC was viewed as potentially destabilizing by the authorities.[320]

University student-run newspapers from that period offer valuable insights into the activism of the time. A series of articles authored by Wendie Schneider in the fall of 1989 for *The Stanford Daily* depicts the campus of the Northern California area as one of the most active among universities in the United States. Notably, Liu Yong Chuan, the first president of the IFCSS, was enrolled at Stanford as a graduate student. In the aftermath of the crackdown in Beijing, Chinese students at Stanford University achieved notable success in fundraising endeavors aimed at supporting the victims of the massacre. The *June Fourth Foundation*, established as a non-profit organization to assist victims of the massacre and to promote pro-

[317] Ibid. Schneider, *The Stanford Daily*, November 16, 1989.
[318] Wendie Schneider, "Chinese at Stanford Continue Fight for Democracy from Afar," *The Stanford Daily*, November 14, 1989.
[319] Ibid. Schneider, *The Stanford Daily*, November 14, 1989.
[320] Wendie Schneider, "Stanford Plays Central Role in Chinese Student Movement," *The Stanford Daily*, November 15, 1989.

democracy educational activities, "raised $180,000 — more than any other university in the nation."[321] According to Douglas Pan, the graduate student overseeing the organization, this achievement was largely attributed to the generous support from the Silicon Valley community, particularly from engineers hailing from Hong Kong and Taiwan who demonstrated a willingness to contribute. At Columbia University in New York Chinese students established the *Foundation of Chinese Students for Democracy* to provide financial assistance to the Autonomous Students Association of Universities in Beijing involved in the remonstration and to the families of the people killed during the Tiananmen crackdown, as well as purchasing printing, photocopying and communication equipment in the United States and sending them back to China to ease contact among them and with the student communities overseas.[322] Additionally, students set up the *China Resource Center*, "a nonpolitical clearinghouse of up-to-date information on China [providing] a library of Chinese and American periodicals, as well as a bulletin board of information and announcements for Chinese students."[323]

According to *The Harvard Crimson*, the student-run newspaper at Harvard University, Chinese students at Harvard and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) worked together to establish the so-called *May Fourth Foundation*. Similar to their colleagues at Columbia, it aimed to raise funds to purchase word processors and fax machines to send back to students in China in order to facilitate the exchange of information and communication among students within China and abroad. Additionally, students from the Boston area founded the *China Information Center* with the objective of collecting and disseminating information about the pro-democracy movement.[324] Similar initiatives included the launch in the fall of 1989 of *The Voice of June Fourth*, a radio program initiated by Chinese students at the University of Chicago to broadcast information regarding the ongoing repression of the pro-democracy movement in China. Spearheaded by Sanyuan Li, a graduate student in social sciences, and supported by colleagues Hui Yun Wang, who served as news director, and Gary Gu, the program broadcasted daily hour-long segments via shortwave transmitters, reaching audiences in China (see photo below). Li emphasized to *The University of Chicago Magazine* that the program's operation by Chinese students was "very encouraging to the people who hear us. I think it gives us greater credibility. We can talk directly to the feelings of the people

[321] Ibid. Schneider, *The Stanford Daily*, November 15, 1989.
[322] Letter, June 9, 1989, Columbia University Chinese Students Association, Human Rights Watch, Box 213.f.11.
[323] David T. Gordon, "Chinese Students Set Up Resource Center," *Columbia Spectator*, June 14, 1989.
[324] Matthew M. Hoffman, "Pushing for Change Across the Ocean – Chinese Students at Harvard," *The Harvard Crimson*, July 14, 1989.

there and remove the sense of isolation they must be feeling." [325] However, the initiative was both ambitious and precarious, requiring a monthly budget of approximately $10,000, primarily sustained by donations from American Chinese communities in the United States. Moreover, it carried inherent risks, as both the students in Chicago and their families back in China faced threats and intimidation linked to their radio activities.

As mentioned in the previous part of this chapter, due to their active involvement in pro-democracy activities in the United States and their open opposition to the actions of the Chinese government against demonstrators back in China, many students in the U.S. reported to have been targeted and harassed by the Chinese Embassy in the United States, which was formally responsible for them and their stay abroad.[326] Not only were the students subjected to this harassment campaign on U.S. territory, but their families residing in China also fell victim to governmental reprisals. "This summer my family called me and said, 'You feel free to speak out over there, but here we feel the pressure.' Then I learned that the government has circulated a blacklist of active students in the U.S.," said a Chinese graduate student at Stanford University. "Since then, I have stayed away from the media. You don't know how far the persecution will go. Your relatives may be denied jobs, condemned by the government, forbidden to go to school and have their homes searched by the police." [327] Following the first emotional wave that had prompted Chinese students to get involved in overseas pro-democracy activities, many feared that their continued media exposure would lead to severe repercussions for them, their careers, and the wellbeing of their families in China. With time, students got increasingly skeptical of talking to the media as "people in China had been assembling clippings from American newspapers" to target and harass both students in the U.S. and their families back in China.[328]

However, going back to China was not an option and the majority of the students was eager to get involved into direct activity to support their peers who had opposed the CCP government in Beijing and elsewhere. "You cannot actually change China by having an organization abroad, but you can have an effect. What students in the U.S. can do is to form a group to support one side in China, and to look after their own interests in the U.S.," said another

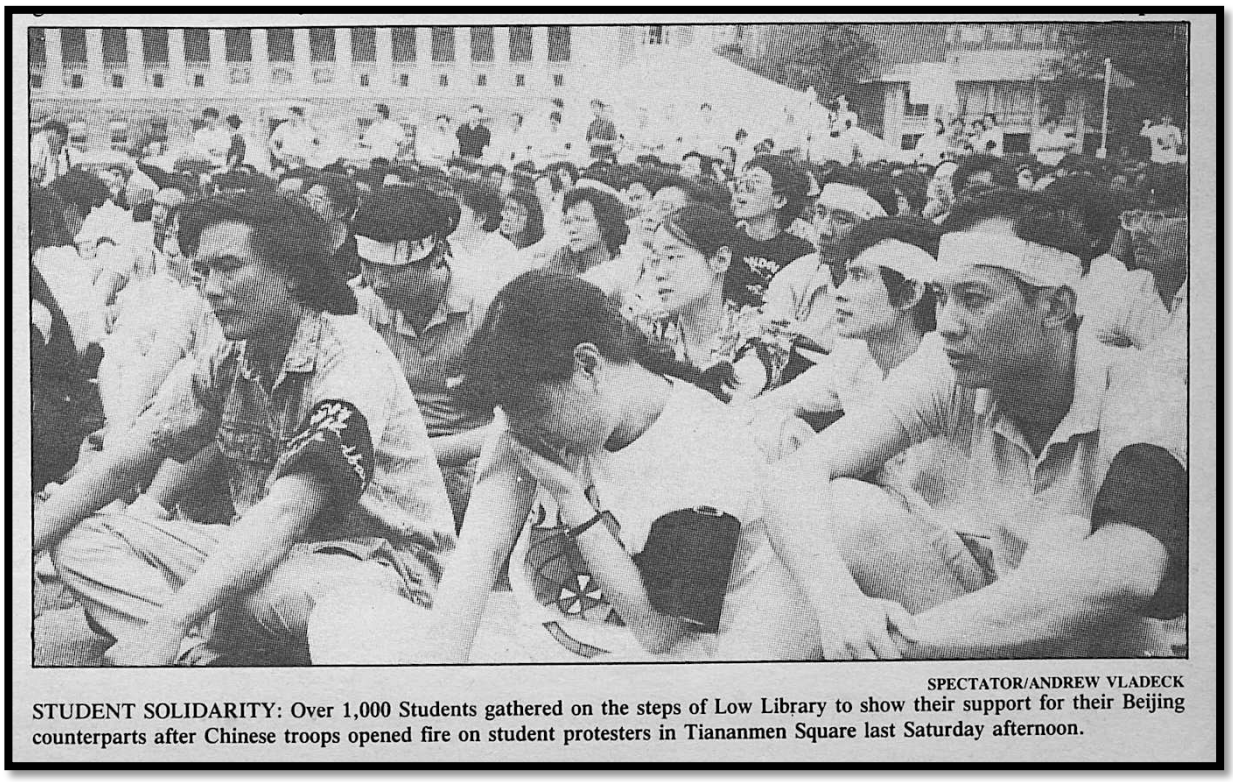
[325] -, "Changing Mind in China," *The University of Chicago Magazine*, vol.83, no.1 (October 1990).
[326] Steven Chin, "Students cut ties with Beijing," *San Francisco Examiner*, July 31, 1989.
[327] Wendie Schneider, "Chinese Students Fear Effects of U.S. Activism on Relatives," *The Stanford Daily*, November 16, 1989.
[328] Ibid. Schneider, *The Stanford Daily*, November 16, 1989.

student.[329] The suppression of pro-democracy remonstrations by PRC authorities and the incarceration of their peers prompted students and scholars in the United States to unite and establish a structured, nationwide organization with the objective of moving beyond campus-level remonstrations and protests, engaging in active participation in policy development regarding relations with Beijing, including advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill. As aptly noted by Wendie Schneider in her above-mentioned 1989 article series for the Stanford University student-run newspaper *The Stanford Daily*, "the summer marked a period of transition for the student movement in the United States." While the massacre and ongoing efforts to support dissidents in China remained prominent concerns, Chinese students in the United States had to reckon with the realization that their advocacy for political and social reforms could no longer be seen as a branch of a larger movement in their homeland. With the movement in China silenced and suppressed, they were compelled to chart their own course. "And the timetables of democratization had been lengthened from weeks and months to years."[330]



Figure 9. Photo credit: The University of Chicago Magazine, vol. 83, no. 1, October 1990, p.15.

[329] Ibid. Schneider, *The Stanford Daily*, November 16, 1989
[330] Ibid. Schneider, *The Stanford Daily*, November 14, 1989.



SPECTATOR/ANDREW VLADECK

STUDENT SOLIDARITY: Over 1,000 Students gathered on the steps of Low Library to show their support for their Beijing counterparts after Chinese troops opened fire on student protesters in Tiananmen Square last Saturday afternoon.

Figure 10. Photo credit: Columbia Spectator, vol. CXIII, no. 127, June 7, 1989, p.1.

1.6 Chicago: Building the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars

Formally established during a three-day conference held in Chicago at the end of July 1989, the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars (IFCSS) had ended its "political, organizational, and financial associations" with China by announcing its independence from the Chinese Education Consul.[331] In Chicago, the IFCSS emerged as an umbrella organization with the goal of coordinating the collective efforts of pro-democracy groups active on American campuses since the Tiananmen unrest. Its aim was to bring together and facilitate the efforts of over 40,000 students across more than 200 colleges and universities throughout the United States.[332] It was initially established with an ambitious agenda. This included initiatives such as setting up a radio station situated off the coast of China, launching a newspaper catering to the Chinese community in the U.S., advocating for more stringent international economic sanctions against China, endorsing a boycott of the Asian Olympic Games, and lobbying for a Nobel Peace Prize to be awarded to Kuo Tze Lin – the student group

[331] Ibid. Jia Gao, *Chinese Activism of a Different Kind*, p.85.
[332] The IFCSS referred to these numbers in various congressional hearings and press conferences in which they participated.

from Beijing that had organized and initiated the protest in May 1989.[333] In the meantime, the White House had closely tracked the students' pro-democracy activities and their efforts in providing sensitive news to their fellow colleagues back in China whose access to information had been limited by the PRC government.[334]

The students started officially attracting major media and congressional attention when gathering at the Student Union Building of the University of Chicago. The media provided an overall positive coverage of the three-day conference, praising the students' effort to experiment with democracy and its benefits. "Like traders in a stock exchange, hundreds of Chinese students shouted their opinions," commented *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.[335] "Exciting chaos marks Chicago dissident meeting," praised the *San Francisco Examiner*, reporting that "for the past three days, the cafeteria and hallways [of the university] were filled with heated debates" among the students.[336] *The Washington Post* even drew a parallel between the students in Chicago and the group of Chinese communists who, half a century earlier, had regrouped and strategized in the Yenan Mountains during the civil war after suffering initial defeats by the corrupt Nationalist regime. The article highlighted that while the early revolutionaries, headed by Mao Zedong, were inspired by Soviet-style Marxism and fought against the U.S.-supported forces of Chiang Kai-shek, the contemporary generation of "rebels," driven by democratic ideals, looked to the West, particularly the United States, for support and as a source of political inspiration.[337] In this instance, the rugged mountains of northern China, which once served as a refuge for dissidents, gave way to the amphitheaters and classrooms of American universities. The struggle of Chinese dissidents had now transitioned to the shores of the United States, following the brutal suppression they faced in Beijing and other major cities across China.

The conference opened on July 28, 1989, with a speech delivered by two delegates in both Chinese and English. They emphasized the longstanding pursuit of democracy by the Chinese people, particularly intellectuals, and highlighted the significance of the recent student demonstrations that had erupted in Beijing and other cities since April. These overseas Chinese

[333] Kevin Johnson, "Keeping dream alive for China," *USA Today*, July 28, 1989.
[334] Memorandum for the President from Sichan Siv on the Update of Chinese Students, July 5, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office Records Management, People's Republic of China (Red China).
[335] Huntly Collins, "Chinese students unite in U.S. for democracy," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 31, 1989.
[336] Steven Chin, "Chinese students learn about democracy," *San Francisco Examiner*, July 30, 1989.
[337] Marianne Yen, "Students in U.S. plan pro-democracy fight: Young Chinese convene in Chicago to continue movement begun at Beijing university," *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1989.

students and scholars had been mobilizing to address the crises in their homeland, advocating for freedom, democracy, and basic human rights. However, they lamented that this democratic movement had been brutally suppressed "by a group of gerontocrats located in the Zhongnanhai compound," leading to a grim assessment that the current conditions under "fascist" rule and dictatorship had extinguished the prospects for democracy in China. Given this bleak situation, the delegates argued, it was all the more imperative for Chinese students and scholars abroad to assume the responsibility of advancing the democratic cause in China. They stressed that to contribute effectively, they must first "learn and practice democracy" among themselves, embracing "mutual compromise, inclusion, tolerance, and unity." These remarks framed the central objectives of the conference in Chicago: to maintain focus on the atrocities committed against Chinese students and workers, to share the responsibility of promoting democracy, and to engage in the practice of democratic principles despite the inherent challenges.[338]



Figure 11. First Congress of Chinese Students in U.S., July 28, 1989.
Video frame credit: C-SPAN.

[338] First Congress of Chinese Students in U.S., July 28, 1989, C-SPAN, online at https://www.c-span.org/video/?8520-1/congress-chinese-students-us (last accessed May 2024).

There are three main features of the Chicago conference that emerged from the coverage of the event. First, as mentioned, the ways and means of this second act of the Chinese students' uprising – which followed the protests in the squares and streets of China's major cities – were clearly inspired by their experience in the United States. According to one of the organizers of the conference, Pei Minxin, a student of political science at Harvard University, the students' "revolution of ideas will not be achieved through armed struggle but through education of the masses. The weapons in this modern-day struggle will be the tools of communication: newspapers, shortwave radio, and a network of computers. The students aim to combat Chinese government propaganda by sending home information."[339] In order to work together toward this goal, in Chicago the students decided to organize by trying to replicate the U.S. government model. A president and a vice president in charge for one year were elected. They were Liu Yong Chuan, a graduate student in sociology at Stanford University, and Han Lian Chao, a law student at Yale University. In a spirit of fair play, Chen Xingyu, a graduate student in mechanical engineering at the University of Wisconsin and the opposing candidate for the presidency, welcomed the voting process as the first instance of free elections in China's 5,000-year history.[340] Furthermore, the U.S. territory was divided into eight districts based on a proportional principle considering the number of students and universities represented in a 16-member council similar to the Congress. These representatives were elected from a pool of 380 delegates chosen by their fellow students at their respective universities across the United States to represent them at the Chicago conference. Additionally, approximately 300 other students attended the meeting as informal observers. Joining them were Chinese dissidents, journalists, and other Chinese external delegates from West Germany, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, and Australia who also took part in the gathering.[341] Finally, the oversight of this representative body was entrusted to a supervisory committee consisting of five elected members. The intention was to create a board that, although less sophisticated than the U.S. Supreme Court, would possess a similar structure and function.

Second, the students were commended for their endeavor to embrace and experience democracy, even though it was acknowledged that their engagement was at an amateur level. Some of them even feared "the idea of a freewheeling democratic process in the hands of hundreds of inexperienced leaders."[342] However, the debates that took place during the three-

[339] Ibid. Yen, *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1989.
[340] William Sexton, "Chinese Students Confer in Chicago," *Newsday*, July 31, 1989.
[341] Rudolph Unger, "Chinese Students Gather," *The Chicago Tribune*, July 28, 1989.
[342] Ibid. Chin, *San Francisco Examiner*, July 30, 1989.

day conference were recognized as a fruitful exercise in democratic engagement. "They have arrived here for the sole purpose of forging coalition of students groups, but they will leave having learned pragmatic lessons in transforming idealism into an ongoing democratic movement," commented the *San Francisco Examiner*.[343] Not only were the Chinese students experiencing democracy and its challenges for the first time since their arrival in the United States, but they were also collaborating with one another. Prior to the conference, their organizational efforts had mainly been confined to the campus level. However, the Chicago gathering provided an opportunity for them to come together and work collectively on a broader scale. They were faced with the task of addressing and resolving common challenges that they shared, which ultimately led to discussions and debates on the nature and purpose of the organization itself. "We immediately got into a fight, realizing that democratic systems were not easy," Ciping Huang, one of the conference organizers and current IFCSS leader, claimed while recalling those days in Chicago.[344]

In addition to the organizational issues, such as whether the representative bodies should be structured purely based on numerical proportionality or consider the significance of the universities the students represented, a substantial portion of the debate in Chicago revolved around the movement's ultimate objectives and purposes. The discussion within the IFCSS in Chicago delved into two contrasting perspectives: one advocating for embracing Communism and seeking to reform the Chinese political system from within, and the other urging a more radical approach of overthrowing the PRC government while establishing democratic institutions modeled after the United States. These divergent viewpoints represented a fundamental question regarding the strategic direction and goals of the student revolution. As reported by *The Washington Post*, there were "deep divisions on whether the student movement should aim to overthrow the Chinese Communist Party or change it."[345] As the conference progressed, "delegates said the idea of abandoning communism in favor of a U.S.-style representative government is becoming more popular than the idea of reform."[346] Indeed, the crucial aspect that garnered considerable attention both among the majority of Chinese students and American observers during the Chicago gathering was not the final decision on whether to change or abandon Communism. Instead, what truly mattered was the unprecedented display of attitude shown by these Chinese nationals, precisely those regarded as the *best and brightest*

[343] Ibid. Chin, *San Francisco Examiner*, July 30, 1989.
[344] Ibid. Interview with Ciping Huang, March 25, 2023.
[345] Marianne Yen, "Chinese Abroad Debate Communism," *The Washington Post*, July 31, 1989.
[346] Ibid. Yen, *The Washington Post*, July 31, 1989.

by their own government. The conference served as a testament to their active engagement in advocating for political change and their willingness to challenge the established norms and authority, marking a significant and transformative moment in the movement for democracy within the Chinese student community. "Everyone has a tendency to obey, including myself. By participating in a democratic process, I'm learning to tolerate other opinions and differences," commented Chong Xiangqian, a delegate from Brown University.[347] After setting up a task force, in 1990, the IFCSS planned to establish a political entity called *Chinese Freedom and Democracy Party*, which should serve as an alternative to the Chinese Communist Party.[348]

Third, the attendance of prominent Chinese dissidents who had taken part in the Tiananmen protests and subsequently fled China garnered significant attention in American newspapers, generating numerous headlines. Their presence and speech at the conference testified to a continuum between the struggle for democracy in China and the students' rally in the United States. After escaping China via Hong Kong through what was named the "Operation Yellowbird" initiative led by the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, the dissidents successfully reached France, where they were granted permanent refugee status. In this context, France's role warrants a brief digression. Among the countries that condemned the violent repression against pro-democracy activists in China, France was particularly vocal. French authorities, along with associations and organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), immediately demonstrated their commitment to protecting Chinese dissidents. Key figures played active roles in the success of the covert operation, ensuring the students' protection and safety in France. French Deputy Consul General in Hong Kong, Jean-Pierre Montagne, in particular, followed the "Operation Yellowbird" phases from oversea as well as Paul Jean-Ortiz, Advisor to Edwige Avice, Minister Delegate to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Claude Martin, Asia Director of at the Quai d'Orsay, who, back in Paris, worked to facilitate the practices conferring refugee status to the Chinese students.[349]

Upon landing in the United States, Chinese dissidents stayed hidden for a few days arriving at the University of Chicago escorted by what they were believed to be FBI agents.[350]

[347] Ibid. Chin, *San Francisco Examiner*, July 30, 1989.
[348] Ibid. Interview with Ciping Huang, March 25, 2023.
[349] Laurence Badel, "Tiananmen, le Coup d'Arrêt," *L'Histoire*, no.459 – La Chine à la Conquête du Monde (May 2019).
[350] -, "Chinese students hide until conference," *The Washington Times*, July 28, 1989.

According to the White House records, there were eight dissidents in total who had been granted a visa to enter the United States.[351] They were Wu'er Kaixi, a former freshman at the Education Department of Beijing University and one of the best-known leaders of the protests in Tiananmen, accompanied by his girlfriend, Liu Yan;[352] Yan Jiaqi, former head of the Institute of Political Studies at the Chinese Academy of School and former consultant of CCP Office of Political Reform, accompanied by his wife, Gao Gao; Wan Rannan, Li Lu, Cao Wuqi, and Shen Ton, all involved in the Beijing uprising. Except for the two leaders' partners, all the others figured in the PRC Government's most-wanted list. According to *The New York Times*, the State Department had granted visas to the dissidents, fully aware that this decision would likely trigger protests from Chinese Government officials.[353] Having France granted them refugee status, the U.S. Administration had been hesitant in deciding what to do. The PRC leadership, represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had previously expressed its concerns to the French authorities regarding the protection of Chinese nationals. J. Stapleton Roy, a couple of weeks before the dissidents' arrival, suggested that Washington should "be open to receiving applications from Chinese dissidents in France who wish to temporarily come to the United States."[354] However, the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State believed that the U.S. had "any necessity or have an existing policy in place to grant permanent residency to those who are already safely residing as refugees in France."[355]

This hesitance did not go unnoticed, and it drew criticism from the American press. According to *The Washington Post*, this reversal of traditional priorities, where the French were showing concern for human rights in China while the Americans prioritized maintaining communication with the Communist leadership, was characterized as not only perverse but also self-defeating. "Washington needs to hear what the exiles have to say and to ignore official rhetoric," sentenced the article.[356] Additionally, Chinese authorities were already angered by the American Embassy in Beijing providing sanctuary to another prominent dissident, Fang

[351] Fax "List of Visitors," August 2, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Student Organization.
[352] Wuer Kaixi was a student at Beijing Normal University and one of the leaders of the student protest movement in Beijing in 1989 and gained significant media attention when, wearing pajamas, engaged in a heated exchange with Premier Li Peng. After he escaped from China, he eventually reached France, where he played a crucial role in leading an international underground network of Chinese dissidents engaged in the promotion of democracy and respect of basic human rights back in China.
[353] Fox Butterfield, "Chinese Opposition Leaders Arrive in U.S.," *The New York Times*, July 27, 1989.
[354] Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft from J. Stapleton Roy, July 12, 1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Douglas H. Paal Files, China-U.S. January-July 1989.
[355] Ibid. Memorandum by Stapleton Roy, July 12, 1989.
[356] Jim Hoagland, "We Should Be Listening to China's Exiles," *The Washington Post*, September 26, 1989.

Lizhi, who had offered shelter in the U.S. diplomatic headquarter since June 1989 (refer to Chapter Two).[357] But not everyone within the Administration agreed with Roy and those who preferred to move cautiously. "We will have just to take our hits from the Chinese," a State Department official said, "we will tell them there is something called freedom of speech in the United States."[358] Among others, the Chinese dissidents' presence in Chicago was welcomed by Hubert Romanowski, one of the leaders of Poland's Solidarity movement.[359] "The unexpected meeting of two communist country exiles at the University of Illinois at Chicago was an example of the past and the present – the continued struggles for democracy by Solidarity and by Chinese students wanting to unify their movement at the first Chinese Students' Congress," commented the *Chicago Sun-Times*.[360]

France ultimately became a central hub for the overseas Chinese pro-democracy movement. In September 1989, notable Chinese exiles, including Yan Jiaqi, Wu'er Kaixi, and Wan Runnan, established the Front for Democracy in China (FDC) in Paris. This political organization was founded with the overarching aims of "protecting basic human rights in China, develop a market economy system, uphold social justice."[361] Central to its mission was the advocacy for the dissolution of the Communist Party's monopoly on power and the promotion of a multiparty political system in China. In contrast to the IFCSS, which maintained a more focused agenda, the Front sought to broaden its membership, aiming to bring together diverse groups committed to democratic reform in China. The organization's influence extended to the United States, where it established a North American branch that convened its inaugural conference in November 1989. According to David Ai, a Taiwanese project manager at Hewlett-Packard who worked closely with Chinese students at California university campuses and served as one of the six members of the branch's board of directors, this conference represented "the first time all the different factions — students, scholars and

[357] During the crackdown, Fang Lizhi and his wife had sought shelter at the American Embassy in Beijing where they would eventually live for thirteen months until the Chinese government would let them leave the country to move to the U.S. See China's Top Dissident Gets Sanctuary in U.S. Embassy: Planes Sent to Pick Up Americans," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1989.
[358] Ibid. Butterfield, *The New York Times*, July 27, 1989.
[359] The emergence and activity of Poland's Solidarity Movement which opposed the Communist monopoly in the country is discussed in Robert Brier, *Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).
[360] John Gilardi, "Chinese students push for solidarity," *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 29, 1989.
[361] Wendie Schneider, "New Group Seeking Chinese Democracy," *The Stanford Daily*, November 13, 1989.

Communist Party members from China, Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and overseas Chinese like myself — sat down in one room to talk about the future of China."[362]

On the opening day of the congress in Chicago, Wu'er Kaixi and Yan Jiaqi took the stage to symbolically hand over the mantle of the student movement to the founders of the IFCSS. Addressing an audience of approximately 600 Chinese students, journalists, and supporters, Wu'er Kaixi delivered a compelling message, challenging the perception that the 1989 democracy movement had come to an end or that China's prospects for reform were bleak. He asserted, "Some people say the democracy movement of 1989 is over. Some say China is hopeless at the moment. I want to say that hope is just beginning."[363] Standing before a replica of the Goddess of Democracy – a statue originally erected in Tiananmen Square during the protests and subsequently destroyed in the crackdown – Wu'er conveyed his conviction that the movement would persevere, stating, "I believe we will be united, and we will erect a Goddess of Democracy [again] on Tiananmen Square someday." The replica, designed to evoke the Statue of Liberty, had become a potent symbol of the students' resistance, embodying their advocacy for values such as freedom, self-determination, and democracy, inspired by the American political tradition (refer to the still images at page 82 and 83). This emblem, along with the iconic image of the *Tank Man*, served as a powerful visual representation of their struggle (refer to in Chapter Three). The statue, reconstructed in the United States, accompanied the students in their public engagements, reinforcing the enduring relevance and symbolic power of their campaign for democratic reform in China.

Recalling the time when the replica was transported to Washington, D.C., to be displayed on Capitol Hill, Craig Middleton described the challenging logistics of getting it there in pieces and then assembling it, all while navigating the concerns of the Capitol police. "We did it anyway. A couple of days with no sleep and a lot of fun with the students all the time. Those students were not much younger than us. We really related well on a personal level. We grew very fan of them."[364] Standing before that statue in Chicago, Wu'er, as other student leaders advocated, asserted that the primary goal of the students' struggle was not to overthrow the PRC government. Instead, their efforts should be directed towards granting Chinese citizens the fundamental right to choose the type of government they wish to live under, thus providing them with a genuine alternative. The aim of the movement was to advocate for democratic

[362] -, *The Stanford Daily*, 1989.
[363] Eric Harrison, "Exiled Students Sees New Hope for China," *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 1989.
[364] Ibid. Interview with Craig Middleton, September 2023.

reforms and empower the people of China to participate in shaping their nation's governance and future. In order to achieve this goal, Yan Jiaiqi urged Chinese students to stay in the United States, not only in their personal interest but also to keep the struggle for democracy alive. The struggle for achieving their right to stay had just begun.

After three intensive days, the IFCSS Congress officially concluded on July 30, 1989, marked by a moment of profound symbolism. The attendees, demonstrating their solidarity, linked arms and sang "We Shall Overcome," the anthem of the American civil rights movement. This act was intended to draw a parallel between their own struggle and the historical fight for civil rights in the United States. Throughout the congress, the students had drafted a constitution, which was subsequently revised multiple times due to internal disagreements regarding the Federation's objectives. Additionally, they passed a manifesto and twelve resolutions proposed by the delegates. The concluding document emphasized that the IFCSS served as a coordinating organization for Chinese students and scholars in the United States. It explicitly stated that the IFCSS represented their collective will and demands and worked to safeguard their interests. The primary objective of the organization was to advance the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in China. This statement outlined the commitment of the IFCSS to advocating for fundamental democratic values and supporting the aspirations of Chinese students and scholars in their pursuit of a more just and equitable society in their homeland.[365] "To accomplish the above-mentioned tasks," the final document concluded, "we need support from all the justice-upholding and peace-loving people throughout the world. Any support you render us, be it moral, material, or financial, will be sincerely appreciated."[366]

1.7 Washington: Setting Up an Unprecedented Lobbying Activity

In the weeks following the Congress in Chicago, the Federation embarked on a formal process of organization. The students established a lobbying committee and set up a headquarters in Washington, D.C. With the assistance of a Chinese intern, the IFCSS secured pro bono legal representation from Arent, Fox, Kintner, Plotkin & Kahn, a distinguished law firm based in the capital. Guided by their legal advisors, the IFCSS officially initiated its

[365] "First Congress of the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars in the U.S.," George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Student Organization.
[366] Ibid. "First Congress of the IFCSS."

operations.[367] The Federation's efforts to publicize the human rights abuses committed by the Chinese government and to address the legal status of Chinese students in the United States gained increasing prominence and influence within Washington. Between July 1989 and January 1990, the students "worked tirelessly with the House and Senate" to secure legislative support for their cause.[368] They frequently provided congressional members and Administration officials with critical insights into the situation in China and the restrictive measures imposed by the Chinese government. As a result, the Federation's leaders became central figures in the American political discourse. They developed strong bonds with members of Congress and their staff, both at the national and local levels, and were regularly invited to testify at Congressional hearings. Their contributions were significant in shaping discussions on various issues, including the Pelosi Bill, which faced opposition from President Bush, and the broader debate over the balance between promoting human rights through foreign policy and advancing economic and commercial interests with China (refer to Chapter Two). The students organized press conferences, wrote op-eds for major American newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, and appeared on American television networks. They adeptly navigated the political landscape, mastering the associated codes and rhetoric. Maintaining a network of informants within Washington, they remained well-informed about key institutional activities. "They definitely had a leaker in the Legislative Council Office," William Quinn, Congresswoman Pelosi's staff member, observed when the students had access to information about a draft proposal to extend immigration rights for Chinese nationals – a detail not yet officially publicized.[369]

[367] Ibid. Mann, *About Face*, p.-
[368] Chinese Students Support the Conference Report on H.R. 2712, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, -
[369] Ibid. Interview with William Quinn, June 2023.



Figure 12. Haiching Zhao and Yuan Geng Huang (IFCSS) Hosted by Bruce Collins, December 12, 1989. Video frames credit:C-SPAN.

The Federation's financial resources were primarily derived from private donors, although the specific allocation of these funds remains difficult to determine. Additionally, financial support was received from various organizations committed to promoting democratic values and assisting Chinese exile associations. Noteworthy among these entities were the aforementioned Chinese Alliance for Democracy (CAD) and the Federation for a Democratic China (FDC). Additionally, the Washington D.C.-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED) stood out in this context.[370] According to the analysis of political scientist Chen Jie, NED allocated approximately $216,000 in support of the overseas initiatives undertaken by Chinese nationals during the year 1991.[371] There were even assertions from some members of Congress that the IFCSS may have received financial assistance from the government of Taiwan, although no concrete evidence was presented to substantiate these claims.[372] In this regard, students consistently asserted their commitment to maintaining independence from the Taiwanese government, as PRC authorities habitually used presumed ties between the students and what they considered an illegitimate government to undermine the pro-democracy efforts of the IFCSS. Nevertheless, rumors suggesting close connections with Taipei gained traction following the dispatch of an IFCSS delegation to Taiwan in late November 1989, aimed "to meet with academics, observe the upcoming national elections and seek [non-governmental] financial support." In response to these rumors, the president of IFCSS clarified that the organization adhered to a strict donation policy, expressly rejecting claims of financial ties with the government in Taiwan and elsewhere. "We will not accept any government donations."[373]

Among the figures that most embodied the Chinese students' unprecedented willingness to voice their concerns was Zhao Haiching, a post-doctoral fellow at the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at Harvard University. Before his election as the third president of the IFCSS in 1991, Zhao had led the Federation working group responsible for congressional lobbying activities for two consecutive years. This role made him one of the most visible and influential individuals among the student activists on Capitol Hill. His testimony – one of many between the years 1989 and 1992 – serves as a quintessential example of the rhetorical skills developed by the student leaders. They had acquired a notable ability for effectively garnering public support by artfully aligning with American traditional values of

[370] See Michael J. Barker, Griffith University, "Mediating a Polyarchal Public Sphere in China," Paper delivered at the Australian Political Studies Association Conference, Brisbane, Australia, 6-9 July 2008.
[371] Ibid. Chen Jie, *The Overseas Chinese Democracy Movement*. p.21.
[372] Congressional Hearing.
[373] Ibid Schneider, *The Stanford Daily*, November 16, 1989.

freedom and core individual rights, smartly tailoring these concepts to resonate with the students' own experiences and challenges. In his statement before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs in January 1990, Zhao urged Congress to support the Chinese students in their quest "to ensure that the hope for freedom sweeping the world is not dashed against the rocks of the Great Wall."[374] In Zhao's words, the Tiananmen massacre had contributed to bringing to light the "unacceptable" human rights situation in China. This event not only revealed China's inability but also its unwillingness to adhere to global ethical standards widely accepted elsewhere across the planet. The students' efforts were therefore instrumental in raising awareness about these issues and calling for accountability and change. Paying tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr. and his struggle for American civil rights, Zhao said:

> *"I have a dream that one day the Chinese students studying abroad will be able to return home of their own free will. Not forced back, as targets of repression, but welcomed as free men and women, with the knowledge and experience gained here to build a more democratic China. I have a dream that one day we will be able to say to the world loudly, I'm proud of you China, my homeland."*[375]

The strategic deployment of rhetorical and iconographic symbols to garner media and public attention soon became a defining feature of the students' activism. Following the Chicago conference, the Federation's initial major event was the Washington March for Democracy in China, held on October 1, 1989. As noted by *The Washington Post*, "like the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the Chinese student democracy movement already has given birth to its own folklore and heroes."[376] Among the fundraising efforts at the march was the sale of replicas of the *Tank Man* photograph, an image that had become emblematic since June 1989. The march was held precisely one hundred days after the Tiananmen Square massacre and coincided with the People's Republic of China's National Day, marking the 40th anniversary of the Communist revolution. The event witnessed the students' deep commitment to democratic ideals and highlighted their organizational acumen. They were deeply engaged

[374] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.38.
[375] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990, p.37.
[376] Tracy Thompson, "In D.C., 3,500 Chinese Students March in Sorrow, Resolution," *The Washington Post*, October 2, 1989.

in all facets of the march, including participant mobilization, coordination with speakers such as Senator Slade Gordon (R-WA) and Representative Walter Fauntroy (D-DC), event planning, accommodation arrangements, press releases, public advocacy, and fundraising efforts. Drawing inspiration from American traditions, the march's theme was "We Have a Dream," reflecting their vision of a government founded on the will of the people and characterized by accountability. Their objectives included the establishment of a pluralistic, multi-party political system with checks and balances, and the promotion of a free-market economy to protect economic rights. The event flyer succinctly conveyed these aspirations:

"When the courageous young Chinese students erected
the Goddess of Democracy in Tiananmen Square,
they had a dream, a dream of freedom and democracy.
The Chinese Goddess was shattered by tanks.
Her builders fell under machine gun bullets.
But the dream will not die.
The fascists can slaughter people.
But they cannot massacre an idea.
To keep the dream of Tiananmen alive,
Join the
WASHINGTON MARCH FOR DEMOCRACY IN CHINA"[377]

Approximately 4,000 Chinese students, accompanied by around 2,000 supporters, participated in the march through Washington, D.C., under heavy rain. The march commenced at the Lincoln Memorial and proceeded to the Chinese Embassy, drawing a symbolic parallel with the civil rights movement. Despite the inclement weather, the demonstrators were characterized as "subdued but resolute" in their condemnation of the Chinese government's repressive practices and their advocacy for democratic reforms in China.[378] Liu Yongchuan, President of the IFCSS, described the demonstration as "disciplined and well organized," arguing that the peaceful march "embodied the spirit of nonviolence, which constituted a sharp

[377] Washington March for Democracy in China Flyer, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, Chinese Student Organization.
[378] Ibid. Thompson, *The Washington Post*, October 2, 1989.

contrast to the bloody crackdown ordered by the Chinese government."[379] Concurrent demonstrations took place in other American cities, including Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and New York, as well as internationally in Bonn, Hong Kong, and Paris. In Los Angeles, for example, approximately 700 participants gathered peacefully outside the Chinese consulate. The event featured human rights signage, peace songs, and speeches by university students, Christian clergymen, and community leaders. "The crowd, mainly Chinese natives, formed a semicircle on the street in front of a military tank, two tents, a 5-foot Goddess of Liberty statue and a gray coffin, on which dozens of spectators placed white flowers," chronicled the student-run newspaper *The Stanford Daily*.[380]

In areas where the IFCSS had a less established presence, attendance at these events might have been higher were it not for intimidation tactics employed by PRC Embassy officials. "In Boston, student leaders have been talking to the people, but at some schools in the Midwest you don't have communication, so the people get scared," remarked Haiqing Zhao.[381] Students who were unable to join major city protests organized alternative gatherings on university campuses across the United States. For instance, at Yale University, students held a candlelight vigil to show solidarity with the Chinese democratic movement. The event was marked by somber poetry readings, musical performances, and personal reflections, commemorating those who perished in Beijing and those still subject to repression by the Chinese government. As detailed by The Yale Daily News, "singing Bob Dylan songs, the crowd of Chinese, Chinese-American, and American students expressed their solidarity with the Chinese people and agreed that it was important to keep the spirit of the student movement alive."[382]

As 1989 was coming to an end and the Pelosi Bill encountered major obstacles throughout its legislative journey, the IFCSS increasingly asserted itself as a crucial force in awakening Congress to issues concerning China. The leaders of the IFCSS demonstrated growing expertise and effectiveness in their lobbying efforts. Despite some internal disagreements regarding the Federation's mission – specifically concerning the nature of the group and its ultimate objectives for China's future – the visa issue served as a unifying factor among the students. As Jia Gao, Associate Professor at the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne, noted,

[379] Document provided by IFCSS first president Liu Yongchuan.
[380] -, "Chinese Rally in Washington," *The Stanford Daily*, October 2, 1989.
[381] -, "Chinese Students March on Capital," *The Harvard Crimson*, October 2, 1989.
[382] Julie Horowitz, "Yale Students Show Support for Chinese Democracy Movement," *The Yale Daily News*, November 4, 1989.

"the visa issue was the common ground on which the students were united."[383] An interview given to C-SPAN on December 12, 1989, by Zhao Haiqing and Huang Yangen, the IFCSS Director of the Government Affairs Committee, offers insight into the students' developing competencies, attitudes, and resolve. The interview not only demonstrated the students' confidence in addressing the media but also made their lobbying objectives – supported by legal advisors – explicit, as well as clarifying whom they deemed trustworthy in their cause. They expressed increasing concern about the Administration's stance following the secret visit of U.S. officials to China. Zhao and Huang argued that there were compelling political and legal reasons why legislation passed by Congress would offer greater protection than a presidential directive. "This is a democratic and legal society," asserted Zhao, "and we know the difference between a statute and a legislation. The second provides protection which the second cannot match. The Administration does not even have a regulation or an executive order. They have a directive from INS, and this can literally be taken away anytime."[384] These positions, as this chapter illustrates, resonated with a broad bipartisan coalition in Congress while simultaneously challenging the Administration's efforts to maintain control over foreign policy prerogatives.

Another key aspect of the IFCSS's operational strategy necessitates further examination: the students' adept use of computer networks significantly enhanced their capacity to remain informed, organize, exchange information, and formulate strategies. Many of the approximately 40,000 Chinese students in the United States were pursuing careers in fields such as science, engineering, and mathematics, which contributed to their adeptness in employing these technological tools for political mobilization. During this period of activism, these students "kept nationally linked school computer systems buzzing with political dialogue."[385] The involvement of Chinese students in American political processes during this period represented a groundbreaking development. While quantifying their precise impact on subsequent grassroots movements and the effectiveness of lobbying efforts remains challenging, these students played a crucial role in pioneering what may be characterized as "the first major [online] network political activity" in the United States.[386] Their innovative use of technology and their commitment to political dialogue marked a significant moment in the

[383] Ibid. Gao*, Chinese Activism of a Different Kind*, p.88.
[384] C-SPAN Interview on "Bush Veto of Chinese Student Visa Bill," December 12, 1989, online at https://www.c-span.org/video/?10265-1/bush-veto-chinese-student-visa-bill (last accessed September 2023).
[385] Ibid. Sexton, *Newsday*, July 31, 1989.
[386] David Alan Grier, "Politics, control, and computer networks: the Chinese Student Lobby of 1989," *Communications of the ACM*, vol.41, no.5 (1998): pp.137-145.

history of online political engagement and demonstrated the potential for technology to facilitate political organizing and advocacy.[387]

A number of scholars, particularly those specializing in computer science and technology, have examined this unprecedented phenomenon. As early as 1987, Chinese students in the United States started utilizing electronic platforms to share information and engage in discussions about China. The initial attempt at a student network forum was known as *CHINANET*, which was created by a group of Chinese researchers at Texas A&M University – the institution that, ironically, was later chosen to host the George H. W. Bush Presidential Library. *CHINANET* primarily functioned as a mailing list, enabling students to exchange views on various topics, including the political unrest occurring in China at the time. As more and more people signed up, *CHINANET* became less practical and it was soon replaced by different online platforms called Soc.Culture.China (SCC) and Electronic Newsletter for Chinese Students (ENCS). They were initiated in late 1987-early 1988 and they both worked as newsgroups, keeping their readers informed about daily news coming from China. While the SCC did run worldwide from Canada to Australia to Japan and attracted about ten thousand readers circulating almost one hundred articles per day, ENCS was U.S.-based, and it was run by a team composed of roughly fifteen members who shared its publications with four hundred subscribers.[388]

The conference held in July 1989 was pivotal in gathering, among others, the editors and contributors of the student-run information platforms which, in addition to ENCS, included other online networks born as a result of the protests in China. These were News Digest, VisaNet – an electronic forum run by Huang Yuangeng, a computer science student at the University of Maryland, who circulated information about immigration policies –, china-net, and China News Group. In Chicago, it was decided to partially merge these different platforms into one called *China News Digest* (CND). According to Bing Wen, a Carleton University graduate who worked for CND for a couple of years in the early 1990s, in 1992 CND could boast a staff of 55 five members working on a volunteer basis mainly from the United States and Canada, but also from Sweden, Japan, and Australia. It worked as an electronically based newsroom and discussion forum distributed among seven sections which included global, U.S.,

[387] The connection between decentralized technology and resistance is examined in Yan Ma, "Chinese Online Presence: Tiananmen Square and Beyond," *Counterpoints*, vol.59 (2000): pp.139–151.
[388] Bing Wen, "China News Digest: A Journalistic Attempt on Worldwide Computer Networks," Dissertation Master of Journalism, School of Journalism, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, June 1992.

Canada, and Europe/Pacific regional news services. The working language was English, but there was a section that was entirely run in Chinese. The CND subscribers grew from 400 in 1989 to 12,000 in 1992 and that mainly included Chinese students and scholars and faculty members across American and Canadian universities. In his university dissertation based on his experience as a volunteer for CND, Bing Wen drew a parallel between the historical role played by Xinhua News Agency – the PRC official state news agency – in overcoming information barriers and aiding the communist forces in their victory against nationalists and the present task faced by China News Digest.[389] He concluded that, not only CND "set the technical standard of using the worldwide computer networks for news distribution," but it also offered a concrete example of how modern technologies applied to news media could guarantee global cooperation among journalists and their freedom to inform without governmental interference.[390]

In the late 1990s, Norman Saul Matloff, Professor of Computer Science at the University of California-Davis, suggested that future historians might identify the early 1990s as a transformative period in American politics due to the growing influence of the Internet. In this context, Chinese nationals studying in the United States played a significant role in utilizing the Internet for political purposes and activism, particularly through their university computer accounts. Their well-organized lobbying campaign targeting Congress showcased the potential power of the Internet as a tool for political mobilization and engagement. "At various points during the bill's journey through congressional committees, floor votes, and so on, an IFCSS coordinator would, merely by hitting the ENTER key, send detailed lobbying instructions to tens of thousands of Chinese students nationwide."[391] As the Internet evolved into an increasingly powerful tool for achieving the IFCSS goals, the students became more adept and efficient in their efforts. One notable example was the use of specific platforms that incorporated a feature allowing students to electronically sign online petitions in favor or in opposition to specific legislation discussed in Congress. Through this method, the IFCSS could

[389] Ibid. Bing Wen, "China News Digest."
[390] Ibid. Bing Wen, "China News Digest," p.92.
[391] Norman Saul Matloff, "Political Networking," *National Review*, vol.49, no.14 (July 28, 1997), p.37. According to Matloff, a standard message sent by IFCSS leaders to the members of the federation would read as follows: *"At this moment, perhaps one of the most critical junctions, we strongly urge students across the country to call/fax [the following members of Congress] … Three members need to be targeted more than others … In addition to calling their Capitol Hill offices, students can also talk to directors of their district office at your localities. You may as well encourage your local newspapers to come up quickly with editorials on the issue – for sure, you may ask the [IFCSS] headquarters to provide technical support. You may also enlist your local American friends/groups to help, especially those with large or influential constituency."*

manage to collect an impressive number of signatures in a very short period of time, otherwise impossible using traditional tools. Additionally, students established another system allowing them to forward copies of an email sent to a specific address to others. This was particularly helpful when lobbying congress members and, ultimately, the White House. This innovative use of technology, mostly unseen in the United States or elsewhere, greatly enhanced their advocacy efforts and outreach, as shown by Matloff.[392]

In exploring the history and development of online network usage among Chinese nationals, David Alan Grier, Professor of International Science and Technology Policy at George Washington University, challenged the sometimes idealized accounts of the students' experiences in the United States. Grier's analysis focuses on a significant aspect of the IFCSS's activities, highlighting the paradoxical nature of the political influence exerted through computer networks. By using the experiences of Chinese students in the United States as a case study, Grier elucidates the complex and multifaceted effects of digital communication on political mobilization and efficacy. Their use of online discussion platforms is particularly significant as it represents one of the earliest instances of such phenomena. The paradox revolves around the simultaneous centralization and decentralization of power eased by the Internet. As Chinese nationals were spread across university campuses in the United States, these practices facilitated "the students debating issues, educating themselves, making decisions and working together" and enhanced "participatory democracy and the network forums, allow[ing] even the most isolated students to participate."[393] Nevertheless, as the congressional debate surrounding the Pelosi Bill faced obstacles and setbacks on Capitol Hill during the fall of 1989, Chinese students throughout the U.S. expressed their discontent and placed blame on their leaders and representatives. This dissatisfaction manifested on various discussion platforms, where criticisms and accusations became prevalent. In response to these concerns, their leaders acted by taking down the online strategy discussions fora that appeared to incite widespread condemnation within the Chinese community of their lobby activity in Washington. Instead, they adopted a more orthodox political approach that shifted the focus of Chinese students away from them and towards those members of Congress – and of the Administration – who were impeding the progress of the bill introduced by Pelosi. Facing what Grier has called the *crisis of control*, the IFCSS leaders and CND editors sent a message to the Chinese students that read: "*Sometimes there are things we cannot post in the net because they*

[392] Ibid. Matloff, "Political Networking."
[393] Ibid. Grier, "Politics, control, and computer networks."

will go everywhere including congressmen's office and sometimes it is not the best way to have a massive response. We hope people can understand this complicated matter and cooperate accordingly."[394] Communications became increasingly mediated by legal and media consultants, signaling a less naïve approach by the students' organization and a more centralized management of issues involving IFCSS.

These internal organizational problems did not go unnoticed and were exploited by members of Congress who opposed H.R. 2712. Senator Alan Simpson (R-WY), for instance, expressed doubts about the real intentions of the Chinese students. "They are tough. They are not just kind of wandering through America with wide eyes about democracy. They have people who are really setting them up," Simpson argued.[395] The senator from Wyoming stressed the concern according to which the students did not really care about the struggle of their fellow colleagues back in China. They wanted to permanently stay in the United States where they would eventually live a better life in terms of job opportunities and lifestyle than if they would go back to China. For these reasons the students were *selfish*, lobbying Congress to sustain a bill that would only protect them, instead of letting the president pass a regulation including all Chinese nationals feeling threatened by their government. Refusing to fully condemn reported harassment by the Chinese Embassy, Simpson echoed allegations that they were the same student leaders who actually intimidated their peers who disagreed with the Independent Federation's official stance.[396]

Although the senator's allegations carried a certain degree of bias, they are useful in stressing a rapid evolution of the students' activity in Washington, as well as the limits of their advocacy effort, which also differentiated IFCSS from other Chinese groups. Kerry Dumbaugh of the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress noted that in the months following the Tiananmen Square massacre, the IFCSS emerged as the most visible and politically engaged organization among Chinese academia-related groups in pushing for legislation to assist Chinese students.[397] The IFCSS established various committees with the objective of lobbying both the U.S. government, particularly officials from the Immigration

[394] Ibid. Grier, "Politics, control, and computer networks."
[395] *Congressional Records*, 101st Congress, January 25, 1990, online at https://congressional-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/congressional/result/congressional/congdocumentview?accountid=10226&groupid=106481&parmId=186FA283694&rsId=186FA206F76 (last accessed September 2023).
[396] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees Affairs*, January 23, 1990.
[397] According to Dumbaugh, "of 17 Chinese student and scholar organizations surveyed in October 1990, 13 of them had been formed since March 1989." See Kerry Dumbaugh, "Chinese Student and Scholar Organizations in the United States," Congressional Research Service Report 90-558 F, October 15, 1990.

and Naturalization Service and the State Department, and the U.S. Congress. In the short term, the IFCSS was likely the most influential lobby group led by Chinese nationals in the United States. However, due to its composition, primarily consisting of university students who would eventually pursue their professional careers, and its focus, mainly centered on the visa issue and later on economic sanctions against China, it began to lose ground to other groups by 1994. As an example, Dumbaugh makes the case of Human Rights in China (HRIC), which was founded in March 1989 by Chinese scientists and scholars. Unlike the IFCSS, HRIC had a broader scope, aiming to educate both Chinese citizens in China and those abroad about human rights principles and imperatives (refer to Chapter Three). Additionally, HRIC was involved in monitoring human rights activities in China, denouncing the misconduct of the PRC government. This broader mission led HRIC to become an active advocate beyond U.S. borders, collaborating with international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (refer to Chapter Three).[398]

Xiao Chang, who served on the Federation's board of directors for one year before assuming the role of Executive Director of HRIC, characterized the IFCSS' members as politically naïve and inexperienced in the realm of political activism. Despite their enthusiasm, many, especially those who had not held leadership positions or been particularly active, demonstrated significant incompetence and selfishness. Once the 1992 Chinese Students Protection Act was signed into law, many students, having achieved their primary objectives, disengaged from the organization, resulting in a loss of its original mission. The Federation also encountered significant resource constraints, as financial support began to decline after two years due to the waning of the initial public shock following the crackdown. Many students either returned to China or pursued business opportunities with China, distancing themselves from the Federation. The movement's momentum further dissipated in 1993, following Deng Xiaoping's renewed emphasis on market-oriented reforms, as the evolving political landscape undermined the conditions essential for sustaining its mission (refer to Chapter Four). Therefore, by the mid-1990s, the IFCSS began to lose momentum, and its influence in Washington started to wane, although the Federation remains active to this day.[399]

[398] Ibid. Dumbaugh, "Ten Years in U.S.-China Policy."
[399] Interview with Xiao Qiang, Human Rights In China Executive Director from 1991 to 2002, September 26, 2024.

1.8 Boston: Charting a New Course for U.S. China Policy Making

A pivotal moment in the evolution of the IFCSS's lobbying efforts took place during a meeting at Harvard University in January 1990. This meeting brought together approximately fifty Chinese students from twenty U.S. institutions, marking a critical juncture in the Federation's strategic approach and its broader engagement with both the PRC government and the U.S. political establishment. While the Bush Administration was tirelessly working behind the scenes to secure enough Republican support to sustain his veto against Pelosi's H.R. 2712, this meeting marked a decisive moment in the students' opposition to both the PRC government and U.S. policies. The congresswoman from San Francisco was the sole member of Congress to attend in person, while other legislators, including Senator Kennedy and Representatives Richard Gephardt (D-MO) and Joe Barton (R-TX), were represented by their staff. In a statement delivered to the meeting, Kennedy asserted, "President Bush is wrong to try to cozy up to the leaders in Beijing who ordered the massacre last June in Tiananmen Square. We must do everything possible to ensure that these brave students do not become pawns or bargaining chips in the Administration's future dealings with that repressive regime."[400]

The Harvard gathering provided a forum for Chinese students to discuss how they could influence Congress to uphold its initial vote in favor of the Pelosi Bill by overriding the presidential veto. However, the meeting also expanded their focus, as participants agreed that Congress should press the U.S. Administration to hold the Chinese leadership accountable for its actions following the Tiananmen Square massacre. These included not only the violent repression of pro-democracy movements but also other human rights abuses such as the extensive use of labor camps, forced abortions, and the suppression of religious freedom. The students resolved to broaden their strategy by identifying new avenues for contestation. One such approach, suggested by the former Ambassador to the PRC Winston Lord to Nancy Pelosi, involved challenging the annual renewal of China's Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status.[401] This status, which had been granted to China since 1980, was contingent on compliance with international human rights standards but had not faced significant opposition until that point. The renewal process, typically finalized every year in early June, coincided with the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, presenting a strategic opportunity to

[400] Chinese Students Meet to Map Strategy Against Bush Veto, George H. W. Bush Presidential Records, White House Office of Legislative Affairs, James Renne Files, China.
[401] Ibid. Interview with William Quinn, June 2023.

build on the public and political attention on China's human rights record. The students recognized that if the Administration chose to renew China's MFN status despite its ongoing violations, it would be critical to leverage the memory of the crackdown to build opposition and pressure Congress to act (refer to Chapter Two and Three).

In the works of prominent scholars on Chinese student activism in the United States, such as James Mann's *About Face* and Jia Gao's *Activism of a Different Kind*, the Harvard meeting is recognized as a critical juncture in the evolution of the IFCSS's lobbying efforts, marking an expansion of their political objectives.[402] The meeting, however, also revealed the challenges in achieving consensus among students on the economic dimension of U.S.-China relations, in contrast to their more unified stance on immigration issues. Testifying in Congress in May 1990, Roger W. Sullivan, President of the U.S.-China Business Council, conveyed that several students had approached him to seek his opinion on the MFN issue, questioning whether it could effectively serve as a means of exerting pressure on the People's Republic of China. He explained, "I have had considerable contact with the Federation of Students and scholars in the United States, and, in fact, when I discussed my views several of them came over to ask me what my views were." Referring to the meeting held earlier that year at Harvard, Sullivan recalled a phone conversation with one of the attendees, who indicated that, while no unified position had emerged, the prevailing sentiment was in favor of a conditional renewal of the MFN status. Yet, Sullivan further emphasized that, in his discussions with both Chinese nationals in China and Chinese students in the U.S., the one common position they shared was that efforts to confront the Chinese government should focus on the "legitimacy question, not through trade."[403]

This meeting also had significant implications for Nancy Pelosi's career, highlighting her as one of the most committed advocates in Congress for the protection of Chinese students and scholars residing in the U.S. One participant noted that "most of [the Harvard students] came to hear Nancy Pelosi speak. Nancy is a big hero for Chinese students right now."[404] However, Pelosi's advocacy extended beyond safeguarding the immigration status of Chinese students in

[402] Ibid. Mann, *About Face*, pp.227-228; Gao, *Activism of a Different Kind*, p.-
[403] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.180.
[404] -, "Chinese Students Attend Conference Outline Plan to Lobby for Visa Bill," *The Harvard Crimson*, January 8, 1990.

the United States. The meeting reiterated her determination to challenge President Bush's cautious approach toward U.S.-China relations. The congresswoman's engagement in the issue represented a broader commitment to holding the PRC accountable for its human rights violations, positioning her as a central figure in the ongoing debate over the balance between economic engagement and the promotion of democratic values and human rights in U.S. foreign policy.

The Harvard meeting reveals additional interpretative dimensions. Firstly, it offered Republicans aligned with President Bush a persuasive argument that the discourse surrounding the Chinese students had become a partisan battleground, ostensibly aimed at discrediting the president. Senator Alan Simpson expressed this concern in Congress, describing the meeting as "a partisan gathering," and accusing it of being part of an effort to undermine Bush, stating, "Let us face it, to some, this is very definitely a trash-the-president movement. Do not miss that," warned Simpson in Congress.[405] In contrast, Nancy Pelosi countered these accusations, asserting the nonpartisan nature of the event and defending her participation. She remarked, "We have from the start invited all people to participate in this. I went at the invitation of the students. The fact is that you would have been very welcome to attend had you expressed any interest in doing so, I'm sure. But it was not my meeting. It was one I was proud to attend." Pelosi also emphasized her message to the students, encouraging them to focus on their personal safety rather than on using their situation to advance legislative objectives: "And if you had been there, you would have heard me say to them that they have to protect themselves; if this doesn't pass, they can't use their own situation to try to make this bill pass. I encourage them: Protect yourself. File under the president's order if you think that it protects you in your own particular situation."[406] This exchange mirrored the broader political dynamics at play, with Republicans viewing the meeting as a strategic attack on the president, while Pelosi framed her involvement as a supportive response to the students' needs, advocating for their protection amid uncertain legislative prospects.

The Chicago gathering nonetheless reaffirmed the political significance of the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars within the broader discourse on U.S.-China relations. Despite its relatively short-lived prominence and influence in Washington's policy-making circles, the still understudied trajectory of the IFCSS provides a valuable case study

[405] Ibid. *Congressional Records*, January 25, 1990.
[406] Ibid. *Chinese Students in America and Human Rights in China Hearing*, January 23, 1990, p.27.

for analyzing the complexities and multifaceted dimensions of U.S. policy toward China in the aftermath of June 1989. Its case is emblematic in that it introduced innovative tools and strategies previously unseen in grassroots movements in the United States, being the use of electronic platforms and the internet among the most ground-braking novelties. Additionally, the lobbying activities undertaken by the IFCSS, while challenging President Bush's cautious approach toward the PRC, reinvigorated a longstanding American belief – entrenched in a tradition of American messianic projection onto China – in a distinctive and exceptional relationship between the two nations (refer to Chapter Three). The students embodied the American aspiration for China to evolve in line with the liberal and democratic ideals that had been promoted since the early 1970s, despite the major setback represented by the Tiananmen Square crackdown. In this context, the students were perceived as future leaders who might succeed the gerontocratic PRC leadership and thus become the natural interlocutors for American engagement. As the debate regarding the extension of their immigration status lost momentum, the IFCSS adeptly capitalized on the support it had secured from various congress members and segments of American society during the year following the Tiananmen Square massacre. When the focus on Capitol Hill shifted to the question of whether economic and commercial engagement with China would advance human rights or simply signal a laissez-faire attitude toward the PRC government's policies, the students retained their influence (refer to Chapter Two). The growing professionalization of the Federation's members, alongside this shift in the student movement's focus, is paradigmatic for understanding the changing dynamics within the IFCSS and the broader discourse on Sino-U.S. relations, particularly as economic and post-Cold War strategic considerations increasingly threatened to eclipse human rights concerns.

Chapter 2

RETAINING CHINA POLICY CONTROL

President Bush's Preoccupation with China, from the MFN Debate to the First Gulf War

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2.1 Fit for the Job? Fighting the *Wimp Factor*

"I depart Beijing tomorrow with both a solid sense of progress and an awareness of fresh challenges in the relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China," wrote the American Ambassador to the PRC at the end of April 1989.[407] In his farewell cable to Washington, Winston Lord outlined the significant accomplishments in U.S.-China relations and identified the many tasks ahead for the new decade. However, Lord left the Embassy in Beijing with a sense of bitterness, as his credibility as ambassador had been seriously undermined by the Administration following President Bush's visit to the PRC in February 1989. Seizing the opportunity presented by his attendance at the funeral of Japanese Emperor Hirohito, the new president managed to travel to China before the highly anticipated historic visit by Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev scheduled for May 1989.[408] This was a homecoming for George H. W. Bush who had previously lived in China serving as Chief of the U.S. Liaison Office in the mid 1970s before President Jimmy Carter granted Beijing

[407] Farewell Cable from Ambassador Lord to Washington and Key Posts, April 21, 1989, cited in Charles Stuart Kennedy, Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, Interview with Winston Lord, April 28, 1998, *The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

[408] "We wanted very much to meet with the Chinese leaders to review and enhance Sino-American relations before Gorbachev had a chance to speak with them," revealed Brent Scowcroft. See George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998), p.-

diplomatic recognition.[409] "The Chinese medias play was the warmest for any visit I had seen," recalled Winston Lord, who had worked tirelessly to set up the tightly scheduled 48-hour presidential visit. "He was a new president and on old friend. Everybody wanted to see him."[410] Not only did Bush meet with the CCP leadership, including Chairman Deng Xiaoping and Premier Li Peng, and received a warm welcome from cheering crowds in Tiananmen Square, but he also achieved a significant milestone by appearing live on Chinese television, a privilege never before granted to a U.S. president. "The 'sentimental journey' to Beijing was simply 'wonderful,' back to their 'second home' or their 'home away from home,' as the Bushes kept saying during the two-day stay; the fifth return for Bush, the sixth for Barbara."[411] This marked a significant departure from historical precedent as it was the first time that a newly elected U.S. president visited Asia before travelling to Europe, underscoring the Administration's prioritization of the region's strategic importance.



Figure 13. President George H. W. Bush waves to the crowd in Tiananmen Square, February 25, 1989. Photo credit: Bettmann / Contributor via Getty Images.

[409] For a broad historical overview of U.S.-China relations, including the significant development of diplomatic recognition under President Carter, see Dong Wang, *The United States and China: A History from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013).
[410] Ibid. Interview by Kennedy and Bernkopf Tucker with Winston Lord, April 28, 1998, p.471.
[411] Quoted in Herbert S. Parmet, *George Bush: The life of a Lone Star Yankee* (New York: Scribner, 1997), p.375.



Figure 14. Premier Li Peng looking at a pair of cowboy boots gifted by President Bush, February 25, 1989. Photo credit: Bettmann / Contributor via Getty Images.

However, the inclusion of Chinese astrophysicist Fang Lizhi on the guest list for a Texan-style barbecue dinner hosted by the U.S. Embassy in Beijing had provoked significant friction. Chinese officials threatened to boycott the event, which the ambassador had intended to be a gathering representing a broad spectrum of Chinese society. The guest list included American businesspeople operating in China, Chinese academics, government officials, and outspoken pro-reform advocates, aiming to demonstrate American interest in the perspectives of an increasingly diverse and multifaceted society. Fang had rose to political prominence in late 1986 while serving as Vice Chancellor of the China Science and Technology University in Hefei, in Eastern China.[412] During his tenure, student-led demonstrations began to emerge, initially protesting corruption among Chinese officials and advocating for freedom of speech. This movement rapidly gained traction, expanding to a widespread, nationwide campaign for reform.[413] Fang was accused of inciting these protests and was subsequently expelled from the

[412] For a recollection of Fang Lizhi's life see his memoir Fang Lizhi, *The Most Wanted Man in China: My Journey from Scientist to Enemy of the State*, trans. Perry Link (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 2016).
[413] On the origins of the pro-democracy protests in China see Richard Baum, "The Road to Tiananmen: Chinese Politics in the 1980s," in Roderick MacFarquhar (ed.), *The Politics of China: Sixty Years of the People's Republic of China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): pp.337–467. See also Suzanne Ogden, *China's Search for Democracy: The Student and the Mass Movement of 1989* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992).

Communist Party in early 1987. "Partly protected by his international academic reputation as an astrophysicist, he was for several years virtually the only Chinese willing to say openly that Marxism had failed in China and to call for greater democracy," commented *The New York Times* in 1990.[414] The news that Fang Lizhi and his wife, Li Shuxian, a physicist and associate professor at Beijing University, had been prevented by Chinese authorities from reaching the dinner venue was eventually reported by American news outlets, overshadowing what was supposed to be Bush's triumphant return to China as President of the United States. "It turned out to be a disaster beyond my wildest dreams. I had to take a sleeping pill to get to sleep," recalled Winston Lord.[415] The Embassy was immediately blamed by the Administration for the convoluted organization, despite the guest lists having been submitted to – and approved by – Washington twice.[416] The accusations infuriated the ambassador who departed from his post in profound disagreement with the president. These events led Winston Lord to conclude that although "the Fang Lizhi banquet incident was an unfortunate but minor blemish which did not damage to the relationship," it underscored the PRC leadership's intolerance toward foreign involvement in Chinese internal affairs, particularly regarding dissent against the Party. "The Chinese were entirely to blame for their needless escalation. They are geniuses at making foreigners feel guilty and dividing them. One very important lesson to be learned from this episode is not to let them succeed," concluded the ambassador.[417]

The controversy surrounding the "banquet-gate," widely covered in the U.S. media, disrupted Bush's inaugural visit to China in February 1989 and prompted questions about his effectiveness and assertiveness as a world leader during his early presidency. Three months before the crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, this incident not only alerted the American public to China's significant challenges in safeguarding individual liberties of its citizens, but also urged scrutiny of the new president's approach to the PRC leadership. The media speculated that George H. W. Bush would be a weak president when dealing with the Chinese counterpart, fueling rumors that had circulated during the 1988's electoral campaign. Notably, Bush appeared on the October 1987 cover of *Newsweek*

[414] Nicholas D. Kristof, "China Lets Dissident Leave Haven in U.S. Embassy to Fly to England," *The New York Times*, June 26, 1990.
[415] Ibid. Interview by Kennedy and Bernkopf Tucker with Winston Lord, April 28, 1998, p.477.
[416] According to *The New York Times*: "A senior White House official said today that inviting a prominent Chinese dissident to a dinner in Beijing last week honoring the country's leaders had not been President Bush's idea, and he suggested that the resulting contretemps was the fault of the American Embassy there." R. W. Apple Jr., "Blunder at Beijing Dinner: U.S. Chides Embassy," *The New York Times,* March 3, 1989.
[417] Ibid. Interview by Kennedy and Bernkopf Tucker with Winston Lord, April 28, 1998, p.503.

magazine wearing a yellow oilskin coat while navigating his motorboat, under the satirical title "Fighting the *Wimp Factor*."[418] This portrayal insinuated a narrative wherein the future president needed to embody a stronger sense of masculinity to counter perceptions of inadequacy.[419] According to Robert A. Strong, as a candidate, the former vice president was perceived not as "a prominent independent figure on the national political stage," but rather as one who "lacked Reagan's rhetorical skills and strong ideological convictions." Additionally, since "the foreign policy dog did not bark in an election held on the eve of the end of the Cold War," Bush was unable to showcase his extensive expertise "in the field he had few competitors."[420] This knowhow had been honed during his tenure as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (1971-1973), Chief of the Liaison Office to the PRC (1974-1975), CIA Director (1976-1977), and Vice President (1981-1989). In the wake of the Fang Lizhi incident, Richard Cohen, author of a weekly political column for *The Washington Post*, suggested that "presidential authority must have a Sicilian component: offers that cannot be refused." By leveraging the threat of boycotting the banquet unless Fang and his wife were excluded, Chinese authorities affirmed their influence over a president who appeared to lack assertiveness in his role as the leader of the world's most powerful nation. "As they say in Mafia movies, this is not showing respect," Cohen asserted in his colorful metaphor.[421]

In his article, *The Washington Post* columnist juxtaposed the affront from the Chinese with the actions of the Democrats in the Senate, who, a couple of weeks after the president's trip to Asia, voted against the confirmation of John Tower as Secretary of Defense. The former Senator from Texas faced allegations of "drunkenness, womanizing, and sharing secret insights

[418] Evan Thomas, the author of the *Newsweek* article, would eventually regret that depiction of the future president. "How wrong we were. As the 41st president, Bush was anything but a wimp." See Evan Thomas, "I called George Bush a 'wimp' on the cover of Newsweek. Why I was wrong," *Yahoo!News*, December 5, 2018, online at https://www.yahoo.com/news/called-george-bush-wimp-cover-newsweek-wrong-140012335.html (last accessed: June 2024).

[419] On the definition of masculinity and how it had influenced the notion of American presidency see Meredith Conroy, *Masculinity, Media, and the American Presidency. Evolving American Presidency Series* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[420] Robert A. Strong, "Ending the Cold War without Debate. Foreign Policy and the 1988 Election," Andrew Johnstone and Andrew Priest (eds.), *U.S. Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy. Candidates, Campaigns, and Global Politics from FDR to Bill Clinton* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2017).

[421] Richard Cohen, "The President is Being Cuffed Around," *The Washington Post*, March 2, 1989. As for the non-confirmation of Republican Texas Senator John Tower's presidential nomination as Secretary of Defense by the Democratic-majority Senate, *Politico* reported citing Sean Cunningham, *Cowboy Conservatism: Texas and The Rise of the Modern Right* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), "It was also the first time the Senate had rejected a new president's Cabinet nominee," Andrew Glass, "Senate fails to confirm John Tower, March 9, 1989," *Politico*, March 9, 2012. These two events led Cohen to predict that Bush would not be confirmed for a second term: "This is a prescription for a one-term presidency. (Ask Jimmy Carter.) In Washington, as in baseball, the wisdom of Leo Durocher still holds: nice guys finish last."

into U.S.-Soviet arms negotiations with defense contractors," leading to the rejection of his nomination.[422] This marked the first time in U.S. history that the Senate rejected a Cabinet nominee of a newly elected president, representing another setback for George H. W. Bush just two months into his presidency.[423] Cohen observed, "domestically, Bush has package himself as a presidential Gandhi, only is catchword is 'bipartisanship' instead of nonviolence. But Washington is a mean town, and the street gangs of Capitol Hill respect, above all, power – the ability and willingness to inflict political pain."[424] This commentary indicated that Democrats perceived President Bush as lacking in strength and, as evidenced by the China situation, were inclined to contest his authority and prerogatives in an unprecedented manner since Nixon's rapprochement with Beijing.

This chapter takes its initial steps from the early weeks of George H. W. Bush's presidency and the numerous challenges to his credibility as an assertive president. It contends that Bush's belief in his unique understanding of China – encompassing the promises of the 1980s market-oriented reforms, the geography of the country's interests, as well as the contradictions within the CCP leadership – contributed to his reluctance to delegate or share his foreign policy prerogatives. This hesitance resulted in intense contention with the Democrat-led Congress, which sought an adequate outlet to express its dissatisfaction following the June 1989 crackdown. Drawing on documents predominantly obtained from the Bush Presidential Library in College Station TX and the Stanford Department of Special Collections and University Archives, some of which still unpublished, the chapter investigates the behind-the-scenes dynamics of the Bush Administration's efforts to retain control over China policy formulation, presenting four main arguments. First, President Bush sought to maintain control over U.S. China policy by leveraging his personal connections and diplomatic experience to navigate complex bilateral relations, thereby counteracting Congress's increasing desire to exert significant influence. He employed a foreign policy approach centered on personal diplomacy and confidential negotiations, a strategy that had fallen out of favor with both policymakers and the American public. Second, as the annual renewal of trade privileges under the Most Favored Nation (MFN) status became the primary domestic platform to challenge Bush's approach to China, Congress members adopted increasingly stringent stances when dealing

[422] Sara Fritz, "Senate Rejects Tower Nomination by 53-47 : 1st Defeat for an Original Cabinet Pick," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1989.
[423] Precedents can be found at https://www.senate.gov/legislative/NominationsRejectedorWithdrawn.htm (last accessed November 2024).
[424] Ibid. *The Washington Post*, March 2, 1989.

with the making of Chiba policy. They focused on human rights conditions and moral imperatives, which the president sought to downplay, arguing that such an approach would ultimately jeopardize the most progressive and free-market-oriented Chinese provinces while diminishing American businesses competitiveness in China. Third, by maintaining economic engagement with China, the Administration aimed to support the reformist faction led by Deng Xiaoping within the Chinese leadership, which appeared increasingly vulnerable to marginalization following the Tiananmen Square massacre. Fourth, the Administration's stance was influenced by the broader international context, particularly the tendency of European Community (EC) countries and Japan to reestablish normal relations with China. According to President Bush, this global dimension underscored Beijing's geopolitical importance, and the proliferation of domestic challenges confronting his Administration threatened to undermine U.S. strategy within the competitive and still uncertain post-Cold War international context.

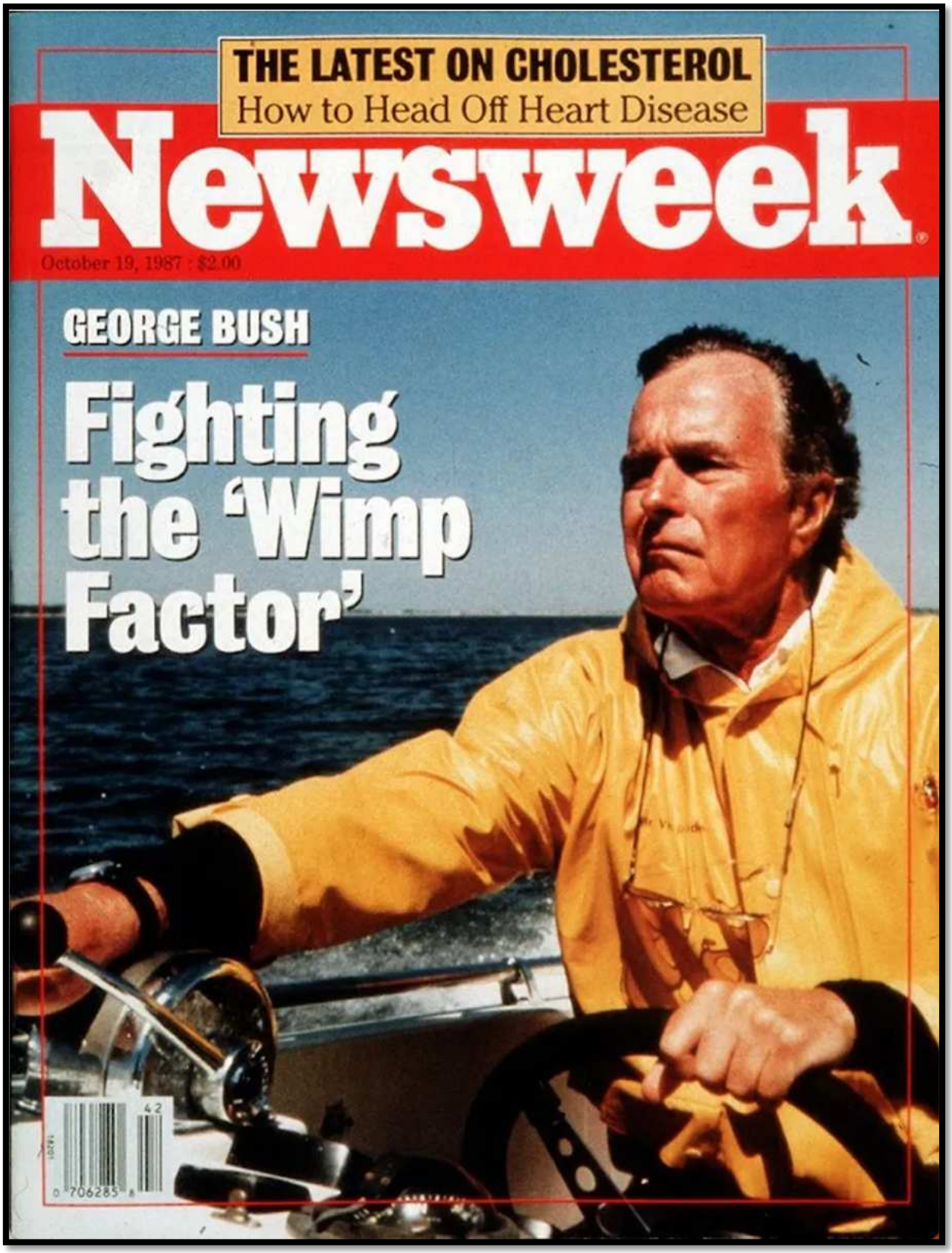

Figure 15. "Fighting the 'Wimp Factor.'"
Photo credit: Newsweek Magazine, October 19, 1987.

2.2 Behind the China Desk. Retaining Foreign Policy Prerogatives

Following his one-term presidency, George H. W. Bush became a subject of significant interest for historians and political analysts. They aimed to understand the complexities of his administration, which coincided with some of the most transformative years in contemporary history. In *George Bush: The Life of a Lone Star Yankee*, historian and presidential biographer Herbert Parmet depicted Bush as an unlucky president, ill-suited for his time. Parmet observed that, in contrast to the populist appeal of contemporaries such as Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, Bush's presidential style and conception of power appeared anachronistic, deeply rooted in a Republican elitist tradition that had gradually faded. "The Bush career, patterned on *noblesse oblige* concepts of public service, had proceeded with an abundance of faith in virtue as its own reward," Parmet stated. Reagan's vice president came to power at a time when the authority of the White House was increasingly questioned, with its actions scrutinized by a more assertive Congress, a pervasive and influential media (particularly television), and the public. "Bush, who had to withstand both carping from the Republican right and control by a Democratic Congress, found even his greatest achievements – liquidating the Cold War and countering the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait – vitiated by the realities of international and domestic politics," noted Parmet. During his four-year term, Bush faced a combative, Democrat-led Congress and rarely enjoyed full legislative support. As the case of China demonstrates, he attempted to reclaim foreign policy prerogatives traditionally held by the Executive branch and now contested by policymakers. Bush "aimed toward the White House, only to find, by the time he arrived at this goal, that presidential power was not what it had once been," concluded Parmet.[425]

George H. W. Bush's conception of the presidential office, atypical for that time, was further analyzed by Jon Meacham who authored *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush*. The 41st president was portrayed as the "last Gentleman" sitting in the Oval Office capable of resisting "ideological certainty and eloquent abstraction."[426] Not a leader "on horseback," but a head of state "dedicated more to steadiness than to boldness, more to reform than revolution, more to the management of complexity than the making of mass movements."[427] This unconventional style, especially compared to his

[425] Herbert S. Parmet, *George Bush: The life of a Lone Star Yankee* (New York: Scribner, 1997).
[426] Jon Meacham, *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush* (New York: Random House, 2015).
[427] Ibid. Meacham, *Destiny and Power*, p.31.

Republican predecessors, was appreciated by John Sununu, Bush's Chief of Staff, who praised the president's wise temperament and judicious approach. In *The Quiet Man. The Indispensable Presidency of George H. W. Bush*, Sununu depicted President Bush as "the right man, with the right experience, with the right disposition, with the right sense of history, and with the right self-discipline."[428] While acknowledging that little progress was achieved in U.S.-China relations during Bush's tenure, Sununu argued that the president's closed-door personal diplomacy and resistance to congressional pressures were crucial in maintaining precarious ties with China. Following the Tiananmen Square crackdown, Bush's ability to put emotions aside helped avoid anticipated Chinese antagonism in international affairs. For instance, Sununu contended that without Bush's diplomatic restraint, Beijing would have likely vetoed the UN Security Council Resolution 678 in November 1990, which authorized "the use of all necessary means" to restore peace in Kuwait following the Iraqi invasion (more of which later in this chapter).[429] On a similar line, historian Timothy Naftali in his book simply titled *George H. W. Bush*, praised the president's wisdom and prudence during a time of significant global transformations. "While lacking in rhetorical gifts or charisma, he led an administration that impressed adversaries and reassured allies in a period of rapid and dramatic international change," argued Naftali.[430]

The Bush Administration's China policy following the crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators has prompted mixed reviews from analysts and historians. Jeffry Engel, who edited Bush's *China Diary* and worked closely with the former president, highlighted Bush's significant achievement in maintaining dialogue with the PRC. "Believing engagement to be the root cause of China's transformation to date, and its isolation inherently dangerous, Bush ensured at the least that Beijing and Washington could continue to communicate in its aftermath. Neither liked what the other had said or had done. But they continued to talk," praised Engle in his *When the World Seemed New*.[431] Conversely, other analysts have criticized Bush's approach, particularly his tendency to uphold the *status quo* with the Chinese leadership during a period when change seemed inevitable. In *About Face*, journalist and China expert James Mann argued that "the more Bush tried to perpetuate the past, the more he

[428] John H. Sununu, *The Quiet Man. The Indispensable Presidency of George H. W. Bush* (Broadside Books, 2017), p.497.
[429] "United Nations Security Council Resolution 678" quoted in Sununu, *The Quiet Man*, p.432.
[430] Timothy J. Naftali, *George H.W. Bush* (New York: Times Books, 2007), p.3.
[431] Jeffrey A. Engel, *When the World Seemed New: George H. W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2017), p.9.

unintentionally ushered in the new."[432] The president's personal attachment to China and his confidence in Deng Xiaoping's modernization efforts seemed to have constrained his agenda in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Massacre. Consequently, his foreign policy strategy led to widespread disappointment. An increasingly confrontational Congress, a disillusioned American public, and a distrustful Chinese leadership dominated by hardliners expressed dissatisfaction toward Bush's China policy.

In his aforementioned *China Diary*, Bush eventually reflected on his approach to shaping relations with Beijing and conducting China policy from Washington. "I took some hits for not being tougher on the Chinese, but my long history with Deng and the other leaders made it possible for us to work through the crises without derailing Sino-American relations, which would have been a disaster. I was a big believer then, and still am, that personal diplomacy can be very useful and productive," recalled the former president.[433] When it came to China, George H. W. Bush showed no willingness to delegate, sensing that his experience as unofficial ambassador and the relations he had built before sitting in the Oval Office were unmatched within his Administration or elsewhere in Washington. "I had a keen personal interest in China and I thought I understood it reasonably well, enough to closely direct our policy toward it," wrote Bush in *A World Transformed*, co-authored with Brent Scowcroft.[434] A letter appeared in *The Washington Times* in 1991 framed the president's years in Beijing, providing a sense of his attachment to the former Middle Kingdom. George Bush's "favorite sport was riding a bicycle roaming around the ancient city of Beijing. With an old sweater on, George Bush became just one of the millions of people riding bicycles in the dusty streets of China. He witnessed the poverty and sufferings of seemingly endless people; he experienced the good will and sincere daily struggles of a country trying to feed closed to one billion people, George Bush was possibly deeply impressed by the ageless Chinese culture and the potentials of this immense country. He would never forget that China represents one quarter of this world's population. No matter how poor this country might be and how deviant the Chinese government seemed to be, one could never ignore China."[435] While the commentary presented a highly idealized depiction of Bush's engagements with the Chinese, comprehending the rationale behind the president's post-June 1989 China policy necessitates consideration of his extensive

[432] James Mann, *About Face. A History of America's Curious Relationship with China from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Random House 1999), p.175.
[433] George H. W. Bush and Jeffrey A. Engel, *The China Diary of George H. W. Bush. The Making of a Global President* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
[434] George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998), p.-
[435] Jane H. Hu, Letter to the Editor: MFN, China, and Chinese, *The Washington Times*, 1991.

experience in the country. President Bush was well aware that the Chinese would strongly resist any interference in the PRC's internal affairs, especially during a period when the leadership was under scrutiny both domestically and internationally. The Chinese should be approached not through direct confrontation but rather through subtle, behind-the-scenes diplomacy, steering clear of the public outrage stemming from the events in Beijing and other major cities in June 1989. "The Chinese are extremely sensitive to anything that might be interpreted as interference in their internal affairs, the legacy of many decades of damaging foreign intrusion. This was not simply a matter of wishing others to mind their own business. For this understandably proud, ancient, and inward-looking people, foreign criticism (from peoples they still perceived as "barbarians" and colonialists untutored in Chinese ways) was an affront, and measures taken against them a return to the coercions of the past," reflected President Bush.[436] His markedly personal approach to China-related matters eventually unsettled policymakers on Capitol Hill and seemed unsuitable for an era increasingly critical of personal diplomacy as a method for conducting foreign policy.

From the onset of his presidency and the appointment of the members of his administration, Bush exhibited a deliberate inclination to maintain direct engagement in shaping China policy. As Jean A. Garrison showed in *Making China Policy*, Bush formed a team that reflected this intention. Notably, he appointed James Lilley as ambassador to Beijing, who replaced Winston Lord right before the Tiananmen unrest. The appointment of the China-born former CIA operative underscored the president's commitment to closely managing U.S.-China relations. Lilley, who had previously collaborated with Bush when they both served in China in the mid-70s, "was to be Bush's eyes and ears and help him take charge of China policy more directly."[437] Additionally, as relations with Beijing became increasingly entangled with pressing domestic interests ranging from humanitarian concerns to economic interdependencies, Secretary of State James Baker took a step back from Chinese affairs, focusing more on other world theatres.[438] Nevertheless, the State Department's involvement in China policy was always ensured by Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, who frequently served as the administration's spokesperson in Congress. His close collaboration with Brent Scowcroft – both had previously worked closely with Henry Kissinger – ensured

[436] Ibid. Bush and Scowcroft, *A World* Transformed, p.-
[437] Jean A. Garrison, *Making China Policy. From Nixon to G. W. Bush* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), p.108.
[438] James A. Baker III's declassified papers at Princeton University Mudd Manuscript Library contain very few documents related to China as to testify that the Secretary of State was not heavily involved in China policy decision-making.

effective cooperation between the State Department and the National Security Council, the executive branch primarily involved in China policy. As Scowcroft recalled towards the end of the 1990s, this arrangement maintained a degree of balance within the Administration: "There were no overt differences. Jim Baker pretty much absented himself from China policy. It was done to the extent that it was done by Larry Eagleburger with me. But there were no strong differences of opinion about what we ought to do with the Chinese in the administration."[439]

When confronted with criticisms from Congress, President Bush appeared to entrust the management of the China agenda to the State Department, specifically relying on Eagleburger. David S. Broder, a political commentator for *The Washington Post*, offered a vivid portrayal of Bush's Deputy Secretary of State: "I'm starting a new nonprofit organization called the Larry Eagleburger Rescue League," joked Broder. "Lawrence S. Eagleburger, the rumpled professional diplomat who is deputy secretary of state, is maybe a pound or two on the plump side – and a chain-smoker. But the real threat to his health and well-being is that he has to climb up Capitol Hill time after time burdened by the task of defending the president's almost indefensible China policy."[440] Broder implied that the President, feeling self-reliant in his approach to China, was ultimately responsible for a policy related to relations with Beijing that was inconsistent. "Free Larry Eagleburger from this folly, Mr. President," Broder concluded. Similarly, in 1992, Robert S. Greenberger contended that "President Bush just can't get over his case of unrequited love for China." Writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, Greenberger observed that "he bestows benefit after benefit on Beijing, and China breaks promise after promise."[441]

In the summer of 1991, *The Los Angeles Times* speculated that President Bush was often referred to as the "China desk officer" among Administration officials. This role was typically assigned to low-ranking State Department officials responsible for handling day-to-day matters related to a specific foreign country, signaling how much the president preferred not to delegate duties concerning China.[442] "The problems that as Bush assumes the role of China desk officer,

[439] Interview with Brent Scowcroft, November 12, 1999, George H.W. Bush Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia.
[440] David D. Broder, "Eagleburger: Taking the Flak on China," *The Washington Post*, June 23, 1991.
[441] Robert S. Greenberger, "As Bush Is Set to Extend China's Favored Status, Broken Commitments Again May Be Response," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 29, 1992.
[442] Similarly, *The New York Times* wrote: "The Administration's China policy, for the most part, is made in the White House by Mr. Bush and his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft. Because of Mr. Bush's close interest, dating to his service in Beijing, he is sometimes jokingly referred to as the China desk officer, a job that actually belongs to a mid-level State Department official who monitors day-to-day events." See Neil A. Lewis, "The U.S. Tries to Decide Just How Important China Is," *The New York Times* May 12, 1991.

the other top members of his foreign policy team begin to bow out," commented the West Coast newspaper. The President appeared to exert excessive influence over the State Department's management of day-to-day affairs related to Beijing. As a consequence, the most prominent figure to have stepped out from the China policy formulation was undoubtedly James Baker. The Secretary of State "has made it plain that he does not want to stake his personal prestige on China or be too closely involved in the policy making," instead focusing on issues related to the Soviet Union and other areas.[443] The same speculation was echoed by *The Washington Post*, which noted that the President frequently made decisions regarding China without prior internal notification. This pattern was exemplified by the 1991 renewal of MFN status for China, a move that "threw the administration's political and foreign policy-making apparatus into some turmoil."[444] According to *The Los Angeles Times*, a significant indication that China had become "very much a domestic political issue," as claimed by Roger W. Sullivan, President of the U.S.-China Business Council, was the increasingly relevant role of John Sununu, the White House Chief of Staff, who had more and more assumed an informal yet significant role as Bush's foreign policy adviser on China. Sununu, along with Scowcroft and Lilley, was the only person within the Bush Administration whom the president allowed to read and comment on the personal letter he wrote to Deng Xiaoping two weeks after the Tiananmen Crackdown.[445] The article, authored by James Mann, had reached the president's desk, where it was dismissed as "pure unadulterated bullshit" by Bush.[446]

However, these observations seemed to be more than mere journalistic speculations. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), which eventually became a key player in Washington's debate on China policy (refer to Chapter Three), it was "widely understood that President Bush sets the agenda on China as for no other country in the world." The organization suggested that not everyone at the State Department appreciated this direct involvement, as it inevitably constrained the autonomy of the foreign policy executive branch. "State Department critics label President Bush the Department's "China desk officer," implying that the president is personally involved in the smallest details of U.S.-China relations," suggested the organization. Most importantly, HRW noted that these internal dynamics had serious

[443] James Mann, "U.S. has New Point Man on China Policy," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1990.
[444] Dan Oberdorfer and Ann Devroy, "Bush Seeks to Keep China Trade Status. Intense Debate on Benefits Expected," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 1991.
[445] "I gave the letter to Brent, and only he, Jim, and John Sununu read it. I hoped that its openness, and the prior personal warmth between Deng and me, would make some difference in reestablishing communication," in Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p.-
[446] GHWBPR, WHORM, Subject File - General, People's Republic of China.

implications for Beijing's leadership, who felt protected by a president willing to justify his measures, even if they were repressive. "The significance of the president's extraordinary personal identification with the Chinese leadership cannot be overstated. It signals to the repressive regime that it has nothing to fear from the United States, no matter how much criticism it receives from other quarters," warned HRW.[447] Winston Lord argued that the president's attempts to maintain control over China policy and his reluctance to compromise with Congress – especially in relation to the provision of commercial benefits – would likely be "misconstrued by China's hardliners" and interpreted as a green light from Washington no matter how brutal and repressive actions taken by the Communist government were. Writing for *The New York Times* Lord cautioned that "Beijing might conclude that there is no limit to our toleration of its abuses."[448]

Given the contentious environment in which the Administration advocated for preserving the relationship with China, President Bush and the few officials responsible for managing these relations often lacked the necessary support and reliable interlocutors to develop a well-conceived policy. This challenge was particularly pronounced in the months following the crackdown, as evidenced by the significant disagreement among Chinese academic experts in the United States with the Administration's approach. As Scowcroft evoked, a few weeks after taking office, "we had a half a dozen of them at Camp David for the weekend to talk philosophically about China, what was China about, and so on. In June, all of those experts deserted us, deserted the administration on how to deal with it. We were pretty much thrown back on our own resources." Most of the information on which the administration relied for decisions concerning China came from the Embassy in Beijing and personal networks, but these sources were often insufficient. Consequently, Washington's China task-force officials had to depend heavily "on our own instincts." During this period, the Administration had very limited contacts with key figures within the Chinese regime. The Ambassador's access was severely restricted, military contacts had ceased (while they had previously been extensive), and although intelligence cooperation continued, it was primarily focused on the Soviet Union. Thus, there was a significant absence of dialogue. As the national security advisor recalled, "it was a period in which knowledge about how the Chinese thinking was evolving—either from the top level, the contacts we had had, or at the bureaucratic level—was largely lacking."[449]

[447] Human Rights Watch World Report 1992 - China and Tibet, 1 January 1992.
[448] Winston Lord, "Bush's Second Chance on China," *The New York Times*, May 9, 1990.
[449] Ibid. Interview with Brent Scowcroft, November 12, 1999.

In the absence of direct engagement with the Chinese leadership, the President struggled to comprehend the internal dynamics of the PRC leadership. To address this challenge, he relied heavily on General Scowcroft, Deputy Secretary Eagleburger, and Ambassador Lilley, as well as former President Nixon and former Secretary Kissinger, in his efforts to decipher the intricate political landscape within China. By the end of the summer of 1989 the communication between Washington and Beijing had severely interrupted and both Nixon and Kissinger were asked to travel to China "to get the lay of land and see whether there was any possibility for some movement back toward a relationship."[450] Both advocates of engagement with China, they firmly believed that Beijing should not be left in isolation without diplomatic contact and emphasized the necessity of finding a means to resume dialogue with the Chinese leadership. Before his journey at the end of October 1989, Richard Nixon wrote a personal letter to Deng Xiaoping, stating that he would be visiting Beijing as a private citizen with the aim of easing the tensions between the two countries. Nixon encouraged Deng to move past the harsh rhetoric that had surfaced following the massacre. He wrote, "no purpose would be served by debating whether the media exaggerated the tragic events of June 4, whether the Chinese government had reason to be concerned about revolutionary activities, or whether the reaction of the United States and other countries to those events has been excessive."[451] Nixon also urged the PRC leader to empathize with the American perspective, noting that the massacre had been shocking for many in the United States who did not anticipate it. He stated, "the fact is that many in the United States, including many friends of China, believe that the crackdown was excessive and unjustified. The events of April through June damaged the respect and confidence which most Americans previously had for the leaders of China." In his letter, the former president called for a return to the spirit that had driven the rapprochement in the early 1970s, when, despite significant differences, common interests, and a willingness to move beyond the past, enabled Washington and Beijing to establish peaceful and productive relations. Nixon emphasized that the Bush Administration sided with Deng as his role remained crucial for maintaining stability and progress within China and open dialogue with the United States. "Whether the reactions in either country are justified or not is irrelevant. We must deal

[450] Ibid. Interview with Brent Scowcroft, November 12, 1999.
[451] Letter from Richard Nixon to Deng Xiaoping, October 6, 1989, James A. Baker III Papers, MC #197, Series 8: Secretary of State, Box 101 – Folder 43 Richard M. Nixon, 1988-1992, Princeton University, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library.

with the facts that this reaction exists and that if we are to restore our previous relationship, it is vitally important to clear the air," exhorted Nixon.[452]

The media had anticipated and condemned the possibility of visits by former high-ranking officials. In July 1989 columnist Jim Hoagland remarked, "Nixon, Kissinger and President Bush, all supposedly practitioners of Realpolitik, give away the leverage the United States could be using on China by arguing that it does no good to isolate or punish China. This is judgment based on sentiment and nostalgia, and on an illusion of "friendship." Deng and his blood stained associates have to be judged by what they are today, not by what Nixon and the others want them to be."[453] Despite these trips being arranged during a period when public tolerance for communication with the PRC leadership was nonexistent in Washington, both Nixon's and Kissinger's visits suggested that the Chinese were willing to initiating a dialogue, indicating a potential for partially restoring the relationship. Therefore, following their initial secret mission to China in July 1989 discussed in the previous chapter, Scowcroft and Eagleburger travelled back to Beijing in December of the same year. During this visit, they engaged with key figures, including Premier Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping. The principal objectives of these discussions were to address the outcomes of the recent Malta summit between President Bush and Chairman Gorbachev, to assess developments in Eastern Europe (more of which later in this chapter), as well as "to underscore [Bush'] personal interest in putting our relationship back on a positive rather than negative track."[454] In his dialogues with senior CCP officials, Scowcroft highlighted the Administration's intent to sustain dialogue with China and to formulate a strategy for realigning the bilateral relationship during a period marked by significant global changes, arguably the most transformative since World War II. The National Security Advisor also urged the Chinese leadership to acknowledge the highly challenging domestic context in the United States, where President Bush was compelled to make decisions regarding China that were largely unpopular.

The December 1989 discussions highlighted the U.S. effort to reassure the Chinese leadership that the improving relations between Washington and Moscow would not pose a threat to Beijing. The transcripts reveal that the U.S. emphasized its cautious stance toward developments within the Soviet Union, aiming to alleviate any concerns within the CCP

[452] Ibid. Letter from Richard Nixon to Deng Xiaoping, October 6, 1989.
[453] *Jim Hoagland, "*This Is No Time to Visit China, Mr. Nixon," *The New York Times*, July 18, 1989.
[454] Memorandum of Conversation Meeting between Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and National Security Advisor Scowcroft, Beijing, December 9, 1989, GHWBPR, NSC, Douglas Paal Files, China – Sensitive – 1989.

following the Malta Summit. This approach was intended to ease the growing anxiety among Chinese leaders about the implications of closer U.S.-Soviet ties. Despite the "many hopeful signs in the attitude of Mr. Gorbachev" toward the various changing circumstances in Europe and Asia, President Bush was said to be willing to adopt a cautious and measured approach to developments in the region. Scowcroft expressed a pessimistic view on Gorbachev's prospects, pointing out the enormous challenges he faced in transitioning the Soviet economic system. "He himself does not appear to have a very sophisticated attitude about the economic system, of some of the issues in moving to a market economy or changing the fundamentals from a command to a commodity economy," Scowcroft noted. However, despite these significant challenges, there was no internal threat to Gorbachev's leadership or any credible alternatives to his policies. His economic approach was described as "highly experimental and not so carefully thought out," yet Gorbachev appeared willing to show flexibility, a characteristic that was viewed positively.[455] In addressing the recurring inquiry from PRC officials about whether the Cold War had now ended, Scowcroft stated, "I believe it is premature, however, to come to any final historical conclusions that the ambitions of the Soviet Union – either those ambitions coming out of a Stalinist drive for expansion after World War II or the fundamental Russian impulse toward expansion – have been significantly lessened or eliminated."[456]

On their part, the Chinese commended both the Americans and the Soviets for refraining from intervention in Eastern Europe, allowing the situation to be resolved based on the self-determination of the people involved. Foreign Minister Qian Qichen asserted, "these events belong to the internal affairs of the countries."[457] However, the PRC officials also emphasized that similar movements would not gain traction in China. The primary objective of the CCP leadership was to maintain order in a country vastly different from the former Soviet states in terms of population, geographic location, historical background, and tradition. General Secretary Jiang Zemin highlighted that China was a nation that "tends to resist foreign

[455] The national security advisor also argued: "On the evaluation of Gorbachev and his prospects I think one has to be pessimistic. He faces enormous problems is his announced goal of the transition of that economic system. He himself does not appear to have a very sophisticated attitude about the economic system, of some of the issues in moving to a market economy or changing the fundamentals from a command to a commodity economy […] While his challenges are formidable to say the least, it is not our view that he faces any internal challenge to his leadership or any alternative choices to the policy that he is pursuing. And his economic approach seems highly experimental and not so carefully thought out so that he continues to follow a fixed course. Faced with problems he seems quite prepared to abandon an approach to try something else. That could be good or bad."
[456] Memorandum of Conversation Meeting between General Secretary Jiang Zemin and National Security Advisor Scowcroft, Beijing, December 10, 1989, GHWBPR, NSC, Douglas Paal Files, China – Sensitive – 1989.
[457] Memorandum of Conversation Meeting between Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and National Security Advisor Scowcroft, Beijing, December 9, 1989, GHWBPR, NSC, Douglas Paal Files, China – Sensitive – 1989.

aggression." Despite acknowledging some ongoing domestic issues due to economic straggle and internal opposition forces, which were deemed unlikely to become mainstream, Li Peng was unequivocal with the American delegation: "Bring a message back to the masses in the United States that the political situation in China is stable."[458]

In his talk with Scowcroft, Deng Xiaoping emphasized the mutual interest in improving Sino-American relations, suggesting that the visit aimed to resolve existing disagreements and foster a new course in the dialogue between the two nations. "General Scowcroft, you have come to brief us on the Malta meeting but in reality, you have come here to put an end our disputes, so our relations can develop new confidence," asserted the paramount leader. Deng reassured that China posed no threat to the United States and had never acted against American interests since 1972. He however highlighted China's unique international influence, warning that internal instability would "not be confined to a regional nature," potentially having detrimental repercussions for both China and the United States. Deng also acknowledged the uncertainty surrounding the turmoil in Eastern Europe but underscored the importance of Sino-U.S. cooperation for global peace, advocating for both nations to avoid "fighting each other." He requested that Scowcroft convey to President Bush the need "to put an end to our dispute by taking into consideration the interests of the other side by both sides."[459]

Despite numerous challenges, Scowcroft and Eagleburger succeeded in developing a roadmap with the Chinese during their discussions. The Americans secured some concessions, such as the release of several prisoners involved in the Tiananmen protests. However, the Chinese did not make substantial further commitments, leading to Scowcroft's disappointment with the negotiations' outcomes. Reflecting on the situation, Scowcroft later stated, "I don't have any regrets about the policy or the way I advised the President on the policy. I do have a regret about the trip to China in December of 1989, where I was, in effect, sandbagged by the Chinese. That's a personal regret." According to the national security advisor, the deposition and assassination of Romanian leader Nicolae Ceausescu on December 25, 1989, marked a significant turning point. As the last socialist leader in Eastern Europe following the democratic wave that swept the region, Ceausescu's fall prompted the Chinese to retreat from their previously promised progress and openness. Scowcroft observed, "my sense of that was that

[458] Memorandum of Conversation Meeting between Premier Li Peng and National Security Advisor Scowcroft, Beijing, December 10, 1989, GHWBPR, NSC, Douglas Paal Files, China – Sensitive – 1989.
[459] Memorandum of Conversation Meeting between Deng Xiaoping and National Security Advisor Scowcroft, Beijing, December 10, 1989, GHWBPR, NSC, Douglas Paal Files, China – Sensitive – 1989.

the Chinese, during this period of 1989, were watching Communism fall in country after country. Everywhere it was giving way except Romania. I remember them commenting to me about the strength of the Romanian system. I think when that, the last remaining other than the Soviet Union, in the whole Communist lexicon of the Warsaw Pact, they decided, *We can't afford to let up in any way*."[460]



"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

New York: Today, partly sunny. High 36. Tonight cloudy, not as cold. Low 27. Tomorrow, more clouds than sun, some rain or snow late. High 38. Yesterday: High 31, low 19. Details are on page 61.

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The Challenge of Keeping U.S. Technology at Home

By ANDREW POLLACK

Despite mounting concern about the nation's dependence on Japan and other foreign nations for important technology, keeping crucial components or machinery in American hands is proving exceedingly difficult.

The latest example of the trend is that the Perkin-Elmer Corporation, unable to find an American buyer for a division that makes equipment for manufacturing computer chips, has opened talks with a Japanese company.

American companies, whose worry is mainly directed at Japan, fear that if they become dependent on foreign companies they will not be granted access to the most advanced machinery or components as quickly as their foreign competitors, putting them at a severe disadvantage.

But such fears are somewhat hypothetical, and American companies have been unwilling to hurt their own profits and anger their shareholders merely out of a sense of patriotism. This observation is true particularly because many of the businesses up for sale are seriously troubled and costly to turn around.

And even when American companies are willing to make such investments, they are often outbid by Japanese companies, which can borrow money at lower interest rates in their country and face less pressure to produce quick profits on their investments.

A Series of Sales

One result is a continued series of sales that distress the nation. "We all become national treasures after deals are made," said

Shift in Control

Market share for wafer steppers, a device central to manufacturing semiconductors

75%

U.S.

Brent Scowcroft, right, the national security adviser, toasting Prime Minister Qian Qichen of China yesterday at a state banquet, part of a previously unannounced visit by American officials to Beijing.

TOP AIDES TO BUSH ARE VISITING CHINA TO MEND RELATIONS

SEEK COMMON INTERESTS

In Unexpected Policy Shift, Scowcroft Announces End to Beijing Quarantine

By STEVEN ERLANGER

Special to The New York Times

BEIJING, Dec. 9 — The White House national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, made a surprise visit to Beijing today and said he had come as an emissary of President Bush "to bring new impetus and vigor" into United States-Chinese relations.

Ending a suspension of high-level contacts with China imposed after soldiers in Beijing killed hundreds of democracy demonstrators in June, Mr. Scowcroft said it was time for the United States and China to find areas where agreement is possible and "to isolate for another time those areas of

Figure 16. The New York Times, December 10, 1989.

"Now may I propose a toast to the People's Republic of China:
To the health of President Yang;
To the great Chinese people; and
To the U.S.-China friendship."[461]

The situation was further complicated when Scowcroft was captured toasting U.S.-China friendship with champagne alongside Chinese officials, a photograph prominently featured on the front page of *The New York Times*. This image was subsequently referenced in Congressional discussions regarding the renewal of MFN status for China. The public's memory of the secretive high-level visits to Beijing, combined with the lasting visual of Scowcroft's toast in December 1989, significantly influenced domestic opinion. "Just more champagne for Beijing?" pondered *The Los Angeles Times* questioning whether the Administration had underestimated the potential public backlash from such discreet diplomatic actions, suggesting that these events could have a lasting impact on Bush's China policy. This posed a significant challenge for the President, as the renewal of MFN status, while intended

[460] Interview with Brent Scowcroft, November 12, 1999, George H.W. Bush Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia.
[461] Text of Toast by the Honorable Brent Scowcroft, Beijing, December 9, 1989, GHWBPR, WHO of Public Liaison, James Shaeffer Files, Foreign Military Sales to China, Scowcroft Visit.

as "a wise American investment in China's future," risked being overshadowed by negative domestic perceptions associated with the toast.[462] At the press conference held right after the photos were made public, asked why the president did not wait for the Chinese to make a move toward the U.S. given the fact that the offense was allegedly on their side, the White House Press Secretary, Marlin Fitzwater, answered: "primarily, events in the world. Certainly, the changes in the Soviet Union. The reforms underway in the Eastern bloc countries. The tearing down of the Berlin Wall. All of these issues, plus the Malta summit, itself, with Chairman Gorbachev, convinced the President that we could no longer allow or force China to remain in isolation. We need to know their views. We need to ensure that they have a viewpoint that is understood as we consider all of these changes in Europe and the Soviet Union."[463] Pressed by reporters regarding a mission that many considered unjustifiable, Fitzwater endeavored to defend the dispatch of the two envoys while articulating the president's rationale behind the decision. "The point being that the United States has always felt, particularly President Bush has always felt, that we must express our moral outrage and indignation at the events of June in Tiananmen Square, and we must take actions to adequately represent that feeling throughout the world," Fitzwater explained. "But that we would not turn our back on productive relations with China in some fashion and that it was a country with which we would continue to try to normalize relations as soon as it was feasible and possible." In response to the press, Fitwater attempted to mitigate the moral concerns associated with the visit by contextualizing it within the broader American practice of prioritizing national interests. "You can go around the world and name country after country where we have diplomatic relations where we do business with them on routine basis in a government-to-government way and yet in which we deplore their human rights values and many of their democratic principles and so forth. Nicaragua is a prime example. They're all over the world."[464] Reflecting on the outcome of the mission to Beijing, Scowcroft acknowledged, "it does not go to the policy, although it certainly didn't help when I was filmed in a toast to the Chinese, didn't help the view of the Bush administration and the way we were treating China. But that's a small point. That's really the only thing I think was mismanaged."[465] The revelation of secret visits by American envoys to China shortly after the Tiananmen Square crackdown further intensified Congressional scrutiny of the

[462] "Just More Champagne for Beijing?" *The Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1990.
[463] Press Briefing by Marlin Fitzwater, December 11, 1989, GHWBPR, NSC, Virginia Lampley Files, China.
[464] Ibid. Press Briefing by Marlin Fitzwater, December 11, 1989.
[465] Ibid. Interview with Brent Scowcroft, November 12, 1999.

Administration's China policy, a topic that will be explored in greater depth in the following section.



Figure 17. Brent Scowcroft during the December 1989 visit to China.
Photo credit: Forrest Anderson via Getty Images.

2.3 All Eyes on China. A President Under Domestic Scrutiny

By the beginning of the new decade, the Bush Administration had made minimal progress in its relations with China. Despite efforts to reestablish direct communication channels with the leadership in Beijing, developments in Europe and Asia had obstructed new concessions and initiatives on the Chinese side. Domestically, concerns were mounting in Washington regarding the White House's reluctance to compromise on the China policy. Signals of a return to business as usual became increasingly likely and, for many on Capitol Hill and among the American public, unacceptably disturbing. Many feared that the Administration's continued secretive management of relations implied tacit support for those responsible for the massacre. Despite extending his efforts beyond his initial intentions, President Bush had successfully lobbied the Senate to uphold his veto on the so-called Pelosi Bill, which aimed to loosen visa requirements and expiration for Chinese nationals attending university in the United States (refer to Chapter One). This effectively prevented Congress from taking a strong stance on foreign policy and relations with the PRC. Bush subsequently issued an Executive Order to secure strong assurances for Chinese students and scholars to remain in the U.S., reaffirming his executive control over U.S. China policy. However, by centralizing decision-making power in matters related to China, he failed to provide members of Congress with an adequate means to express their outrage over the repression of pro-democracy movements in Beijing. As the majority of the Republican Senators reaffirmed their trust in the Administration's ability to manage American relations with the PRC leadership – hinting at a decline in bipartisanship – the debate on China was rapidly disrupted by new matters likely to compromise the precarious equilibrium reached in Washington.

January 1990 marked a significant turning point in the history of how American policy-making toward the PRC had entered the domestic public debate in the United States in the wake of the Tiananmen pro-democracy protests. Harvard University emerged as the epicenter of a new wave of shocks, bearing the potential to unleash another disrupting earthquake in the making of Washington's China policy. Together with the representatives of the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars (IFCSS) – which had gained unprecedented leverage on the policy debate through its lobby activity in Washington – and several other people including staff members sent to Boston by representatives in Congress, Nancy Pelosi – the only member of Congress at Harvard – mapped out a new path to follow on the China matter, signaling that she and her colleagues would not give up on claiming their role in foreign

policy-making. The upcoming annual renewal of Most Favored Nation (MFN) commercial status for Beijing, a customary process scheduled to take place every year by the beginning of June, was poised to become the next focal point for those on Capitol Hill who did not align with President Bush's stance on China. Winston Lord, who had developed a close friendship with Nancy Pelosi following the Tiananmen massacre, advised her that initiating actions related to the renewal of MFN status could strategically garner public attention on the China matter. According to James Mann, the former head of *The Los Angeles Times* bureau in Beijing, who extensively covered relations between the United States and China, "none of those at the Harvard conference could have recognized the long-term consequences of their decision to target China's MFN benefits. None was aware that they were starting a series of annual legislative battles that would continue through most of the decade and would prove far more enduring than the Chinese student movement itself."[466] Beyond expectations, which included those of Pelosi, her staff, Chinese students, and other attendees with an interest in China policy, the Harvard meeting marked the beginning of a new domestic clash concerning China. This conflict would endure for years, spanning two administrations. Once again, similar to the previous battle over the status of Chinese students and scholars in the U.S., immigration, human rights, and – this time even more prominently – economic and commercial concerns would become the focal points of the new debate.

By the spring of 1990, the Administration acknowledged that renewing China's MFN commercial status would face more challenges compared to the previous decade. The president was scheduled to submit his recommendation on the extension of trade benefits to Congress by June 3, a date that coincidentally overlapped with the anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre. A confidential memorandum issued by the National Security Council for President Bush in early April, stressed the problematic stalemate in U.S.-China relations and the ongoing struggle with Congress. It foresaw that the upcoming months would be exceptionally challenging. "An ugly confrontation with Congress and Beijing awaits us over waiver of Jackson-Vanik for China," warned the National Security Advisor. According to Brent Scowcroft, the Administration should quickly grab the reins of a galloping Congress and play it by ear "to move from defense to offense domestically on China issues while maximizing incentives for China to take steps in the right direction." Once again, a challenging battle loomed ahead as

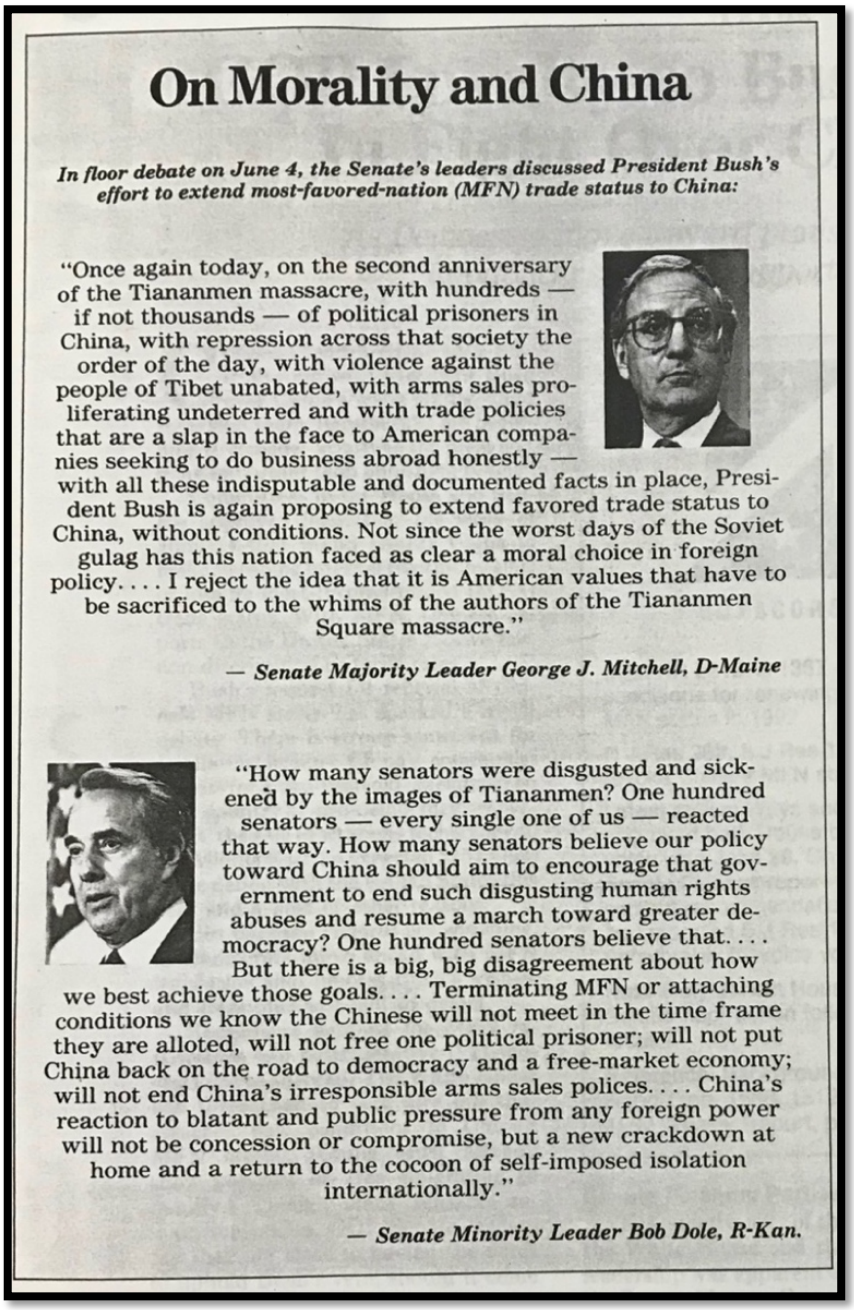
[466] Ibid. Mann, *About Face*, p.231. William Quinn, Pelosi's legislative assistant, who attended the gathering in Cambridge Massachusetts, would recall years later that "the Harvard meeting was pretty low-key. I remember I flew to Boston, and I thought *Oh Gosh, I probably should not be here*." Interview with Quinn, June 13, 2023.

reports from Capitol Hill staffers suggested that Congress members were "eager to humiliate our China policy."[467] These rumors were confirmed in a confidential letter addressed to the president by Senator Bob Dole (R-KS), a figure historically opposed to close ties with Beijing and one of Capitol Hill's staunchest supporters of relations with Taiwan since the 1970s. "On the MFN issue, they smell blood [and] frankly, as things now stand, their sense of smell is probably pretty good" cautioned Dole.[468] According to the senator from Kansas, the Democrats were willing to exploit the MFN renewal debate to denounce the inconsistency and amorality of the China policy put forth by the Administration since June 1989.

In his letter, Dole referenced a speech by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME), who, along with Pelosi, emerged as a key figure in the MFN debate among Democrats in Congress. On the Senate floor, Mitchell criticized Bush's approach toward China, asserting that "rarely has a policy been as obvious or as complete a failure." He argued that this policy had not yielded any positive outcomes for human rights in China or the bilateral relationship. Mitchell contended that the unconditional granting of MFN trading status would convey a misleading message to both the American people and the Chinese, constituting "a betrayal of American ideals" that ignored Washington's longstanding commitment to democracy and freedom. Just as France provided moral support to colonial aspirations against the power of Great Britain, serving as "an anchor to which our people clung," the United States should similarly support the Chinese people in their struggle against oppressive governance. Drawing rhetorical parallels to America's own history in the late 18th century, Mitchell claimed that "Force can crush unarmed people. But force cannot crush an idea. Force cannot dam a desire. Force cannot quell hope. What can crush hope is the lack of moral support. Ours is a nation that gained strength and legitimacy from moral support."[469] Doing business with the PRC leadership, who had shown no willingness to advance towards compliance with internationally recognized human rights norms, was a grave error. In his correspondence, Senator Dole cautioned that even among Republicans supporting the Administration's China policy, there was concern that the president's position might not sufficiently align with the values and ideals upheld by Washington. According to Dole, the president should "somehow eliminate the impression that does exist in some circles that the Administration cares more about China's

[467] China – Game Plan for MFN, Memorandum for the President from Brent Scowcroft, April 2, 1990, GHWBPR, NSC, Karl Jackson Files, China – General 1990.
[468] Letter from Bob Dole to President Bush, May 18, 1990, GHWBPR, WHO of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, China MFN.
[469] Statement by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, United States-China Relations, Congressional Records – Senate, May 18, 1990.

strategic importance than its treatment of its own citizens." He urged the president to issue a statement affirming "in a convincing way" Washington's opposition to the ongoing violation of human rights in China. Additionally, Dole called for a "full court" lobbying effort, involving the business community, to garner support from Republican senators and reinforce party loyalty.[470]



On Morality and China

In floor debate on June 4, the Senate's leaders discussed President Bush's effort to extend most-favored-nation (MFN) trade status to China:

"Once again today, on the second anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre, with hundreds — if not thousands — of political prisoners in China, with repression across that society the order of the day, with violence against the people of Tibet unabated, with arms sales proliferating undeterred and with trade policies that are a slap in the face to American companies seeking to do business abroad honestly — with all these indisputable and documented facts in place, President Bush is again proposing to extend favored trade status to China, without conditions. Not since the worst days of the Soviet gulag has this nation faced as clear a moral choice in foreign policy. . . . I reject the idea that it is American values that have to be sacrificed to the whims of the authors of the Tiananmen Square massacre."

— Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell, D-Maine

"How many senators were disgusted and sickened by the images of Tiananmen? One hundred senators — every single one of us — reacted that way. How many senators believe our policy toward China should aim to encourage that government to end such disgusting human rights abuses and resume a march toward greater democracy? One hundred senators believe that. . . . But there is a big, big disagreement about how we best achieve those goals. . . . Terminating MFN or attaching conditions we know the Chinese will not meet in the time frame they are alloted, will not free one political prisoner; will not put China back on the road to democracy and a free-market economy; will not end China's irresponsible arms sales polices. . . . China's reaction to blatant and public pressure from any foreign power will not be concession or compromise, but a new crackdown at home and a return to the cocoon of self-imposed isolation internationally."

— Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole, R-Kan.

Figure 18. "On Morality and China."
Image credit: Congressional Quarterly, Defense & Foreign Policy, June 8, 1991.

[470] Ibid. Letter from Bob Dole to President Bush, May 18, 1990.

Regarding the moral dimension highlighted by Dole, in the wake of the June 1989 events, the images of the massacre broadcasted live on TV had contributed to quickly turn human rights turned into the main pillar of the American domestic debate on China and the president should not be left behind on this issue, at least in its rhetorical facets. "We need to move early to signal to China and to the American public your strong commitment to human rights in China before human rights activists and political opponents seize the lead," suggested Scowcroft in a confidential message to Bush, signaling the multiplication of actors engaged in the American public debate on China and the inescapable moral dimension surrounding the policy-making process. "We will want to be seen as actively interested in the human rights of the Chinese people and working against irresponsible Chinese behavior abroad," urged the National Security Advisor. In order to do so, as the first anniversary of the massacre approached and, with that, the decision on MFN, "we should modestly escalate our rhetoric of condemnation" in the hope that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) "will understand (though not agree) if they see the rhetoric protecting the policy."[471] The question of whether extend trade benefits to China was about to "become a question of international morality and American values, rather than just another debate over economic affairs or geopolitical advantage." Members of Congress would eventually frame their campaign to deny or condition MFN trade status to China primarily on moral grounds. Concurrently, President Bush was exhorted to justify his decision to grant MFN to Beijing on similar ethical principles, asserting that it was the only viable strategy to encourage China towards reform and democracy.[472]

Following the crackdown, what Scowcroft labeled the "China-watching community in the U.S." had grown exponentially, becoming increasingly vocal on the precarious human rights situation in the country. This community, along with members of Congress displeased with Bush's arguments on China, included former U.S. officials, NGOs, labor unions, consumers organizations, Chinese students and dissidents, and American scholars, among others. Their sentiment resonated deeply within the American public, garnering widespread attention and concern. The events of June 1989 had compacted a multifaceted group that was now "hurt, angry, and vengeful." This community was deeply disillusioned by the actions taken by the Bush Administration, particularly the president's veto to oppose the Pelosi Bill and the dispatch of secret emissaries to China one month after the massacre, a move perceived as contradictory

[471] Ibid. China – Game Plan for MFN, April 2, 1990.
[472] Pamela Fessler, "China Trade Creates Moral Debate Shaded by Political Undertones," *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, June 8. 1991.

to the formal suspension of high-level contacts between American and Chinese officials, enacted in response to the crackdown (refer to Chapter One). Polls confirmed the prevailing negative perception of China among Americans. According to Gallup polling data, the percentage of individuals expressing positive views of Beijing experienced a notable decline from 72 percent in February/March 1989 to 31 percent by August of the same year.[473] This trend, characterized by a marginal deviation in favorability, persisted throughout the tenure of George H. W. Bush in the White House. These figures were particularly telling when juxtaposed with Americans' perceptions of the Soviet Union. In 1990, 64 percent expressed a favorable opinion of Moscow, whereas only 39 percent viewed Beijing positively.[474] Concurrently, other polls also indicated a similar negative trajectory. According to ABC/Washington Post surveys, Americans' favorability toward China decreased from 80 percent in the spring of 1989 to 39 percent one year later.[475] However, the President's approval rating remained consistently high, making George H. W. Bush's term average "the highest of any president who served in the past [60] years." In his first year as president, his approval rating was "near 60% and surged to 70% after the Tiananmen Square incident in China in June 1989." [476] This was likely due to Americans' confidence in a president perceived as highly skilled and trustworthy in the foreign policy domain during a time of significant changes that had the potential to disrupt global stability. High approval ratings, however, did not alleviate Bush's concerned eagerness to retain control over China policy-making, nor did they satisfy the China Watching Community's willingness to influence or scrutinize these policies.

Believing that the wave of democratization that had hit Eastern Europe would eventually reach China, these latter's focus had turned to Beijing. The NSC had increasingly focused on this multifaceted group and its capacity to elevate human rights concerns within the domestic discourse on China. "Human rights activists have energy to spare following the developments in the Soviet Union and East Europe. China has rapidly become the test case for many as to how this Administration stands on human rights," warned Scowcroft. "They particularly like

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[473] Gallup Historical Trends: China (data updated to 2024), online at https://news.gallup.com/poll/1627/china.aspx (last accessed, May 2024).
[474] Taifa Yu, "The Conduct of Post-Tiananmen U.S. China Policy: Domestic Constraints, Systemic Change, and Value Incompatibility," *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, vol.19, no.4 (Winter, 1993): pp.229-247.
[475] The ABC/Washington Post polls, as well as those conducted by CBS/New York Times are cited in Wynne Pomoroy Waller and Marianne E. Ide, "Poll Trends: China and Human Rights," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol.59, no.1 (Spring 1995): pp.133-143.
[476] RJ Reinhart, "George H.W. Bush Retrospective," *Gallup Presidential Job Approval Center, online at https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/234971/george-bush-retrospective.aspx#:~:text=Bush's%20Average%20Approval%20Rating%20Compares,received%20in%20his%20last%20year* (last accessed June 2024).

China because it is easy to make the Administration look bad. Naturally, adversaries on the Hill will exploit this to the extent their constituents permit."[477] Many among Congress members and the public raised inquiries as to why the same Administration, which had embraced the democratic momentum sweeping across Eastern Europe, appeared unable to apply analogous reasoning to China. Mass demonstrations from Poland to Hungary, from East Germany to Czechoslovakia, ultimately culminating in the violent overthrow of Romania's dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, had effectively dismantled Soviet-aligned regimes in Eastern Europe. These events, which eventually resulted in the establishment of democratically elected governments replacing former socialist regimes, demonstrated that the U.S. assertive stance had produced positive outcomes.[478] This starkly contrasted with the Administration's cautious approach to China.

One year after the Tiananmen crackdown, the U.S. China-watching community was closely monitoring the White House, eager to discern the president's next move. Would he be willing to compromise with Congress and address the growing concerns on Capitol Hill? Or would he adopt a stance similar to his approach towards the immigration status of Chinese students in the United States? How would the Administration address the ongoing human rights violations in China when dealing with commercial matters? Winston Lord encapsulated this anticipation in his op-ed, "Bush's Second Chance on China," published in *The New York Times* in May 1990. According to former ambassador to China, "in one stroke, President Bush can close the breach between Capitol Hill and the White House on China policy, forge a common American front, and promote Chinese human rights and U.S. national interests."[479] The president had a chance to address a contentious foreign policy issue that had sparked heated debate in Washington and had the potential to further radicalize sides in the United States. In his op-ed, Lord rhetorically suggested reaching a compromise between the White House and Congress. This compromise entailed extending MFN status for another year to the PRC to support the most progressive and free-market-oriented provinces while preserving American business interests. However, it also called for a firm condemnation of the Tiananmen massacre, open support for those who had demonstrated for pro-democracy reforms, and explicit reaffirmation of the punitive measures adopted following the June 4 events. These measures included the

[477] Ibid. China – Game Plan for MFN, April 2, 1990.
[478] On the democratization wave sweeping across Eastern Europe see Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York, NY: Random House, 1990). See also Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2009).
[479] Ibid. Lord, *The New York Times*, May 9, 1990.

suspension of military ties, a freeze on the liberalization of technology exports, and the postponement of World Bank loans. Additionally, Lord advocated for a substantial increase in Voice of America funding to overcome the jamming of programs beamed to China, a positive consideration of Taiwan's application to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the expansion of future immigration opportunities for Hong Kong citizens. This strategy presented a chance to restore the bipartisan approach that had characterized the U.S. posture for two decades across five Administrations. "President Bush has an opportunity to heal wounds on the single foreign policy issue where he has provoked heated debate and about which he may care most deeply. He can align himself solidly with the Chinese people for the first time and restore the bipartisan approach that marked our China policy for two decades through five Administrations," suggested Lord, who implied that the Hill would follow along. "Congress, torn on the trade issue, would respond positively to a Bush initiative that made clear where this nation stood. Together, the President and Congress can send a powerful message to the transitional leaders in Beijing and to the Chinese people who herald a more hopeful future for their country."[480]

The challenge posed by Congress to the President could serve this latter as an opportunity to regain renewed credibility on his approach to Beijing. Unlike the students' issue, which ended up translating into a missed opportunity for Bush, the question regarding commercial status offered multiple potential solutions, none of which seemed inherently incorrect from the outset. With the China matter now fully entangled in U.S. domestic complexities, in the Spring of 1990 all eyes had turned once again to the President, who was faced with the task of aligning his stance toward Beijing with prevailing American sentiment, avoiding a new clash with the Democrat-led Congress. According to Harry Harding, China expert and Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, "the Bush Administration must reconstruct a domestic consensus on our China policy." This required Bush to be more conciliatory with Capitol Hill and to conceive the making of U.S. China policy as a multifaceted task to be shared with numerous stakeholders. Harding noted that "the White House has no monopoly of wisdom on dealing with China." Simultaneously, it required all parties involved to endeavor towards a more nuanced comprehension of the nature of Chinese society, complicating the puzzled reality of the Asian country. This involved looking beyond the leadership in Beijing, which was unlikely to express remorse for the events of June 1989, and focusing on local and regional institutions and stances

[480] Ibid. Lord, *The New York Times*, May 9, 1990.

where the central government seemed to be losing influence and control. By advocating for economic liberalization and preserving commercial ties with China, Washington could provide support to these elements pushing for additional economic and political reforms from grassroots levels. "Our understandable sensitivity to the negative trends should not blind us to more positive developments when they occur," urged Harding from the pages of *The Los Angeles Times*.[481]

Faced with an unprecedented domestic challenging environment, by the beginning of 1990, President Bush had three possible paths ahead of him. First, he could work towards the suspension of MFN status for China – or at least threaten such a move – to gain more credibility on the human rights front and restore moral authority in his dealings with China before the American people. Second, set up a more conciliatory approach with Congress and let the Hill decide whether to sustain the MFN renewal, without opposing the eventuality of negative feedback. Third, as his National Security Advisor warned, "prepare for another fight over [his] right to conduct foreign policy by signaling an intention to veto."[482] By opting for this third way, the president should have assured the support of the business sector while also trying to bring a consistent section of the Chinese American community that had commercial interests with the PRC on his side. The President's decision to pursue the third path resulted in yet another convoluted and problematic response from Washington to Beijing.

2.4 MFN and China Policy Micro-Management. Beyond the Jackson-Vanik Amendment

On June 5, 1989, after the protests in Beijing were crushed by the People's Liberation Army, Fang Lizhi and his wife, fearing for their safety, sought refuge at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, where they would ultimately remain for over a year. Although Chinese officials repeatedly contested the actions of the American Embassy – Vice Foreign Minister Zhu Qizhen called it "a violation of both international law and the relevant laws of China"[483] – the couple remained sheltered for thirteen months, complicating Washington's dealing with Beijing and increasingly turning the American public reluctant to the CCP leadership. Among others, the significance of this issue was further underscored by ABC journalist Barbara Walters during a notable interview with the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Jiang Zemin, which aired on the news program "20/20" on May 18, 1990. Walters suggested that the release

[481] Harry Harding, "Pressure won't Break This Impasse," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 1990.
[482] Ibid. China – Game Plan for MFN, April 2, 1990.
[483] "June 8 PRC Demarche on Fang Lizhi" Secret Cable, June 1989, GHWBPR, NSC, Nicholas Rostow Files, Fang Lizhi.

of Fang Lizhi and his wife would carry significant symbolic weight for the American public, emphasizing to Jiang that there was an "emotional side" to the matter and that the events of the previous year "affected us greatly." She inquired whether this could be viewed as an act of reconciliation between the two countries. In response, Jiang acknowledged the complexity of such an undertaking but outlined two preconditions for any potential release. Firstly, Fang Lizhi and his wife should acknowledge their guilt in inspiring what was often termed as counterrevolutionary turmoil. Secondly, the American side ought to provide assurances that the couple would refrain from engaging in activities against the PRC.[484]

Over a year after the February 1989 banquet incident, Fang Lizhi continued to present a formidable obstacle to the Administration's attempts to normalize relations with China and justify its controversial China policy to the American public. According to American officials in China, "it discouraged those who hoped that a solution was in the offing." The case of the Chinese couple sheltered at the American Embassy in Beijing was frequently cited in Washington as compelling evidence of Chinese authorities violating individual freedoms and emigration rights. Additionally, it remained a persistent point of contention, with Chinese hardliners condemning it as a clear example of American interference in their internal affairs. The symbolic dimension represented by Fang stuck at the Embassy was pointed out by James Lilley. In a secret cable to Washington, the ambassador claimed that the Chinese astrophysicist was "a constant reminder of our connection to 'bourgeois liberalism' and puts us at odds with the regime here. He is a living symbol of our conflict with China over human rights." Fang was considered by the Chinese leadership as "no better than a criminal, a 'rotten egg,' a counter-revolutionary who has spoken against the socialist road and the communist party."[485] At the same time, the Embassy perceived that offering refuge to Fang Lizhi and his wife had enhanced the United States' reputation among many Chinese citizens, positioning the U.S. more favorably than the Soviets. As observed in the Embassy cables to the White House, "we have a lot of support among the Chinese of the future. Our ideas are contagious, our presence appreciated. Those who have struck against us so far have made us more popular. This is not just with students but with thinking Chinese of all stripes. We invited Fang Lizhi, the Russian didn't. Gorbachev was overshadowed by the Goddess of Democracy at Tiananmen."[486]

[484] Barbara Walters interview with General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Jiang Zemin, ABC News Program "20/20," May 18, 1990.
[485] "Criticism of U.S. on Fang Lizhi," Cable from American Embassy in Beijing to the Secretary of State, June 1989, Stanford University Green Library Archives, James Lilley Papers, M1849, Accession 2011-148, Box 1, Folder 1 – Cables C. Peking 89-91 (1 of 2).
[486] Ibid. "Chaos within China," Secret Cable, June 1989.

However, in Washington, the case of the Chinese astrophysicist – often referred to as the "Chinese Sakharov" – became a source of embarrassment for the Bush Administration and served as a central argument for those claiming that the free movement of people was not guaranteed in China. Free emigration was, after all, a precondition for granting MFN commercial status to a non-market country, and Fang would eventually become the living proof that China did not appear to meet this requirement.



Figure 19. Arrest warrant of Fang Lizhi and Li Shuxian on Chinese National TV, June 12, 1989. Photo credit: -/AFP via Getty Images.

In this regard, the establishment of trade relations between China and the United States had been formalized under the provisions of the 1974 Trade Act.[487] This legislation required the president to make an annual determination by early June regarding the extension of MFN status to China, significantly reducing trade tariffs and barriers between the two nations. This decision was then subject to confirmation, or rejection, by Congress, which had a sixty-day window to

[487] For a contemporary history of U.S.-China trade relations see Craig Allen, "U.S.-China Retrospective: Forty Years of Commercial Relations," in Anne Thurston (eds.), *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations* (New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2021): pp.146-173. For a recollection of the emergence of U.S.-China trade relations in the 1970s, including the role of U.S. entrepreneurs and companies in seeking access to China's market and labor forces, and how this intersected with China's economic reorganization see Elizabeth O'Brien Ingleson, *Made in China: When US-China Interests Converged to Transform Global Trade* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2024).

vote. Specifically, both the White House and Capitol Hill were called upon to decide whether to waive the amendment named after Senator Henry Jackson (D-WA) and Representative Charles Vanik (D-OH). This provision pertained to non-market states and aimed to safeguard freedom of emigration. It stipulated that MFN status could be granted to a Communist country only if certain conditions were met, including a valid bilateral trade agreement negotiated with the United States and the assurance of freedom of emigration to its citizens. Initially conceived as a legislative tool to promote human rights within an anti-Soviet framework and to support the Jewish community in the USSR and to attack Kissinger's détente, the Jackson-Vanik amendment gradually evolved into a defining aspect of the late Cold War.[488]

As for China, MFN was first granted to Beijing in 1980, following U.S. diplomatic recognition, and had been consistently renewed throughout the decade. The Jackson-Vanik amendment was consistently waived by U.S. presidents without Congress' opposition, reflecting a prevailing sense of optimism driven by the alignment of economic and strategic interests between Washington and Beijing amidst the backdrop of the Cold War. Deng Xiaoping's policies of modernization and openness, combined with Beijing's strategic importance as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union in Asia, led legislators in Washington, as well as the American public, to overlook the PRC's human rights violations. However, as the events of 1989 unfolded, the MFN granting process increasingly emerged as one of the most effective mechanisms that Congress envisioned to challenge the Administration's foreign policy prerogatives and oppose the PRC leadership. This shift in perception was underscored, once again, by Nancy Pelosi. The representative from San Francisco – who had meanwhile formed the bipartisan Congressional Working Group on China and established herself as the leading figure on Capitol Hill regarding PRC-related matters – characterized 1989 as "a year of missed opportunities [...] to express indignation over the deplorable actions undertaken by the Chinese government."[489] MFN represented a new chance that could and should not be ignored.

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[488] For an overview of the origins of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and the active involvement of the American Jewish community see William D. Korey, "The Struggle Over Jackson-Mills-Vanik." *The American Jewish Year Book*, vol.75 (1974): pp.199–234. For a study of how the passing of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment disrupted the détente process between Washington and Moscow see Noam Kochavi, "Idealpolitik in Disguise: Israel, Jewish Emigration from the Soviet Union, and the Nixon Administration, 1969-1974," *The International History Review*, vol.29, no.3 (2007): pp.550–72. For a revisionist approach to the effectiveness of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment see Geoffrey P. Levin, "Before Soviet Jewry's Happy Ending: The Cold War and America's Long Debate Over Jackson-Vanik, 1976-1989," *Shofar*, vol.33, no.3 (2015): pp.63–85.

[489] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations,*

As he would do in the following two years, on May 24, 1990, President Bush announced his intention to renew the MFN status for the PRC, justifying his decision by attempting to deflate the symbolic significance attributed to it by Congress. "MFN is not a special favor; it is not a concession. It's the basis of everyday trade," Bush declared at the press conference held to communicate his decision. "It says that economic contacts are the best way to keep the economic reforms going forward. It says that the more economic contacts we have with China, the more they're going to see the fruits of free-market economies." He rejected all accusations coming from Capitol Hill, asserting his opposition to withdrawing the commercial status and claiming that his decision was highly supported by a wide range of stakeholders. "What irks me is when some of the people up on the Hill accuse me of being less interested than they are in human rights. I think we're on the right track here. I've cited the number of countries that agree with us. I've cited the fact that the students and the intellectuals in China itself agree with what I've just done," contented Bush. According to the president, granting MFN to China was first and foremost into U.S. national interest. "It is in our best interest and the interest of the Chinese people to continue China's trade status. Not to do so would hurt the United States. Trade would drop dramatically, hurting exporters, consumers, and investors. China buys about billion a year of American aircraft and wheat and chemicals, lumber and other products." By denying MFN to China, there would be consequences across the board able to hurt American exporters, investors, and consumers. "Lose this market and we lose American jobs. Aircraft workers in the West, farmers in the Great Plains, high-tech employees in the Northeast," warned Bush.[490]

But, in the president's reasoning, the granting of the commercial status would not automatically translate into a denial of the problematic situation of human rights in China. It meant having a sense of history and knowing where the country came from and to what extent its society and economy had changed in only one decade since diplomatic relations were established between Washington and Beijing. "Transforming China – with its 4000-year-old civilization, its own distinct and extraordinary traditions, an undeveloped economy, and a historically authoritarian political system – is a monumental task," recognized the president.[491] The annual renewal of normal trade treatment could not be turned, according to Bush, into a

Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.207.

[490] Press Conference by the President, May 24, 1990, GHWBPR, WHO of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, China MFN.

[491] Statement by the President, June 4, 1990, GHWBPR, WHO of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, China MFN.

burden for the relationship with Beijing as MFN, the president claimed, "it is not a favor we're doing." Granting the commercial status would mean aligning with the international community that Washington had led following the June crackdown in condemnation of the brutal massacre of pro-democracy protesters. "But, sir, if it's not a favor, how do you square this with our policy on denying the same status to the Soviet Union based on the fact that they haven't codified their emigration policy?" asked one the journalists attending the press conference. "Because the MFN is related to emigration," replied Bush.[492]

From a purely technical standpoint, as the president argued, establishing a country's adherence to the principle of freedom of emigration – thus providing grounds for the renewal of the MFN status – hinged on meeting the U.S. immigration annual quotas set at 17,000 immigrants per country, as outlined in the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. However, this threshold was notably easy for a country like China to attain, given its vast population of 1.1 billion people. The intricacies of Chinese immigration procedures presented a more complex scenario. Thus, when the State Department officials cited this argument to support compliance with the Jackson-Vanik immigration requirements, opponents contended that the situation was far more nuanced. The amendment itself underscored the pivotal nature of congressional debate on China for two significant reasons. Firstly, the introduction of the Jackson-Vanik amendment in the early 1970s marked the United States' recognition of human rights as universal principles transcending national boundaries and citizenship-related legal frameworks. As Samuel Moyn elucidated in his seminal work *The Last Utopia*, Senator Jackson's advocacy for Soviet Jews' free emigration rights universalized their plight, emphasizing the universality of human rights principles while challenging the notion of internal affairs within nations. Secondly, the amendment exemplified Congress members' assertiveness in shaping U.S. external relations and therefore the relevance of domestic dynamics in the formulation of foreign policy. As detailed by Paula Stern in *Water's Edge*, the passage of the Jackson-Vanik amendment exemplified how U.S. foreign policy considerations and decisions became deeply intertwined with domestic dynamics and negotiations among parochial interests. Driven by human rights concerns – predating President Carter's late 1970s emphasis on the issue – as well as his own political ambitions, Senator Henry Jackson (D-WA)

[492] Ibid. Press Conference by the President, May 24, 1990.

successfully mobilized both the Jewish community in the United States and labor movements to pass legislation that effectively dictated U.S. foreign policy to the Soviet Union.[493]

A study conducted by the Library of Congress and published in May 1991 revealed a significant omission in the PRC Constitution adopted in 1982 as far as immigration was concerned. The report concluded that: "while the Constitution of the PRC does not address the matter of the right to emigrate, since freedom of residence is not granted, one can conclude that there is no freedom of emigration granted under that charter." While such protections were previously enshrined in the 1954 Constitution, they were conspicuously absent in subsequent iterations, including the 1975, 1978, and 1982 versions. Of particular concern was Article 8, section 5, of the Law of the PRC on the Exit and Entry of Citizens, enacted in 1985, which stipulated that if the State Council and relevant authorities determined that a Chinese citizen seeking to leave the country posed a threat to state security or national interests, they could deny their request to emigrate without providing any avenue for the citizens to appeal to the court for reconsideration of the case. "This provision is so vague that the authorities can, in effect, deny the right to emigrate to any citizen on very little pretext," commented the report.[494] In discussing the new provisions introduced by Chinese law, Zhao Haiqing, one of the founders of the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars (refer to Chapter One), contested the arguments put forth by the State Department. He rebuked the U.S. government for previously relying on Chinese assurances regarding emigration when extending the Jackson-Vanik waiver, despite these assurances proving untrustworthy. This indicated, once again, that the Administration was not prioritizing human rights concerns in its dialogue with Beijing. Zhao highlighted that the State Department's argument effectively suggested that China's lack of a free emigration policy was inconsequential as long as they allowed enough people to leave to meet the U.S. quota. "In the past, the U.S. administration has relied upon

[493] Paula Stern, *Water's Edge: Domestic Politics and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979).

[494] Tao-tai Hsia and Wendy I. Zeldin, *Library of Congress Report: Freedom of Emigration of Chinese Citizens Under Chinese Law And Other Policies And Provisions That Restrict Overseas Travel* (Washington, D.C.: Far Eastern Law Division, Law Library, May 1991). The study depicted an alarming situation concluding that: "Since June 4, 1989, various actions have been taken by the Chinese authorities to further restrict and more closely monitor the travel-related activities of its citizens. These include the imposition of new passport and exit permit criteria, curtailment of overseas trips by officials, tightening up of the use of identification cards, restraints on citizens of the PRC who work in Hong Kong, a narrower definition of persons who may go overseas to receive training, restrictions on employees of Xinhua News Agency and on staff of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences that mandate forced resignation should an employee or staff member wish to travel abroad for personal reasons, creation of added complications in the application process to study or do research abroad, retaliatory action against notables who have left the country without official approval, and the establishment of a new body devoted entirely to more stringent social control," p.15.

Chinese assurances on emigration when extending the Jackson-Vanik waiver in order to grant MFN status to China. In light of China's institution of harsher emigration standards since June 1989, those assurances have proved to be untrustworthy. They have just instituted new criteria for people to export from China. The new export- and exit-permit criteria focus upon the political orientation of the applicant in relation to Communist Party principles," argued Zhao. [495]

Concerns over immigration freedom were endorsed by non-governmental organizations interested in the Chinese case. The Human Rights Watch's 1990 report on immigration in China shed light on the highly discretionary and restrictive nature of the immigration process in the PRC, which had worsened since the crackdown. By mid-June 1989, citizens planning to travel outside of China were required to start a new application – even those who already hold a previously issued visa – and no matter if they possessed a valid passport, they had to obtain a clearance from their university or work unit. Each step of the procedure was closely monitored by police officials who had taken over the task of issuing passports and travel authorizations from the special passport section of the Foreign Ministry. To apply for a new passport, the applicant was asked to write two reports addressed to the party secretary at their workplace or university – "*dongluan biaoxian* (a report on my performance during the period of turmoil) and *baoluan biaoxign* (a report on my performance during the period of rebellion)" – which were "expected to be confessional in nature in order to be credible." A third letter was also requested, describing the nature and plans of the trip. Furthermore, each application was sent to the headquarters of the People's Liberation Army, where the applicants' personal data were scrutinized, and their photos compared to the video camera footage of the pro-democracy movement and the occupation at Tiananmen Square.

As Representative Richard Schulze (R-PA) reiterated in Congress, "the litany of nearly insurmountable roadblocks that one must be subjected to in order to have an exit permit or passport reissued clearly indicates that China's emigration policy is merely facilitating the police dragnet designed to apprehend every possible pro-democracy activist."[496] This procedure was even harder for Chinese students who wished to pursue self-financed graduate studies as, following the 1989 protests, the PRC government required them "to pay a *cultivation*

[495] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations; Asian and Pacific Affairs; and International Economic Policy and Trade*, 102nd Congress, 1st Session, May 29, 1991, p.74.
[496] Ibid. *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.212.

fee (peiyang fei), a kind of deposit paid to the government to make up for money spent on the person's education by the state." According to Schulze, "this fee amounts to what the average Chinese college student earns over an 8-year period of time, this, obviously, precludes free movement and open emigration."[497] Due to the challenges in obtaining credible data from Chinese authorities, it was difficult to determine the actual number of citizens who had been denied a new passport or travel authorization. The freedom of immigration of the people involved in the June protests was being curtailed, along with that of their families. Additionally, while there was an increase in Chinese immigrants entering the U.S., as noted in the State Department's country report, "the percentage of Chinese individuals applying for exit permits from the Chinese government who were actually receiving these permits had likely decreased significantly since Tiananmen Square."[498]

Although considered a reasonable investment in the future of Sino-American relations, the decision to extend MFN status, in light of immigration restrictions and broader human rights abuses, was met with considerable hesitation by American media outlets. This move was perceived as a substantial concession to Beijing. According to *The Los Angeles Times*, there were no doubts that MFN could serve as "a tool of politics no less than of economics, a weapon for punishment as well as a device for reward." But firing that shot would result in injuring at the same time both the shooter and the target. "Almost certainly any attempt to use economic coercion to promote more political tolerance in China would fail, in the process bringing still more pain to an already beset Chinese people," sentenced the West Coast newspaper.[499] There were calls for a stronger stance on human rights abuses in China and for more explicit dialogue with Congress. *The New York Times* argued that President Bush had only been "half right on China," and urged Capitol Hill to advocate for a louder human rights commitment. It was once again "up to Congress to press for the second half – a ringing commitment to human and civil rights for the Chinese people."[500] The president was expected to engage in a more constructive dialogue with Congress and be more demanding with the Chinese counterpart. "To offset any tendency in Beijing to think that the Americans don't really care about democracy and human rights, the Bush Administration ought to take the occasion to narrow the gap between itself and Congress. This requires Mr. Bush to stop acting as something of an apologist for the regime

[497] Ibid. *United States-People's Republic of China Trade Relations, Including Most Favored Nation Trade Status for China Hearing*, June 12, 1991, p.63.
[498] United States Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1990, 1991, and 1992 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990, 1991, and 1992).
[499] -, "Aim the Policy at Next Generation," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 1990.
[500] -, "Half Right on China Trade," *The New York Times*, May 25, 1990.

and to start standing with the congressional majority as an advocate of rights," sentenced *The Washington Post*. "There are a dozen ways a President so-minded could make this shift. The result could only be to correct the pro-Beijing tilt of the White House, to restore the strength of bipartisanship to American China policy and to identify the United States with the future of China."[501]

The release of Fang Lizhi and his wife in the summer of 1990 alleviated a substantial impediment to the Administration's rationale for preserving relations with China through the extension of MFN status. After thirteen months spent inside the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, on June 27, the PRC government issued the couple a waiver to depart the country. This timing coincided with Congress preparing to engage in discussions regarding an extension of China's MFN status and the World Bank deliberating whether to authorize the resumption of loans suspended in the wake of the crackdown. In Washington, Marlin Fitzwater, the White House Spokesman, officially announced the release of the Chinese couple, stating, "Dr. Fang Lizhi and his wife, Li Shuxian, have left the United States Embassy in Beijing to proceed to the United Kingdom. The United States Government welcomes the People's Republic of China Government's decision to facilitate the departure of Dr. Fang and his wife for reasons of Dr. Fang's health and well-being and to permit Dr. Fang to pursue his important research in astrophysics. This humanitarian action is a far-sighted, significant step that will improve the atmosphere for progress in our bilateral relations."[502] However, the American press responded to the news of the release with less enthusiasm than the Administration. Major newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* highlighted the opaque nature of the Chinese government's decision and the underlying motivations behind it. According to *The Washington Post*, the Bush Administration had orchestrated "a face-saving solution," indicating "a costly political investment in normalizing relations with China."[503] Pulitzer Prize winner Jim Hoagland criticized the Administration's portrayal of the event, stating, "the Fitzwaterian slip does put the 'humanitarian' Chinese leadership in the right league internationally. But praising Beijing for freeing people who should never have been the target of official persecution in the first place debases the language and practice of American diplomacy."[504] As the following section illustrates, the debate surrounding China's MFN status

[501] -, "Correcting the Tilt to Beijing," *The Washington Post*, May 11, 1990.
[502] Thomas L. Friedman, "Behind the Scenes: Diplomatic Poker," *The New York Times*, June 26, 1990.
[503] -, "Freedom for Fang Lizhi," *The Washington Post*, June 27, 1990.
[504] Jim Hoagland, "The Freeing of Fang Lizhi: What a Little Pressure Can Do," *The Washington Post*, June 27, 1990.

grew increasingly contentious, as the initial focus on securing guarantees for free emigration from China rapidly broadened to encompass a wider range of human rights issues. This expansion allowed policymakers to more effectively challenge President Bush's increasingly precarious hold on U.S. policy towards China, highlighting the intensifying struggle over the future direction of Sino-American relations.



Figure 20. Satirical cartoon. Image credit: Newsweek Magazine, May 1990.

2.5 Getting Tougher. Congress, MFN, and the Question of Conditions

Commercial matters were not initially the primary concern on Capitol Hill in 1989 when questioning the Administration's cautions response to the events in China. The Tiananmen Square crackdown occurred just three days after President Bush, following the precedent set by his two predecessors, had waived the Jackson-Vanik amendment, thereby recommending the granting of MFN status to Beijing. As previously mentioned, Congress had the option to contest the renewal of trade privileges for China by the end of the summer through a joint resolution, yet no such action was even introduced. The controversy surrounding the renewal of MFN status intensified in the spring of 1990 – following the failure of Pelosi's Chinese Students Protection Act (refer to Chapter One) – and would eventually continue to escalate every year throughout the remainder of Bush's presidency. Although several resolutions were

introduced in the House to oppose the renewal of MFN, similar actions were not taken in the Senate. The Administration strategically concentrated its lobbying efforts on the Senate, with a particular emphasis on garnering support from Republican senators. Hence, the status was renewed for the following year with minimal obstacles, albeit largely symbolic ones, for the White House. The president was aware that by lifting MFN, "I might persuade some of my critics that I am serious about human rights in China, [giving] a sense that we might have some direct effect on the Chinese leadership." However, he warned the Republican senators that the negative repercussions on U.S. interests would be significant. International competitors were unlikely to follow the U.S. lead, potentially placing American businesses at a disadvantage. Additionally, regional allies such as Thailand, Korea, and Japan had expressed concerns about the destabilizing effects of denying MFN status to Beijing. Bush also emphasized that "efforts to pressure China with MFN could prove counterproductive," as it might provide the Chinese government with a convenient "scapegoat for its failing policies" and empower hardliners who opposed U.S. influence. Additionally, he underscored the importance of avoiding actions that could inadvertently harm Hong Kong.[505] In addition to these arguments, as pointed out by Kerry Dumbaugh, Asian Affairs Specialist at the Library of Congress, the caution shown in the Senate was probably due to the ongoing war in the Persian Gulf and the strategic importance of China as a key ally within the UN Security Council.[506]

In the meantime, the House engaged in discussions to determine the most effective future strategy. It concluded that emphasizing the imposition of conditions on the renewal of MFN status, rather than advocating for its revocation as had been the case in the summer of 1990, would be more effective. When testifying in Congress, former Ambassador to the PRC Winston Lord advocated for a middle approach to the MFN matters. There were several reasons that justified the renewal of China's commercial status. Revoking MFN status would adversely affect market-oriented sectors within Chinese society, companies, and workers based in Hong Kong, American consumers, as well as long-term objectives in U.S.-China relations. However, granting unconditional MFN status, as advocated by the Administration, would send the wrong message to the Chinese leadership. It would imply that regardless of their actions – such as the June massacre – Washington would tolerate them for the sake of

[505] China-MFN: Points to be Made with Republican Leadership, May 22, 1990, Memorandum for the President from Brent Scowcroft, May 21, 1990, GHWBPR, WHORM, Brent Scowcroft Collection, China: Non-Tiananmen (May 1990).
[506] Kerry Dumbaugh, "China's Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) Status: Congressional consideration, 1989-1998," *Congressional Research Service – The Library of Congress*, August 1998.

economic and geopolitical interests. Lord explained that conditional renewal represented "the brightest chance of minimizing the drawbacks of the two more extreme options." Moreover, it was best suited to promote various American interests – geopolitical, economic, and humanitarian. Properly managed, this approach would neither severely damage U.S. relations with China nor condone its egregious abuses. It would empower the Administration to advocate for human rights rather than relinquish the most potent instrument available. Regarding the conditions to be attached to the renewal of MFN, Lord believed they should primarily be humanitarian with reasonable prospects for progress. They should be confined to areas logically connected to the legislation at hand, such as emigration, human rights, and freedom of information. These conditions should be concrete enough to provide meaningful benchmarks, yet flexible enough to afford the Administration real leverage with Beijing. Lord urged Congress to work well on the language of the legislation. For example, while freeing *all* political prisoners was certainly a desirable goal, wording like *freeing political prisoners* was more likely to engender results. Similarly, on some other questions, the formulation *significant progress* was preferable to requiring complete solutions. "In sum," Lord contended, "while far-ranging conditions might appear more satisfying, moderate ones are much more likely to produce genuine improvements in the lives of Chinese citizens. That, after all, is what Americans desire and what this debate concerns."[507]

Among the first efforts to attach conditions beyond immigration-related freedoms, was the bill introduced by Representative Donald Pease (D-OH) which gained increasing relevance on the Hill. The H.R. 4939 bill would require the conditional renewal of MFN status, compelling the Chinese leadership to change course from the repressive approach culminating in June 1989 crackdown. Following deliberations in the House Ways and Means Committee, the bill underwent significant amendments, softening initial stringent conditions for the renewal of MFN status to China and tempering its language to facilitate a broader consensus. The final version of HR 4939 mandated "significant progress" in several human rights areas. These stipulations included the lifting of martial law in China and Tibet, the release of individuals imprisoned following the Tiananmen crackdown, the relaxation of restrictions on press freedom, and the cessation of intimidation and harassment of Chinese citizens and students residing in the United States.[508] Despite passing the House on October 18 with a vote of 384-

[507] Ibid. *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing*, May 29, 1991, p.21.
[508] H.R.4939 - 101st Congress (1989-1990): Regarding the extension of most-favored-nation treatment to the products of the People's Republic of China, and for other purposes, October 27, 1990.

30, with 150 Republicans in favor, the Senate took no action resulting in the Congress' failure to attach any conditions to the renewal of MFN status. The State Department had notified Congress of its unwillingness to accept any kind of conditions for MFN. In a message to the House Committee of Ways and Means where the bill was first introduced, Lawrence Eagleburger argued that "adding further conditions to MFN renewal could well serve to weaken that vital relationship, rather than strengthen it."[509] Nonetheless, it was just the calm after the storm. As the Desert Storm Operation contributed to the liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion, the House began realigning forces in preparation for a new contestation.

The beginning of 1991, when the 102nd Congress took office, seemed to signal a renewed inclination to oppose the unconditional granting of MFN to China, both in the House and, this time, also in the Senate.[510] The shift towards attaching conditions, rather than entirely revoking the status, marked a new phase in the legislative effort on Capitol Hill, where the debate was driven by concerns that extended beyond human rights. Even policymakers aligned with the president recognized the need to incorporate moderate conditions into the renewal of China's MFN status, primarily to avoid the imposition of more stringent measures that could further antagonize the PRC leadership. Representative Jim Leach (R-IA) articulated this sentiment, stating, "the president is in a very different position from one year ago. The question today is between reasonable conditions and unreasonable ones, not between no conditions and some."[511] Reflecting this shift, Nancy Pelosi introduced H.R. 2212 in the House, having previously advocated for more stringent conditions to the bill proposed by her Ohio colleague the previous year.[512] Expanding on the conditions outlined in the Pease Bill while adhering to the nuanced language aimed at facilitating China's compliance with the requirements for MFN status, the amended version of the bill introduced by the representative from San Francisco and modified on the House floor gained bipartisan support, including backing from those among the Democrats who were staunch free-traders like Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL), Chairman of the

https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/4939/all-actions-without-amendments (last accessed, March 2024).

[509] "State Department Views on Proposal of Congressman Pease for Conditional MFN Approval for China," July 11, 1990, *Congressional Hearings*.

[510] For an analysis of the mid-term elections results see Pippa Morris, "The 1990 Mid-term US Elections: Campaign and Results," *The Political Quarterly*, no.62 (1991): pp.461-475. The human rights issue gained increasing relevance in the MFN debate. See Robert F. Drinan and Teresa T. Kuo, "The 1991 Battle for Human Rights in China," *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol.14, no.1 (1992): pp.21–42.

[511] Pamela Fessler, "China Trade Creates Moral Debate Shaded by Political Undertones," *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, June 8, 1991.

[512] H.R. 2212 - 102nd Congress (1991-1992): United States-China Act of 1991, March 19, 1992, https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/house-bill/2212/text (last accessed, March 2024).

Ways and Means House Committee, where the bill was first introduced, and Sam Gibbons (D-FL). "I know that they don't love the bill to death. If we have to go to the floor again with the amendment, we're fully prepared to do that," commented Pelosi in April 1991.[513]

Her bill required "significant progress" in areas related to human rights ("taking action to prevent gross violations of human rights in China and Tibet; ceasing the export of goods produced by prison labor; ending religious persecution in China and Tibet; terminating harassment of Chinese citizens in the United States; allowing freedom of the press and peaceful assembly; and giving international human rights agencies access to people being held in Chinese prisons"), trade practices ("reducing unfair practices by protecting U.S. patents and other intellectual property rights; giving American exporters fair access to Chinese markets; and ending other unfair commercial activities such as trans-shipping goods through other countries to get around U.S. imports restrictions"), and weapons non-proliferation ("adhering to the Missile Technology Control Regime, the 1987 international agreement between major weapons producers to restrict the export of sensitive missile technology; accepting the guidelines of the Nuclear Suppliers Group on trade in nuclear technology; taking clear steps to assure that it will not assist any non-nuclear state, directly or indirectly, in acquiring nuclear weapons or materials or components for such devices").[514]

Regarding this last condition, Capitol Hill had grown increasingly concerned about the PRC involvement in threatening weapon proliferation practices. A fear that was further exacerbated by the Persian Gulf War. These concerns encompassed Beijing's assistance to Algeria in developing nuclear weapons capability, the sale of missiles to Syria and Iran, and the provision of advanced ballistic missile technology and mobile launchers to Pakistan for medium-range missiles. According to *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, concerns over arms proliferation cut across party lines and ideological divides. Senator Joe Biden Jr. (D-DE) reportedly joined forces with his Senate Foreign Relations Committee colleague, the conservative Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC), to strongly criticize China for its sales of high-tech weapons to several Middle Eastern nations.[515] Despite assurances from both the Administration and the Chinese government, the senator from Delaware remained skeptical, advocating for the inclusion of provisions related to weapons non-proliferation in the renewal of the MFN trade

[513] David S. Cloud, "Sentiment Grows in Congress to Reject MFN for China," *Congressional Quarterly*, April 27, 1991.
[514] "China MFN Veto – Fact Sheet No. 102-38," Democratic Study Group, U.S. House of Representatives, March 6, 1992.
[515] Carroll J. Doherty, "Arms Sales Reports Stir Hill Critics," *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, April 27, 1991.

status. “One day we are told that the Chinese are prepared to live by international guidelines prohibiting the export of medium-range missiles. The next day we read in the press that the Chinese are selling missiles to Syria and Pakistan,” Biden remarked, calling for a Senate meeting to discuss classified information about Chinese activities concerning missile and nuclear technology.[516]

The bill introduced in the House by Pelosi and by Mitchell in the Senate underwent consistent modifications in both the language and the requirements regarding the granting of MFN status to China, affording the President considerable discretion in interpreting the notion of progress. “The effect of these changes was to eliminate some requirements of the original House bill and to weaken others and make them examples of progress toward the bill’s objectives.”[517] The final draft of the H.R. 2212 was approved by the House with a vote of 313 - 112, with 82 Republicans in favor, and subsequently passed the Senate with a vote of 55-44. The legislation was sponsored in the Senate by Majority Leader George J. Mitchell and garnered support from “an eclectic alliance of anti-Communists, human rights advocates and protectionists.”[518] Notably, six Republican senators, led by Helms, whose state had experienced significant impacts from increased textile imports from China, voted to impose conditions on the renewal of MFN status.[519]

The dynamics behind the final vote in the Senate is illustrative of how concerns regarding China transcended conventional party lines, while also underscoring the tension within political parties stemming from states’ interests and deepening economic interdependences with China. It was the case of the role played by Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) who emerged as one of the most vocal lawmakers in the debate on MFN to China. Heading a bipartisan coalition in the Senate that sought to negotiate with President Bush, the “successful son of Montana’s Big Sky […] broke ranks with most of his fellow Senate Democrats” to negotiate a compromise solution with the Administration that avoided revocation or imposing conditions on the extension of trade benefits to Beijing. While it was customary for senators to deviate from party lines, the MFN debate stood out due to the prominence of certain key actors involved. Not only was Baucus opposing the Senate Majority Leader, but he was also at odds with influential figures

[516] John R. Cranford, “Senate Clears China MFN Bill; Bush has Promised Veto,” *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, February 29, 1992.
[517] Ibid. “China MFN Veto – Fact Sheet No. 102-38.”
[518] Keith Bradsher, “Senate Restricts Trade with China; Bush Veto Likely,” *The New York Times*, July 24, 1991.
[519] The other Republican senators to vote for the Mitchell Bill were Alfonse D’Amato (R-NY), Jake Garn (R-UT), Connie Mack III (R-FL), Robert C. Smith (R-NH), and Malcolm Wallop (R-WY).

within the Democratic Party, such as Finance Committee Chairman Lloyd Bentsen (D-TX) and European Affairs Subcommittee Chairman Biden (D-DE). According to *The Washington Post*, Baucus had gained recognition throughout his tenure on Capitol Hill for his unwavering support of Montana's timber and agriculture sectors, only aligning with a moderately liberal stance on broader policy matters. However, in his role as chairman of the Senate's International Trade Subcommittee, he had emerged as a fervent advocate of free trade and a vocal opponent of protectionist measures, both domestically and internationally.[520] In June 1991, he authored a letter addressed to President Bush, co-signed by fifteen other senators, including six Democrats predominantly from farm states like Baucus' Montana. "The United States cannot continue to tolerate Chinese intransigence. We must tailor active responses to our wide-ranging concerns. [But] revoking MFN would be counterproductive," wrote the senators who urged the President to be "more active in addressing American concerns with China."[521] The letter, while expressing some criticism of the Bush Administration's stance on China, indicated that there was a significant number of Democratic senators willing to diverge from party lines, thus making it unlikely to garner enough votes to override a presidential veto. "We clearly share the same goals," responded the President addressing Senator Baucus with a detailed letter, emphasizing the Administration's efforts to address various issues concerning the PRC beyond MFN, as well as the importance to maintain dialogue with and support to the most market-oriented regions in China.

Although the Senate vote failed to reach the threshold necessary to override a potential presidential veto – Senator Dole remarked, "this is a feel-good exercise. It's not a do-good exercise," in contrast to advocates of conditioning the renewal of MFN status – this development, similar to the situation with the Pelosi Bill, indicated that Congress was adopting a more assertive stance, signaling a shift away from the White House's prior hesitancy to take action against the PRC government.[522] While President Bush maintained his opposition to

[520] Guy Gugliotta, "Baucus Pitted in Fight Over China's MFN Status," *The Washington Post*, July 14, 1991. See Value of Exports to China from Montana from 1992 to 2017, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, online at https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MTCHNA052SCEN (last accessed December 2024).
[521] In their letter the senators suggested: "But other steps can be taken. For example, the U.S. could reinvigorate its opposition to multilateral loans for China. The U.S. could also take strong action under U.S. law to address China's unfair trade barriers and imports produced by prison labor. In the area of nuclear and missile proliferation, the U.S. could immediately negotiate for strict, multilateral technology restrictions conditioned upon Chinese adherence to accepted international standards. As for Taiwan, the U.S. could immediately give strong support to Taiwan's GATT application." Letter to President Bush from Senator Max Baucus, June 19, 1991, GHWBPR, Council of Economic Advisers, -.
[522] David S. Cloud, "GOP Loyalty to Bush May Be Key in Fight Over China Status," *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, June 29, 1991.

MFN conditionality,[523] he enacted three measures aimed at addressing Congress' call for a more assertive policy towards China. Firstly, in accordance with Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, investigations were launched into China's unfair trade practices and violations of U.S. intellectual property rights. Secondly, the Administration condemned this conduct involving textile products entering U.S. markets, which subsequently led to the authorization of product seizures. Thirdly, departing from previous policy and despite objections from the Chinese leadership, the Administration voiced support for Taiwan's accession to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). This initiative had been advocated by *The Wall Street Journal* as early as 1989. The newspaper suggested that Congress should facilitate Taiwan's entry into GATT before China, despite the organization's initial reluctance. The editorial argued that "by urging that GATT get on with Taiwan's admission, now, instead of waiting years for China, the U.S. would send a useful signal. It would set straight for China's leaders where they rank in world esteem, compared with their capitalist, democratizing rivals on Taiwan (who graciously recommended extension of MFN for China). It would give Taiwan its due. And in a time when the U.S. is already granting the communist governments of China and the Soviet Union extraordinary political favors, it would remind the world that what America most favors are governments that understand the link between capitalist trade and freedom."[524] In his address at the Conference on U.S.-China policy in February 1992, co-sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute and the U.S.-China Business Council, Senator Baucus claimed credit for this development, stating that he and his colleagues had prompted President Bush to outline a strategy aimed at addressing U.S. concerns with Beijing pursuing a "carefully tailored policy tools to win reform in China" while staying engaged through MFN "in order to nurture vital business ties with China."[525]

However, not all members of Congress shared this perspective, viewing these measures as insufficient to address the demands emanating from Capitol Hill. In 1992, Congress demonstrated an unprecedented level of toughness in its approach toward China. Notably,

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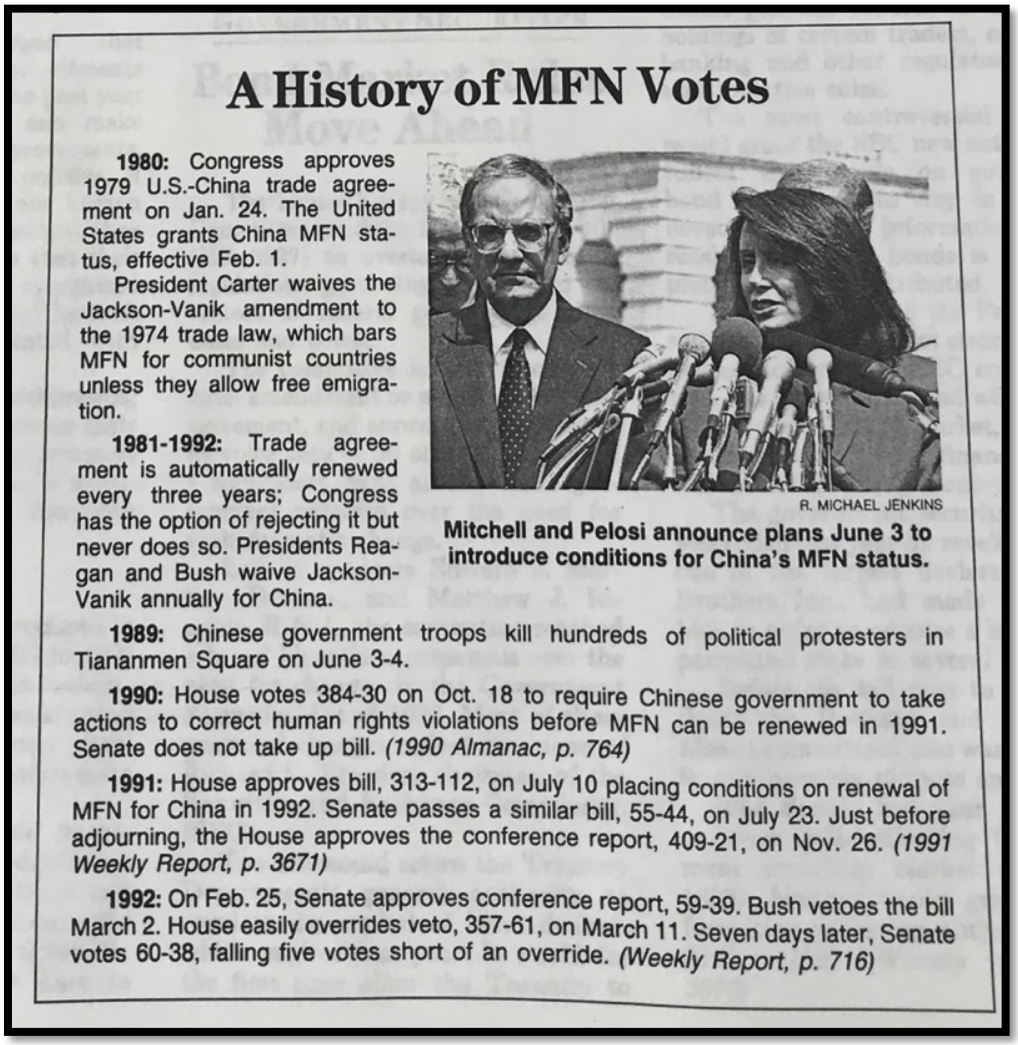
[523] In a message to the Congress President Bush argued that "The Administration's comprehensive policy of engagement on several separate fronts invites China's leadership to act responsibly without leaving any doubts about the consequences of Chinese misdeeds. Our approach is one of targeting specific areas of concern with the appropriate policy instruments to produce the required results. H.R. 2212 would severely handicap U.S. business in China, penalizing American workers and eliminating jobs in this country." Message from the President of the United States transmitting his veto of H.R. 2212, the "United States-China Act of 1991," March 3, 1992, 102nd Congress, 2nd Session, House Document 102-197.

[524] -, "China Trade," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 1989.

[525] "Conference on U.S.-China Policy, American Enterprise Institute & U.S.-China Business Council," February 5, 1992, Max S. Baucus Speeches, Archives and Special Collections at ScholarWorks at University of Montana.

Representative Donald Pease reintroduced a significant bill, H.R. 5318, modeled after Pelosi's H.R. 2212 but with added complexity. The new bill added a provision that, for the first time, made a distinction between state-owned and private enterprises: if China failed to meet the conditions outlined in the bill, only state-owned enterprises would face discriminatory treatment.[526] This formulation aimed to counter arguments suggesting that denying MFN status would disproportionately harm the more market-oriented and progressive segments of Chinese society. Additionally, "the bill would require the Chinese government to take steps to prevent export of goods made by prison labor; and religious persecution; grant press freedoms in China and Tibet; and stop intimidating Chinese citizens in the United States."[527] Furthermore, it called for refraining from unfair trade practices and disregarding intellectual property rights. H.R. 5318 passed the House with a vote of 339-62, with 112 Republicans in favor. "To punctuate its opposition, the House also voted 258-135 in favor of a resolution (H.J. Res 502) that would withdraw China's MFN status immediately. The vote was considered a symbolic gesture, however, since the resolution is not likely to make it through the Senate."[528] Conversely, H.R. 5318 passed the Senate by unanimous consent, an unusual occurrence that placed considerable pressure on the president. The Senate vote indicated that a two-thirds majority of senators could potentially override the president's veto; however, this was not realized, as some senators ultimately retreated from their position. Although the House successfully overrode the veto (345-74), the Senate fell short of the required majority, with the final vote standing at 59-40.[529]

[526] H.R. 5318 - 102nd Congress (1991-1992): United States-China Act of 1992, October 2, 1992. https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/house-bill/5318/all-actions (last accessed, March 2024).
[527] David S. Cloud, "House Tries Again to Restrict MFN Status for China," *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, July 25, 1992.
[528] Ibid. Cloud, *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, July 25, 1992.
[529] For a brief and good synthesis of the MFN renewal journey from the Tiananmen Crackdown to China's entry into the WTO see Kerry Dumbaugh, "China's Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) Status: Congressional consideration, 1989-1998," *Congressional Research Service – The Library of Congress*, August 1998.



A History of MFN Votes

1980: Congress approves 1979 U.S.-China trade agreement on Jan. 24. The United States grants China MFN status, effective Feb. 1.

President Carter waives the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the 1974 trade law, which bars MFN for communist countries unless they allow free emigration.

1981-1992: Trade agreement is automatically renewed every three years; Congress has the option of rejecting it but never does so. Presidents Reagan and Bush waive Jackson-Vanik annually for China.

R. MICHAEL JENKINS

Mitchell and Pelosi announce plans June 3 to introduce conditions for China's MFN status.

1989: Chinese government troops kill hundreds of political protesters in Tiananmen Square on June 3-4.

1990: House votes 384-30 on Oct. 18 to require Chinese government to take actions to correct human rights violations before MFN can be renewed in 1991. Senate does not take up bill. *(1990 Almanac, p. 764)*

1991: House approves bill, 313-112, on July 10 placing conditions on renewal of MFN for China in 1992. Senate passes a similar bill, 55-44, on July 23. Just before adjourning, the House approves the conference report, 409-21, on Nov. 26. *(1991 Weekly Report, p. 3671)*

1992: On Feb. 25, Senate approves conference report, 59-39. Bush vetoes the bill March 2. House easily overrides veto, 357-61, on March 11. Seven days later, Senate votes 60-38, falling five votes short of an override. *(Weekly Report, p. 716)*

Figure 21. "A History of MFN Votes.
Image credit: Congressional Quarterly Magazine, Politics & Finance, June 6, 1992.

The increasingly confrontational stance of Capitol Hill towards the White House from 1990 to 1992 stemmed from dissatisfaction with the Administration's overall response to the Tiananmen crackdown. This sentiment was particularly evident in the congressional MFN debate due to several reasons. Firstly, one of the most critical aspects that surfaced on Capitol Hill was the widespread dissatisfaction among members of Congress due to their inability to play a significant role in condemning the PRC leadership after the crackdown. This discontent was well expressed in June 1990 by Representative Robert Matsui (D-CA) when discussing the MFN matter with Deputy Secretary of State Eagleburger. Despite believing that the curtail of commercial privileges to China was not the right move to tackle the issue, Matsui argued that, while framing its response to the PRC in Cold War terms, the Administration had failed to "give the public and many members of Congress any outlet to show their dissatisfaction with

what happened in Tiananmen except on their debate on Most Favored Nation status."[530] By acting as he did, Bush gave the impression that maintaining the status quo of the relationship with Beijing was his foremost concern, thereby failing to effectively convey Americans' outrage through his policy strategy and decisions. "I am afraid," asserted Matsui, "the status quo will continue on, and as a result of that, there is no outlet for the public, for Chinese students who are concerned about the repression, and Members of Congress, and somehow that has to be dealt with." The images coming from Beijing in May and June 1989, shattered the illusion of a Communist country willing to open its market to comply with American-inspired international practices beyond the realms of economy and commerce. However, it seemed that the perception of China had changed for almost everybody except the president. "It is almost as if the Administration is saying life goes on, we have a relationship with those old leaders of China and we don't want to disturb that relationship and what happened last June was simply an isolated incident," concluded Matsui. But for the majority of people in Congress maintaining the status quo was not an option and the policy of the Administration was disturbingly anachronistic. Additionally, members of Congress expressed frustration over the president's apparent reluctance to engage in dialogue with Congress, maintaining a steadfast conviction on how China should be addressed and refusing to compromise on the MFN issue. Representative Stephen Solarz (D-NY) remarked that the President had "unfortunately removed himself from the debate that is now underway in both Congress and across the country on this issue."[531]

Secondly, the MFN debate gained prominence due to Congress' perception that the actions taken by the White House were rooted in a Cold War-era reasoning, which had long been used to justify the poor human rights situation within China. The Cold War was now over, and many preconditions had collapsed. According to Representative Barney Frank (D-MA), the first one had to do with a certain way of conceiving foreign policy with China and the fact the global context did not justify Bush's approach to the PRC. "It is hard today to conjure up a major threat to our national security sufficient, in my judgment, to dilute our commitment to human rights," commentated the representative from Massachusetts.[532] While the competition with the Soviet Union had mostly set the conditions for Washington's relations with Beijing during the 1980s, the relations in the new decade could and should not be driven by sole geopolitics

[530] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Trade*, June 19 and 21, 1990, p.232.
[531] Ibid. *United States-People's Republic of China Trade Relations, Including Most Favored Nation Trade Status for China Hearing*, June 12, 1991, p.64.
[532] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Trade*, June 19 and 21, 1990, p.9.

considerations. The second precondition that had collapsed according to Frank was a certain style of conducting relations with Beijing exclusively limited to the sole Administration's prerogatives. "We have had a period in which the President said: I can handle this, guys, back off, leave it to me." That time had reached an end not ultimately because it seemed to not work anymore. The president had made concessions to China promoting a "carrot and carrot approach", as his predecessors had done, and this had not brought anything positive in the relationship after June 1989. "And, frankly, the People's Republic of China has played the role of Bugs Bunny. They ate all the President's carrots, but we have nothing to show for it. There has simply been no improvement," concluded Frank. The third reason explaining the centrality of the MFN debate pertains directly to human rights, particularly the perception among members of Congress and lobby groups that the U.S. government had not sufficiently addressed that issue in the China context. Tom Lantos (D-CA) consistently and candidly voiced his concerns on this matter. He expressed the view that while many might consider human rights to be an inconvenience or a topic to be overlooked, he believed that was a fundamental aspect of American foreign policy. Lantos asserted that unless Congress took meaningful steps to impose stringent conditions on China, "we will have failed and failed in a historic sense."[533]

A fourth reason contributing to Congress' substantial engagement in MFN matters can be attributed to the perception that the events unfolding in Beijing in June 1989 undermined the prevailing notion that China was advancing towards greater openness to the international community while adopting economic, political, and social norms akin to those of Western countries and Japan. Throughout the 1980s, there was a prevailing belief that economic liberalization would naturally lead to increased social openness. With a few sporadic exceptions, following the early 1970s rapprochement, the American public debate had avoided direct accusations of China's misconduct in human rights practices. "One of the things that intrigue me about this debate," argued Representative Robert Lagomarsino (R-CA), "is how many people suddenly realized what has been happening in China for the last what, 30 or 40 years; how much brutality and suppression of human rights there has been."[534] However, the crackdown on peaceful protesters in 1989 shattered this illusion. Members of Congress began to advance the idea that Beijing had enjoyed too many benefits in terms of economic advantage provided by Washington and time had come to stop that unconditional flow of aid. Recalling the decision to grant MFN in the first place in 1980, Representative Dick Schulze (R-PA)

[533] Ibid. *Hearing*, May 29, 1990, p.12.
[534] Ibid. *Most-Favored-Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing*, May 29, 1991, p.13.

lamented as follows: "I recommended that we phase in MFN and that we say, let's see how it works. Let's do it gradually. They said, no, no, no. My colleagues on this very committee said, no, no, no. We have got to go it all the way and make it dramatic and do it. I think the bulk of Congress now realizes that was an error."[535]

As the domestic debate on MFN persisted throughout 1991 and 1992, with Congress shifting its focus towards imposing conditions rather than advocating for the trenchant revocation of commercial privileges to Beijing, President Bush's reluctance to compromise with Capitol Hill became increasingly concerning for many legislators. When in mid-May 1991 Bush surprisingly anticipated to the press his inclination to renew MFN to China for one more year without conditions, he somehow delivered the message that the making of Washington's China policy was still rooted in a Cold War-style hyper elitist framework. "Mr. Bush's statement today highlighted not only the basic conflict between the White House and Congress over how to handle relations with China but also the highly secretive and personal way in which the President operates when it comes to relations with the authorities in Beijing," sentenced Andrew Rosenthal from the pages of *The New York Times*.[536] Rather than the decision itself for which there existed solid economic and strategical grounds, Bush came under the press scrutiny due to his style of conceiving and conducting relations with Beijing. The President was said to rely too heavily on his past experience as Chief of the U.S. Liaison Office to the PRC in the mid-70s therefore allowing his tenure as President of the United States to be excessively bias when it came to the making of China policy. According to *The Washington Post* correspondent Hobart Rowen, "Bush is blind on China […] allowing his emotional and personal ties to the People's Republic to get the better of his common sense."[537]

The president faced criticism following his commencement address to the Yale University graduating class of 1991 on May 27. The speech received significant press attention, largely because of its strong – and nearly exclusive – focus on advocating for continued engagement with Beijing. This stance was meant to provide moral legitimacy to his China policy and served as a counterargument to those, particularly in Congress, whom the President accused of attempting to isolate the strategically significant nation. The speech coincided with Bush's decision to renew MFN benefits for China without imposing conditions. During his address in

[535] Ibid. *United States-People's Republic of China Trade Relations, Including Most Favored Nation Trade Status for China Hearing*, June 12, 1991, p.44.
[536] Andrew Rosenthal, "Bush Backs China Trade Status, Reopening Conflict Over Rights," *The New York Times*, 16 May 1991.
[537] Hobart Rowen, "Bush is Just Plain Wrong on China," *The Washington Post*, June 2, 1991.

New Haven (CT), Bush elaborated on the moral considerations guiding his commitment to continued engagement with China. "This nation's foreign policy has always been more than simply an expression of American interests; it's an extension of American ideals. This moral dimension of American policy requires us to remain active, engaged in the world. Many times, that means trying to chart a moral course through a world of lesser evils. That's the real world, not black and white. Very few moral absolutes. Enormous potential for error and embarrassment. But all are part of the risks that we willingly take to advance the American ideal," argued the President.[538] He advocated for the renewal of MFN to China unconditionally, invoking moral considerations rather than economic or strategic ones to justify his policy.

One of the most severe critics of this stance was Mary McGrory, writing for *The Washington Post*. McGrory characterized President Bush's Yale speech as "more like a tantrum than speech," accusing him "to moralize about something that is realpolitik at best, and crass at worst."[539] Similarly, columnist Richard Cohen critiqued the President's message, noting a disturbing "trust me" quality to Bush's address, as if him alone was the best suited capable of striking the ideal balance between incentives and pressure. Cohen criticized Bush for being "devious and secretive" in his approach to China policy, prioritizing other considerations over a firm condemnation of human rights abuses. "Bush is tone-deaf when it comes to the pitch of human rights. As a former director of the CIA, he seems to have left the agency but taken its ethic with him. All he can see is what advances the political interests of the United States, human rights (even trade) being peripheral," sentenced Cohen.[540] Year after year, the President remained steadfast in his insistence on renewing MFN trade benefits to China, never wavering in his veto prerogatives when Congress pushed for revocation or the attachment of conditions. "Since 1989 it has become a rite of spring in Washington, as dependable as the cherry blossoms: President Bush renews for another year the MFN trade benefits for China, Congress fulminates and threatens to block the move, but in the end the President wins," wrote Thomas L. Friedman in 1992 on *The New York Times*.[541] Bush had erected a wall between the White House and Capitol Hill, disregarding any suggestions, claims, or arguments regarding Beijing and MFN originating from Congress. Despite significant changes in global circumstances and the nature of Sino-U.S. relations, "Mr. Bush is still tiptoeing" when addressing the Chinese

[538] President George H. W. Bush Remarks at the Yale University Commencement Ceremony in New Haven, Connecticut, May 27, 1991, The American Presidency Project, UC Santa Barbara.
[539] Mary McGrory, "China and an Imperial President," *The Washington Post*, May 30, 1991.
[540] Richard Cohen, "One Nation That Should Not be Favored in Any Way," *The Washington Post*, May 30, 1991.
[541] Thomas L. Friedman, "As Usual, the President Favors the Trade Benefits: China," *The New York Times*, June 7, 1992.

counterpart. “He stubbornly continues to misstate the difference between himself and Congress. He juxtaposes his policy of prudent across-the-board “engagement” to a dangerous congressional tendency to “isolate” Beijing and subject it to a sure-to-fail blunderbuss MFN “ultimatum.”[542] However, despite a considerable time had passed since the crackdown on pro-democracy protestants and Beijing receiving quite a good treatment from the Bush Administration, almost no improvements had been made to comply to international recognized human rights norms. “China’s leaders had almost two years to shape up since their bloody crackdown in Tiananmen Square. Yet they threw Mr. Bush, their great protector, only a few bones: an abstention in the U.N. vote to authorize force against Iraq, and the release of political prisoners (though providing no list).”[543] As detailed in the following two sections, the president’s concerns were rooted in anxieties about China’s internal challenges following the crackdown, as well as the stance of U.S. allies and the fear of ceding leadership in developing a cohesive strategy towards Beijing.

2.6 Troubles from Beijing. Power Struggle, Economic Stagnation, and Anti-Americanism

“Dear Chairman Deng, I write this letter with a heavy heart. I wish there were some way to discuss this matter in person, but regrettably that is not the case,” wrote President Bush in a private letter addressed to Deng Xiaoping in mid-June 1989. Frustrated by his inability to reach Deng directly by phone, the president felt compelled to reassure the CCP chairman that, despite his public condemnation of the Tiananmen Square events and the sanctions implemented following the crackdown, he remained committed to maintaining dialogue and restoring the bilateral relationship. “I am simply writing as a friend, a genuine *lao pengyou*,” President Bush asserted, stressing his efforts to avoid interfering in China’s internal affairs. He underscored his resistance to significant domestic pressure to condemn the massacre more forcefully and impose harsher sanctions – measures that could jeopardize the relationship carefully cultivated over the preceding decades. Despite the post-Tiananmen public suspension of high-level visits, in his letter Bush proposed to send a special envoy to China. He, the president suggested, could “speak with total candor to you representing my heartfelt convictions on these matters.”[544] A couple of days later Deng agreed. Amid the domestic debate over the renewal of MFN status, President Bush recognized that the outcome of the contentious discussions in Washington

[542] “Still Tiptoeing,” *The Washington Post*, March 4, 1992.
[543] Leslie H. Gelb, “China Ties About to Snap,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 1991.
[544] Private letter from President Bush to Deng Xiaoping in Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*.

could significantly influence, disrupt, and potentially reshape the delicate balance between reformists and hardliners within the CCP leadership. Thus, placing the Administration's efforts to preserve relations with Beijing and maintain favorable trade tariffs for the PRC – a position Bush steadfastly defended throughout his presidency – within this broader context provides a clearer understanding of his approach. In addition to strategic, economic, and moral considerations, the president's personal attachment to China, coupled with his reluctance to delegate responsibility for China-related matters, continued to play a pivotal role in shaping U.S. policy toward Beijing.

In the weeks following the massacre, Capitol Hill redirected its attention to Chinese students in the U.S. and the PRC, viewing them as potential future interlocutors who could succeed the gerontocratic leadership. Concurrently, a primary concern for President George H. W. Bush was evaluating how the CCP in Beijing was managing the internal ongoing crisis. The president's determination to retain control over U.S.-China policy was further influenced by the intricate Chinese internal dynamics.[545] Misguided and fragmented foreign policy management in Washington risked complicating these delicate circumstances. On the one hand, the Administration needed to contain "the variable of the uncontrolled American reaction to China," aiming to mitigate widespread dissatisfaction across various sectors of society, including the media, academia, business, and Congress. On the other hand, due to the Americans' vulnerability in China, the Administration had to ensure that the Chinese did not "establish a dichotomy between good substantive high-level talks and bashing us on the ground in Beijing."[546] Based on the information coming from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, the Chinese domestic scenario presented several challenges, including a complex power struggle, economic stagnation, and an alarming rise in anti-American rhetoric.

Firstly, following the massacre, the Embassy chronicled of continuing disagreement among top PRC leadership and between the Party center and the provinces. "The leadership continues to be driven by disagreements over personnel and policy issues as well as isolated

[545] For an analysis of the CCP power transition in the 1990s see Joseph Fewsmith, *China since Tiananmen. From Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

[546] "China and the U.S. – A protracted engagement," Secret Cable from American Embassy in Beijing to the NSC and the State Department, July 1989, Stanford University Green Library Archives, James Lilley Papers, M1849, Accession 2011-148, Box 1, Folder 1 – Cables C. Peking 89-91 (1 of 2).

from provincial leaders and other central committee members," informed James Lilley.[547] On June 9, Deng had addressed his Party comrades and, despite endorsing the crackdown, he had also supported continued reform and opening, therefore attempting to reestablish the balance. Whether his attempt was likely to succeed, the Embassy could not assure. Chinese governance found itself in "a tense interregnum," expected to endure until the older generation of leaders passed away or until policy stagnation worsened, potentially leading to further social unrest. Around a dozen young leaders within the Communist Party vied for power, all committed to maintaining the party's survival, which had been significantly challenged by the 1989 democracy movement. While actively engaging in "intense behind-the-scenes power maneuvers" and seeking support from key members of the ruling gerontocracy, the leadership appeared trapped in a stalemate. The uncertainty surrounding the departure of the old guard from the political stage made it difficult to predict when this transition would eventually occur or the sequence in which individuals would exit. Members of the younger generation were therefore cautious while "locked into a waiting game," avoiding premature moves and preparing for the next phase of the succession struggle, characterized by intensified "backroom maneuvering." Despite Deng Xiaoping's declining health and influence, he remained a central figure. By the beginning of 1990, the Embassy sensed that "the paramount leader has entered into his final decline, as his physical condition no longer permits active involvement in all important matters while his once unquestioned prestige has been measurably diminished by last year's events." Yet the younger leaders were expected to remain loyal to him until his definitive departure from office, refraining from attempting to seize power within the Party. As for the time being, the "lingering crisis of legitimacy poses central dilemma" and was the major cause of a "policy malaise" that was unlikely to be addressed until the succession issue was resolved. Discontent among various segments of society, including "alienated intellectuals, a disaffected urban population, frightened and uncertain rank and file party members, restive minorities, a large floating population," remained unaddressed, potentially fueling social unrest. The Embassy concluded that "the more protracted the succession crisis, the more volatile the situation is likely to become." [548] Given the intricate situation in Beijing, it was

[547] " – Describes Present Political Scene," Secret Cable from American Embassy in Beijing to the NSC and the State Department, June 1989, Stanford University Green Library Archives, James Lilley Papers, M1849, Accession 2011-148, Box 1, Folder 2 – Cables C. Peking 89-91 (2 of 2).
[548] "China Leadership Dynamics: Interregnum Blues" Secret Cable, September 1990, GHWBPR, NSC, Douglas H. Paal Files, China – Foreign Policy 1990.

imperative that President Bush maintained control over China policy-making in Washington to effectively address the ongoing power struggle.

Secondly, concerning its economy, the PRC had plunged into what *The Wall Street Journal* described as a "chaos," exacerbated by the government's response to the crackdown, which had a detrimental effect on the workers' morale and productivity as well as on the trust and willingness to invest of the international business community.[549] Difficulties within the PRC leadership, coupled with the pro-democracy protests, seemed to have hindered the opening up process of the country to the outside world, as well as the market-oriented turn of the Chinese economy. Additionally, the crisis underscored regional disparities within China, particularly the pronounced differences between the more advanced urban and coastal areas and the less developed rural and inland regions. A report submitted to the Congress Joint Economic Committee in 1991, mostly based on Chinese official statistics, highlighted the difficulties and multiple dilemmas faced by Beijing. "China's economic performance in the 1980s was a success by most measures. In this decade of reform, the economy expanded at an annual average rate of about 10 percent, living standards and consumption more than doubled, and for most of the period inflation was kept under control. By the end of the decade, China's foreign trade had more than tripled and the PRC had become an important player on the global economic stage. In 1989 China was the world's 13th largest exporter and total trade was equivalent to about one-fourth of its gross national product."[550] By the end of the 1980s, however, inflation in China had surged to 30 percent, with prices for many essential foods and consumer goods doubling, due to increased investment and consumption demands driven by economic decentralization and the lack of effective indirect monetary instruments for countercyclical intervention. To mitigate the crisis, the leadership implemented stricter controls on credit and investment, which succeeded in reducing inflation but also hindered economic growth. These measures also led to "rising unemployment, slumping industrial efficiency, and a widening government budget deficit."[551]

According to official PRC data, the annual gross national income (GNI) growth declined sharply from 11 percent in 1987 to 3.9 percent in 1989, a decrease of over seven

[549] -, "China Syndrome. Beijing's Economic Ills Pose a New Threat of Social Upheaval," *The Walls Street Journal*, August 3, 1989.
[550] "China's Economic Dilemmas in the 1990s - The Problems of Reforms, Modernization, and Interdependence," Study Papers Submitted to the Joint Economic Committee Congress of the United States, 102nd Congress, April 1991.
[551] Ibid. Study Papers Submitted to the Joint Economic Committee Congress, April 1991.

percentage points within two years. Similarly, the gross value of industrial output (GVIO) for both state-owned and private industries more than halved, dropping from 17.7 percent in 1987 to 7 percent in 1990. The labor productivity growth rate was particularly alarming, decreasing from 7.6 percent in 1987 to a negative 0.8 percent by September 1990.[552] As for the workers, conservative estimates suggested that the two months of unrest had resulted in over $1 billion in lost man-hours and damaged property alone. Many workers had participated in the demonstrations, and upon returning to their factories, they were subjected to long hours of studying ideological speeches, accompanied by warnings of severe punishment if they were to take to the streets again. "The result: resentment is up, productivity is down," sentenced the WSJ. Workers were disillusioned by the unpredictable and unstable nature of economic reforms and their outcomes, as well as by the prevalence of corruption and nepotism among the Chinese elite. In terms of foreign investments, Western governments and aid groups had delayed or restricted loans, and commercial banks, already concerned about China's long-term economic challenges, had tightened credit. Additionally, various joint ventures had either reduced production or postponed planned new investments. "From technocrats inside the country and joint-venture partners outside, the prophecy is the same, and bleak: unless China's new, hardline leadership can untangle the nation's contradictory economic program and revive incentive and productivity, the country's stagnation, inflation and shortages will only worsen," foresaw the WSJ.[553]

Thirdly, faced with sanctions from both Washington and the international community in response to the crackdown, the conservative faction, which appeared to have assumed leadership within the CCP, resorted to appeals to xenophobia and anti-Western rhetoric. The anti-American propaganda campaign, reminiscent of themes from the Cultural Revolution and the early 1970s, explicitly associated the United States with the pejorative notion of 'bourgeois liberalization,' claiming that Washington was the primary instigator of the counter-revolutionaries threatening the stability of the country.[554] The narrative positioned the U.S. as a superpower intent on meddling in Chinese domestic affairs and exerting dominance over China. This propaganda directly appealed to anti-foreign sentiment and Chinese nationalism, likely to achieve, according to the U.S. Embassy, some measurable impact.[555] This tactic was

[552] Ibid. Study Papers Submitted to the Joint Economic Committee Congress, April 1991.
[553] Ibid. *The Walls Street Journal*, August 3, 1989.
[554] On the anti-American rhetoric see, among others, Julian Gewirtz, "'Loving Capitalism Disease': Aids and Ideology in the People's Republic of China, 1984–2000," *Past & Present*, vol.249, no.1 (November 2020): pp.251–294.
[555] Ibid. "China and the U.S. – A protracted engagement," Secret Cable, July 1989.

reported in internal documents circulating within the Bush Administration, arguing that the conduct of the hardliners was threefold. First, the hardliners underscored the critical importance of maintaining China's economic independence and highlighted the perils associated with excessive dependence on foreign markets. In this context, they drew a parallel with the benefits gained from disengagement from the Soviet Union in the 1960s, contending that a comparable approach should be adopted in relation to Western countries.[556] Second, they opposed foreign criticisms about internal repression as they claimed that those measures were necessary to maintain order and guarantee stability in China. Third, they resorted to well-known rhetoric of humiliation caused by foreign mercantilist powers in the 19th century, and they maintained that major disruption in the modern history of the country had been caused by external forces.[557]

Although finding it disturbing and at times problematic, the American Embassy in Beijing seemed to initially justify this harsh rhetoric. "Their negative efforts so far have been predictable and often clumsy, as they perceive they are losing ground and suffering humiliation internationally," seemed to dismiss the Embassy. According to Ambassador Lilley, the conduct of the hardliners suggested a profound struggle to manage both domestic and international challenges, and an endeavor to reassert control over events of a much larger scale and complexity than previously anticipated. "We can certainly handle this colorful behavior at the moment and would not overinterpret its significance except as it reflects the conflicting signals the regime is giving itself and others," it was claimed. What was less tolerable was that, in the months following the June crackdown, CCP hardliners seemed to have targeted foreigners, including businesspeople and diplomats residing in China. "Analysis of the behavior of the current leaders of China shows a schizophrenia both calculated and emotional. In recent weeks, they have exhibited defense mechanisms bordering on paranoia in meetings with foreigners," noted a secret cable dispatched to Washington. The leadership consistently reiterated allegations of involvement by the CIA and Voice of America, as well as Taiwan, in the Tiananmen Square protests during meetings with American business representatives in China. The leadership, portrayed as "groping and insecure," seemed persistently intent on "driving a wedge between the Embassy and the American business community." This strategy primarily

[556] For a brief but complete recollection of Sino-Soviet relations during the Cold War period see Sergey Radchenko, "The Rise and the Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance 1949–1989," in Norman Naimark, Silvio Pons, and Sophie Quinn-Judge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Communism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): pp.243–68.

[557] On the post-Tiananmen Chinese nationalism and humiliation domestic discourse see Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation. Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

served to irritate and bemuse the foreign business community rather than create significant frictions among Americans, which frustrated the leadership. Consequently, hardliners redirected their efforts inward, attempting to persuade the Chinese population of the purported American threat.[558] Although Lilley was confident that "most American businessmen will not accept the Chinese big lie and will not lend themselves to propaganda manipulation," a protracted anti-American propaganda had the potential to become increasingly problematic. Which led the ambassador concluding that "we may have to take some stronger medicine on the Washington side to remind them of the reciprocal costs of their attempts at humiliating us here in China."[559] Comparable propaganda strategies had proven effective in other global contexts, such as Latin America, where depictions of U.S. power as imperialistic and predatory had found resonance among key societal groups.[560] These outcomes, if they exceeded a tolerable limit, were deemed unacceptable by the United States and necessitated intervention to prevent further escalation.

From Beijing, Ambassador Lilley cautioned that the domestic debate in Washington on China had the potential to exacerbate this sentiment. "We must recognize that we Americans are an intrusive actor in this Chinese situation. We are in fact way up the flagpole. Congressional resolutions, media and Voice of America coverage, individual critical statements by influential Americans and our occasional private intervention all make us vulnerable to a counter-attack. The Chinese have at all levels signaled us to watch our step or else," warned the U.S. ambassador.[561] As the precarious equilibrium between hardliners and reformists within the CCP leadership progressively shifted in favor of the former, those who had consistently expressed caution regarding the opening-up process initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s seized upon the May student-led protests – wherein the echoes of Western ideals such as freedom and democracy resonated – to advocate for a reversion to a more orthodox political stance. In October 1990, a CIA report provided to President Bush by

[558] "A Flavor of dealings with China today," Cable from American Embassy in Beijing to the Secretary of State and the NSC, October 1989, Stanford University Green Library Archives, James Lilley Papers, M1849, Accession 2011-148, Box 1, Folder 1 – Cables C. Peking 89-91 (1 of 2).
[559] Ibid. "A Flavor of dealings with China today," Secret Cable, October 1989.
[560] For a comprehensive account of anti-U.S. attitudes in Latin America see Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Juan Pablo Scarfi and Andrew Reid Tillman (eds.), *Cooperation and Hegemony in U.S.-Latin American Relations: Revisiting the Western Hemisphere Idea* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 2011).
[561] "Chaos within China," Secret Cable from American Embassy in Beijing to the NSC and the State Department, June 1989, Stanford University Green Library Archives, James Lilley Papers, M1849, Accession 2011-148, Box 1, Folder 1 – Cables C. Peking 89-91 (1 of 2).

Brent Scowcroft emphasized the efforts of hardliners were "consistently trying to move China's foreign policy center of gravity farther from the U.S. and the West." It highlighted that Li Peng repeatedly warned publicly about the danger of "new hegemonism," expressing concerns that U.S. power and influence had become "unbridled as the Soviet global reach waned." The Chinese premier feared that Washington would "use this ascendancy to impose Western ideology on China and other states."[562]

However, the Administration's primary diplomatic goal was to preserve relations with Beijing, therefore avoiding direct condemnations of human rights violations. Despite engaging in a "massive campaign to discredit U.S. influence among the Chinese populace," China remained dependent on American technology, trade, and security connections with Washington. Following nearly two decades of sustained economic growth, the PRC encountered a historical juncture characterized by a significant erosion of popular trust and confidence in its leadership, the likelihood of economic stagflation and possibly recession, and a tarnished international image. The American Embassy characterized the leadership's strategy to address this multifaceted crisis as "backward and conservative yet occasionally cunning." By the decade's end, assessing the actual power and influence of the hardliners remained challenging, as did predicting the duration of their dominance amid the "struggle between forces advocating for outward orientation and those preferring an inward focus."[563] The Bush Administration should commit to anesthetize the attempt of stakeholders in Washington to influence the management of the American China policy as reformists like Deng Xiaoping and General Secretary Jiang Zemin sought to counter this trend while distancing themselves from the hardliners' claims that Beijing had gained little from Washington despite making numerous concessions. Faced with this anti-foreign language – which especially targeted the United States – Bush was advised by both the Embassy in Beijing and his closer advisers in Washington to extended MFN to China to continue boosting those sections of society such as export-oriented industry managers who had greatly profited from the country's opening to external markets and reform-minded provincial authorities whose regions had become hubs of Western-oriented development and progress. [564] They believed that the loss of MFN would seriously undercut their influence and counterweight clout against hardliners. By granting MFN, Washington could prove to be a reliable commercial partner while keeping contact and

[562] CIA Report on China, GHWBPR, NSC.
[563] Ibid. "China and the U.S. – A protracted engagement," Secret Cable, July 1989.
[564] Fact Sheet on MFN for China. Impact on Reformer/Hardliner Debate, GHWBPR, WHO of Public Liaison, James Schaefer Files, China MFN.

dialogue with the most reformist segments of Chinese society, gaining greater influence in the transformative process that had started in the country in the 1980s and, despite a major setback, would eventually continue.

Ultimately, one of the Administration's compelling concerns was aligning the American response to the crackdown with that of its allies. The U.S. was perceived as the principal influence behind the May protests and consequently as the main cause of the resulting instability. This perception led Beijing to adopt a harsher stance towards Washington compared to other Western countries that had condemned the Chinese leadership's repression. "The Chinese have singled us out from the EC and Japan for more of their vitriol although the EC, and especially France, have been at least as aggressive in their reactions to Chinese suppression as we have," warned the Lilley. Washington had become China's "bogeyman," with Americans viewed as "the main foreign influence not only at Tiananmen but throughout China."[565] This appeared to be a deliberate strategy to create a rift between Washington and its allies. To counteract this attempt, Washington should ensure all its sanctions were coordinated with those of the EC countries as well as Japan, with which Beijing was progressively restoring relations at the beginning of 1990. According to the American ambassador, the U.S. "need not be alone in this" effort.[566] As the next section demonstrates, the Bush administration shared these concerns, fearing entanglement in domestic negotiations with stakeholders multiplying in Washington, while its allies gradually resumed "business as usual."

[565] Ibid. "China and the U.S. – A protracted engagement," Secret Cable, July 1989.
[566] Ibid. "Chaos within China," Secret Cable, June 1989.

2.7 What the Allies Stand For. Facing the Risk of Missing Out on China



Figure 22. G-7 Leaders in Paris, July 14, 1989.
Photo credit: Dirck Halstead via Getty Images.

Following the Tiananmen Square massacre, Western nations had initially expressed strong and unified condemnation of the Chinese leadership's bloody response to the pro-democracy demonstrations. However, as time passed, this denunciation weakened, particularly among U.S. allies such as the European Community (EC) countries and Japan, which began showing a greater willingness to quickly resume business with Beijing by early 1990. Back in Washington, this shift fueled an urgent and troubling concern that the United States might miss the opportunity to engage China as a major economic and commercial partner, as well as a valuable ally in geopolitical strategic matters in the post-Cold War world settlement. Amid an increasingly polarized and contentious domestic debate in Washington on the nature of the relations with the PRC, these anxieties first emerged at the beginning of the 1990s. At that time, several nations expressed a willingness to ease sanctions on China. Notably, within the framework of the World Bank, they contemplated the resumption of loans to Beijing that had been frozen following the Tiananmen crackdown. A confidential document issued by the National Security Council outlined the attitudes of both the EC and G-7 members. Concerning the EC, the document cautioned that European nations were leaning toward easing sanctions

on China, but there was substantial disagreement regarding the extent of relaxation. While Southern countries such as Italy, Spain, and Portugal favored the reestablishment of normal economic relations, including the resumption of World Bank loans – Italy being particularly prominent in this stance – France, the Benelux States, and Denmark opposed such relaxation. The UK and Germany adopted a middle-ground approach. However, on the diplomatic front, the EC as a whole indicated a preference for aligning with Washington's position. As for the G-7 countries, Japan and Italy emerged as the primary advocates for returning to normal business relations. The prime ministers of both nations wrote to President Bush, urging him to support their stance on relaxing sanctions against China. In particular, Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti expressed a desire for a policy toward China that "transcends the immediate and well-justified reaction spurred by events that genuinely offended Western political sensitivity and which enables us to pursue the common objectives of a dialogue with an interlocutor of critical importance to a mere satisfactory balance in Asia." Conversely, France, under President Mitterand, emphasized opposition to the loans, asserting that the current situation in China did not justify lifting the sanctions agreed to in Paris during the G-7 Economic Summit in June 1989. Lastly, UK officials adopted a more nuanced position, primarily driven by concerns about the future of Hong Kong (refer to Chapter Four). They believed that normal economic relations with China would facilitate the anticipated transition of the colony to Chinese control in 1997.[567]

Hence, alongside navigating the American domestic legislative turmoil, the Bush Administration found itself tasked with formulating a strategy to engage China within the global community of powers. A strategy aimed to safeguard Washington's interests while preventing key allies, such as Japan, from outpacing the United States in their pursuit of relations with Beijing. Relations with Tokyo – and Japan's role in international affairs – posed a significant dilemma for U.S. global leadership in the post-Cold War era. By the late 1980s, scholars debated the likelihood of Japan surpassing the United States in industrial performance, economic capabilities, and geopolitical appeal, thereby challenging American global hegemony. Historian Paul Kennedy's influential work, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, epitomized prevalent anxieties regarding the potential decline of the United States in contrast to Japan's swift economic and geopolitical rise. In his concluding and highly contentious chapter, which was later expanded into a monograph in 1993 titled "Towards the Twenty-First

[567] EC and G7 attitudes toward China, 1990, GHWBPR, NSC, Douglass Paal Files, China – Domestic Policy 1989.

Century," Kennedy speculated that the United States had overstretched and was likely to be eclipsed initially by Japan, followed by other growing competitors in Asia and Europe.[568] Similarly, political economist Lester Thurow's *Head to Head: The Coming Economic Battle among Japan, Europe, and America* analyzed the strengths, weaknesses, and future prospects of these major economic powers to predict their impact on the global landscape, and on Washington's global supremacy.[569] George Friedman and Meredith LeBard's provocative book *The Coming War with Japan* heightened concerns by forecasting an inevitable conflict between the U.S. and Japan, driven by economic rivalry, strategic interests, and cultural differences.[570] While dismissing the widespread anxiety about Japan, American political scientist Joseph Nye argued that Washington had to come up with a convincing strategy to cope with the rising of Tokyo. "Although American decline has been exaggerated and mismeasured, half the American public and half the Japanese public believe that the United States is in decline; it is that perception rather than reality that triggers anxiety. At the same time, the rise in Japan's power has been dramatic, and, relative to Japan alone, America is less powerful than it was," argued Nye.[571]

As highlighted by the former director of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University – who refused the Cold War analogy often employed at the beginning of the new decade to frame the nature of U.S.-Japan relations – these studies held great appeal on the American public and contributed to fostering anxieties about relations with Japan and its rising global prominence. The business community, in particular, grew increasingly concerned. As an example, in a 1988 interview with Oprah Winfrey, Donald Trump, one of the most popular American real-estate developers, whose book *Donald Trump: The Art of the Deal* achieved significant commercial success – enough to prevent Kennedy's book from reaching the top position in *The New York Times* bestseller list – accused the Japanese of exploiting the American market excessively.[572] "They come over here, they sell their cars, their VCRs. They knock the hell out of our companies," Trump asserted. Similarly, in a 1990 interview with

[568] Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).
[569] Lester Thurow, *Head to Head. The Coming Economic Battle among Japan, Europe, and America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992).
[570] George Friedman and Meredith Lebard, *The Coming War with Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).
[571] Joseph S. Nye, "Coping with Japan," *Foreign Policy*, no.89 (Winter, 1992-1993), p.97.
[572] On the rising popularity of Donal Trump see Conor Friedersdorf, "When Donald Trump Became a Celebrity," *The Atlantic*, January 6, 2016.

Playboy magazine, Trump claimed, "First they take all our money with their consumer goods, then they put it back in buying all of Manhattan."[573]

Despite employing less colorful language, the Bush Administration echoed some of these concerns. The 1991 National Security Strategy appeared to position Japan more as a competitor rather than an ally in the global financial and commercial arena. "We frequently find ourselves competitors – sometimes even bitter competitors – in the economic arena," the strategic document argued. "These frictions must be managed if we are to preserve the partnerships that have fostered reconciliation, reassurance, democracy and security in the postwar period." Although Tokyo did not represent an existential threat as Moscow had often been portrayed during the Cold War, the NSS drew a comparison between the two powers claiming that "ongoing trade negotiations now share some of the strategic importance we have traditionally attached to arms talks with the Soviet Union."[574] In light of these concerns, it was crucial to safeguard relations with China to ensure that the vast potential of the Chinese market did not exclusively benefit U.S. allies-competitors, thereby placing Washington at a disadvantage.

To avoid being left behind in the global race to re-establish connections with China, the Bush Administration needed to garner support from the American public for its policy objectives as well as reaching a compromise with its allies on the timing of returning to *business as usual* without excessively upsetting the Chinese. Brent Scowcroft had anticipated that, among G-7 countries, "the consensus to restrict lending to Basic Human Needs (BHN)-only has frayed," and that Tokyo, Rome, London, and Berlin would likely push for new loans to China, beyond the sole humanitarian aids to which the loans were restricted in the past year.[575] However, the President should prepare to advocate for a compromise position as his margin of maneuver was curtailed by the congressional actions against Beijing.[576] In Washington, those opposing Bush's stance on China had grown increasingly preoccupied that the Administration would be inclined to soften tensions with Beijing despite faint – if not existent – signs of

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[573] Jonathan Soble and Keith Bradsher, "Donald Trump Laces into Japan with a Trade Tirade from the '80s," *The New York Times,* March 7, 2016.

[574] National Security Strategy of the United States, August 1991, Historical Office – Office of the Secretary of Defense.

[575] Huston Summit: World Bank Lending to China, Memorandum for the President from Brent Scowcroft, July 1990, GHWBPR, WHORM, Economic Summit, Houston, Texas, 7/9.11/9/1990.

[576] At the conclusion the July 1990 G-7 meeting in Houston, Texas, it was agreed "*to maintain the measures put into place at last year's summit*" and to "*keep them under review for future adjustments to respond to further positive developments in China.*" Acknowledging some recent developments in China, the countries expressed their willingness to "*explore whether there are other World Bank loans that would contribute to reform of the Chinese economy, especially loans that would address environmental concerns.*" The Houston Summit; The Text of the Political Declaration," *The New York Times*, July 11, 1990.

willingness to comply with internationally recognized human rights standards from the other side. "There is still no *business as usual* with China, and our sanctions of last June essentially remain in place," assured Lawrence Eagleburger testifying before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in February 1990. "But we have taken a series of steps to try to put relations back on a positive track and to try to prevent any further retrogression," declared the Deputy Secretary of State.[577] These steps included the partial resumption of World Bank loans to the PRC, which had been suspended in the aftermath of the massacre.[578] The State Department began to put forth the message that it was in the Administration's intentions to consider restoring some loans to China on a case-by-case basis and aimed exclusively at improving BHN. These were only intended to provide assistance to the people of China as well as to market-oriented regional and local institutions that had been instrumental in driving China's economic liberalization process.[579] "In short, we seek to soften the blow to the Chinese people brought about by the crisis in China," argued Eagleburger. "China is not a benighted society from top to bottom. Indeed, the forces favoring reform have not disappeared. We owe them an approach that strengthens their hand, not the hand of those who would welcome isolation."[580]

This argument was repeatedly invoked by Bush Administration officials in discussions concerning economic linkages with Beijing and the granting of MFN status. Economic engagement with China had been, since the early 1980s, the primary means to promote liberalization and market-oriented impulses within Chinese society. Cutting of this process would adversely affect exactly those it intended to help. Despite "the Administration remains opposed to a general resumption of World Bank lending" – it's worth noting that these loans represented a very small portion of the over 40 World Bank projects that had been put on hold since June 1989 and they amounted to significantly less than the average annual allocation of

[577] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy toward China Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, February 7, 1990, p.11.
[578] Convening in Paris in July 1989 for the annual Economic Summit, the G-7 countries – collectively holding 51 percent of the votes – had opted to defer the evaluation of new loans to the PRC by the World Bank. This decision had an immediate impact, affecting seven projects valued at $786 million, and also halted progress on further plans that were in the process of being reviewed.
[579] Between February and March 1990, the U.S. Administration opted to endorse a sum of $140 million in World Bank loans designated for various purposes. These included aiding agricultural development and farming projects in Jiangxi province, undertaking reconstruction efforts following an earthquake in Shanxi province that took place in October 1989, and providing financial support for Vocational and Technical Education initiatives.
[580] Ibid. *U.S. Policy toward China Hearing*, February 7, 1990, p.12.

$1.5 billion in the three years leading up to the crackdown – its support for the loans alarmed many on Capitol Hill.[581]

Believing that this measure would lead to further unjustifiable concessions to the PRC leadership and that the humanitarian label was being excessively stretched by the Bush Administration, Congress started questioning their adequacy. On the House floor, Representative Pelosi (D-CA) embarked on a heated confrontation with John Niehuss, Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary of Treasury for International Economic Policy, who had come to testify on the Administration's support for the resumption of World Bank lending to China. The representative from California contested three main dimensions that appeared convoluted in the Administration's reasoning. First, the main issue laid in the discrepancy in providing financial help based on humanitarian grounds to a country that was consistently spending its money to fund its army and apply repressive measures against its own citizens. Second, she also questioned the efficacy of the control mechanisms put in place to assure that the funds provided by the World Bank would be effectively allocated for the humanitarian projects they aimed at. Third, and most importantly, Pelosi warned about the use of human rights rhetoric in the specific case of dealing with China, especially when this was paired with economic interests. "If the basic human needs standard becomes too broad in interpretation, it will make a farce of basic human needs," she claimed. "It will become a loophole, and that is what we would like not to see happen." [582]

Countering these arguments was challenging, as the Chinese provided little assistance. There were clear indications that the internal situation in China had not improved after the crackdown; in fact, it might even have worsened. As previously illustrated, the ascendance of hardliners within the Chinese communist leadership has resulted in the intensification of a concerning anti-U.S. rhetoric, likely to pose a significant threat to the recent positive developments in Sino-American relations. "There is no debate on today's China. The regime has taken the nation on a great leap backward," commented Winston Lord, depicting an alarming picture of the country's internal situation that re-evoked images of the pre-rapprochement China. "Executions, purges, imprisonment, surveillance, political indoctrination, and the reversal of many economic reforms – all cloaked in the big lie. Once

[581] Report to Congress of the President on China Economic Sanctions Required by Subsection 902 (C) of P.L. 101-246, May 11, 1990, GHWBPR, NSC, Karl Jackson Files, China – General 1990.
[582] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs, *World Bank Lending to the People's Republic of China Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Development, Finance, Trade, and Monetary Policy*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, May 8, 1990, p.17.

again, ideology reigns over expertise, Maoist slogans are in fashion, and culture serves the state. Western values are attacked, America vilified," warned the former ambassador to the PRC.[583] Similarly, behind-the-scenes, the Administration officials internally lamented that the CCP government had offered very little sign of redemption that the White House could use to justify its wait-and-see approach. By April 1990, the Chinese government had resumed the Fulbright program, suspended after the crackdown, and let the Peace Corps into China. However, Scowcroft considered these moves "small and politically useless." Already in the summer of 1989, Deng Xiaoping was reported to have said that China was "a chunk of good meat," indicating that Western countries would soon reestablish normal relations with Beijing without requiring much effort from the Chinese side.[584]

Despite the National Security Council's belief that the PRC was not immune to the transformative reforms sweeping the Communist world, and its assertion that "Beijing's current effort to deny any implications for the CCP is plainly futile," the evidence of a shift comparable to that seen in Eastern Europe was too insubstantial to effectively rally American public support behind the Administration's position. President Bush could not afford to simply wait for a democratic wave to sweep across China and for the aging leadership to be replaced if he wished to maintain control over its China policy. According to Douglas Paal, the Special Assistant to the President for Asia Affairs, the Administration needed a strategic approach for the President to engage with Beijing without appearing overly accommodating to the Chinese leadership in the eyes of the American public. "The President must be seen as ahead of the tide of change and not behind it. He can no longer successfully defend interaction with the current leadership without clearly – and in a moderate tone – calling for greater government responsiveness to the Chinese people. Otherwise, he risks being overwhelmed not only by opinion here but also possibly by events in China," recommended Paal in a memorandum to Scowcroft.[585] Additionally, the president would inevitably face scrutiny from the press and the public regarding the disparities in managing relations with Moscow and Beijing. Paal suggested that the question of the U.S. approach to the Soviet Union and the PRC could serve as an opportunity for Bush to urge China to be more responsive to its people publicly. "I am convinced," the memorandum suggested, "we need to get the President's position on change

[583] Ibid. *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.7.
[584] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs, *Human Rights and Multilateral Aid to China and Somalia hearing Before the International Development, Finance, Trade and Monetary Policy*, 101st Congress, 1st Session, June 20, 1989, p.13.
[585] China – How to Posture the President in View of the Changes in Moscow, Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft from Douglas Paal, February 8, 1990, GHWBPR, NSC, Virginia Lampley Files, China.

in China clearer in the public mind. We need to do it soon." According to Paal, the leadership in Beijing would not be excessively upset. "It should not produce a Chinese overreaction. We have lived with policies of dual track approaches to rhetoric and cooperation in the past with China, as in the early 1980s."[586]

This task would prove increasingly challenging. However, the onset of the Gulf War in the summer of 1990 presented a threefold opportunity for President Bush. Firstly, China seemed to regain a strategic role in global affairs, which the Administration could leverage to appease Congress and rally the American public around the White House's policy. Secondly, it reaffirmed Washington's primary role among its allies. Lastly, it offered a convincing argument to provide support to Deng Xiaoping and the reformists in Beijing, assisting them in regaining prominence within the CCP leadership. Following the August 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the Bush Administration had acknowledged the United Nations as the sole legitimate authority empowered to authorize the use of force and worked to build a broad-based coalition to support military action against Iraq. This approach helped delineate new boundaries of global conflict management in the post-Cold War era.[587] Moreover, for Washington, working through the UN meant implicating the Security Council and, therefore, Beijing.

In a confidential communication dispatched by the U.S. Embassy in Beijing to Washington in September 1990, the posture of the Chinese in the Gulf matter was described as "strikingly cooperative than we might have anticipated." This assessment highlighted the strategic intent of the Chinese leadership to regain international legitimacy, counter the prevailing post-Cold War perceptions portraying China as "strategically irrelevant," and increase the likelihood of returning to the pre-June 1989 era characterized by harmonious and constructive relations with the United States. Additionally, the Embassy urged a nuanced understanding of the sacrifices made by Beijing, including the forfeiture of lucrative arms contracts and the exposure of Chinese diplomats and technicians to high risks. Finally, "Chinese actions placed Beijing – in

[586] Ibid. China – How to Posture the President, February 8, 1990.
[587] For a comprehensive study of the Gulf War see Alastair Finlan, *The Gulf War 1991* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003). For a study on the Gulf War as the first global conflict in the post-Cold War era see Jeffrey A. Engel (eds.), *Into the Desert: Reflections on the Gulf War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For a counter-argument of how the Gulf War was a "good war" see Samuel Helfont, "The Gulf's War Afterlife: Dilemmas, Missed Opportunities and the Post-Cold War Order Undone," *The Texas National Security Review*, no.2 (Spring 2021): pp.25-47. Helfont has also published a study on Iraqi foreign policy after the 1991 Gulf War. See Samuel Helfont, *Iraq against the World: Saddam, America, and the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

some eyes anyway – uncomfortably close to association with the type of international big power condominium that has traditionally been anathema to China's older generation of leaders."[588]

Most importantly, in private conversations with Vice Foreign Minister Liu Huaqiu, the Embassy had learned that China had been able "to stay in sync with the international consensus" thanks to the ability of the more reformist professionals in seizing control of the Iraq/Kuwait response formulation "before the gerontocracy and ideologues could, in Mao's old phrase, *pick up a stone only to drop it on one's own foot*." They had been able to do so thanks to the fact that the condemnation of Saddam Hussain's invasion had not been framed in East/West nor superpower vs third-world terms. Finally, although it was unlikely that they could openly disclose enthusiasm for U.S. involvement in a foreign country's internal affairs, out of public sight, officials working at the Chinese foreign ministry had "shown understanding and sympathy with respect to Saudi requests for U.S. help." The Iraqi invasion – and the international condemnation that followed – had exposed the divisions within the Chinese leadership to the public, with moderates attempting to capitalize on the global blame of the attack and finding little choice but to support the UN Security Council resolutions. "We believe," suggested the report, "China's handling of the Gulf crisis reflects a behind-the-scenes effort by Deng Xiaoping and reformers to moderate hardline inclinations to create a sharp distinction between the positions of China and the United States."[589]

According to a CIA estimate, seeking to position China along with the West, Deng aimed at preventing hardliners from taking the lead in foreign policy matters, safeguarding his authority in addressing China's strategic vision, and bringing relations with the U.S. back on track. If it sought to gain leverage in the ongoing clash within the PRC leadership, the Administration was advised to build on China's current cooperation on the Gulf matter to improve U.S.-China relations and strengthen the reformists' positions "avoid[ing] publicly encouraging such linkage"[590] The Administration should work toward granting some concession to Beijing for the reformers back in China to prove internally that their strategy was effectively working. "We speculate that assurances – either explicit or implicit – may have been made by Deng and his supporters to the rest of the leadership that China's cooperation

[588] "China's approach toward the Gulf Crisis" Secret Cable, September 1, 1990, GHWBPR, Brent Scowcroft Collection, China: Post-Tiananmen (October 1990).
[589] Ibid. "China's approach toward the Gulf Crisis," September 1, 1990.
[590] The Gulf Crisis and U.S.-China Relations, Memorandum for the President from Brent Scowcroft, October 5, 1990, GHWBPR, Brent Scowcroft Collection, China: Post-Tiananmen (October 1990).

with the West in the United Nations on the Gulf will lead to an easing of sanctions imposed on China in the wake of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. If China is unable to secure this objective, hardliners are likely to intensify their criticism of Deng and his foreign policy line."[591] President Bush once again sought direct engagement with Deng Xiaoping through a private letter. He began by stating, "I am writing to you, my old friend, to reemphasize the high importance I attach to the U.S.-China relationship." Bush underscored his belief that cooperation between Washington and Beijing was "fundamental to peace and stability, not only in Asia, but in the entire world." The president expressed his gratitude for the PRC government's "principled position" regarding the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. He remarked, "I believe a useful message is conveyed to all countries when our two governments can stand together in support of the fundamental principles of international conduct." Bush observed that the Chinese stance, along with other actions such as permitting the departure of the Fang Lizhi family, would likely have a positive impact on the MFN debate in Washington. He emphasized, "for now, I want to emphasize the priority I attach to the next U.S. step: winning a continuation of China's most-favored-nation status. That is, of course, a crucial next step. I am compelled to say, however, that more needs to be done on the Chinese side before I can guarantee a general improvement in our relations. Any such step your side can take will move toward accomplishment of the package solution which is so much in our mutual interest."[592] As in previous communications, the letter tone was conciliatory and amicable. President Bush positioned the United States and China as equals, emphasizing their shared interests over their differences. While advocating for the further relaxation of China internal policies, Bush implicitly assured his support for Beijing in the ongoing domestic debates in Washington, particularly concerning trade benefits.

The Gulf crisis served as a catalyst for high-level meetings with Chinese government officials, which were conducted openly rather than in secrecy. These discussions aimed to secure Beijing's support in the imposition of international sanctions against Iraq at the United Nations. On November 6, Secretary of State James Baker and Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen met in Cairo. Baker was on an eight-city trip to the Middle East and Europe, where he aimed to "galvanize support for a United Nations resolution authorizing force to enhance the

[591] CIA document "The Domestic Dynamic in China's Response to the Persian Gulf Crisis", September 24, 1990, GHWBPR, Brent Scowcroft Collection, China: Post-Tiananmen (October 1990).
[592] Letter from President Bush to Deng Xiaoping, August 30, 1990, GHWBPR, Brent Scowcroft Collection, China: Post-Tiananmen (September 1990).

credibility of the American military threat against Baghdad."[593] In Egypt, Qian guaranteed that the PRC government would not obstruct a potential intervention against Iraq. "The U.N. resolutions are intended to increase the pressure on Iraq for a peaceful solution. All of the armed forces have two roles to play. One is to fight a war, the other is to seek peace," Qian was reported to have said in Cairo. In return, according to an Administration official, Baker assured that Beijing's constructive behavior "will not be forgotten and the meaning of that assistance will not be lost on the domestic audience in the United States."[594] A few weeks later, Qian was formally invited to Washington by his American counterpart, becoming the highest-ranking Chinese official to visit the United States since the June 4 crackdown. The visit was scheduled to take place following the UN Security Council meeting in New York, where the vote on the authorization of the use of force against Iraq was on the agenda. Although Qian left China being vague about his voting intentions while speaking to reporters – a strategy likely intended to "to increase his bargaining power in negotiations with the Secretary of State before the vote" – China ultimately abstained, thus not interfering with the final decision.[595] Following the UN gathering in New York, Qian went to Washington where, following a business lunch hosted by Baker, he met with the president. Opening the meeting, Bush emphasized the importance of maintaining dialogue with the Chinese, despite the differences. "I am always inclined to emphasize the positive. And there are many positive and very important aspects to this relationship, very important, not the least of which is that China and the United States have made common ground in terms of standing up against aggression. That is important to every American. It is important, I think, to the Chinese side as well," said the president.[596]

Many in Washington lamented that the Administration had once again capitulated to the Chinese, arguing that with the international focus now on the Middle East, the Beijing leadership would feel less constrained to suppress internal dissent more forcefully. According to Human Rights Watch, "the visit by the Chinese Foreign Minister was clearly a reward for China's abstention at the Security Council on a critical resolution on Iraq, and formally ended the administration's previous position of limiting high-level contacts with China."[597] In its

[593] Thomas L. Friedman, "Mideast Tensions; Baker Gets Help from China on Gulf," *The New York Times*, November 7, 1990.
[594] Thomas L. Friedman, "Mideast Tensions; Official is Invited to Washington in Response to Gulf Stance," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1990.
[595] Sheryl Wudunn, "Mideast Tensions; Chinese Official Leaves in Doubt How He Will Vote on Iraq at U.N.," *The New York Times*, November 29, 1990.
[596] Robert Pear, "Mideast Tensions; Bush, Meeting Foreign Minister, Lauds Beijing Stand Against Iraq," *The New York Times*, December 1, 1990.
[597] Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Watch World Report 1990 – China, 1 January 1991.

annual report on global human rights practices, the organization stated, "While it was clear that the United States had important interests to pursue with Beijing, it was a shame that human rights were the trade-off in securing China's acquiescence to US policy in the Gulf. This trade-off was particularly regrettable in that it occurred precisely at a time when human rights conditions in China were deteriorating badly."[598] Criticism also emerged from Capitol Hill. In a letter signed by eighteen members of Congress, Representative Pelosi condemned the resumption of high-level contacts with China, arguing that the meeting between Bush and Qian was likely to send "precisely the wrong message about our concern for human rights in China." Congressmembers criticized the resumption of high-level contacts with PRC officials despite "the escalating prosecution of democracy advocates and the massive repression that continues" in China. They expressed concerns that Beijing's cooperative stance in the Gulf War was being leveraged by the President to restore relations with the PRC government, to the detriment of human rights advocates. "We must not permit the Chinese government to conclude that cooperation in the Persian Gulf crisis can silence criticism. Nor should we dismantle sanctions so long as the most basic human rights of the Chinese people continue to be abused," concluded the letter.[599] A more nuanced perspective was offered by other members, such as Representative Stephen J. Solarz, Chairman of the House subcommittee on Asia, who remarked, "We are now confronting in the Gulf the most serious crisis since the end of the Cold War. How this is resolved is going to determine the shape of international relations for decades to come. We need the Chinese to support our efforts and if this is a price that had to be paid to secure their support, it is a price worth paying."[600]

Solarz's argument suggested that the Gulf crisis and China's strategic significance in global affairs, affecting U.S. hegemony and vital interests, had the potential to temper Congress' punitive inclination following the crackdown. However, although on Capitol Hill, the favorable position taken by China within the UN Security Council might have influenced the Senate to temporarily delay action on the MFN issue, this delay was short-lived. Former Ambassador to China Winston Lord argued in Congress that regarding the war in the Persian Gulf, "the record is mixed." On the one hand, China did not obstruct the U.S. and did not veto resolutions, enforcing sanctions and condemning the invasion. However, on the other, China also watered-down resolutions and did not vote on the crucial one authorizing force. Additionally, the

[598] Ibid. Human Rights Watch World Report 1990 – China.
[599] Letter to President Bush from member of Congress, November 29, 1990, GHWBPR, WHORM Subject File General, CO 034-02 184856 to 194778, People's Republic of China.
[600] Ibid. *The New York Times*, November 28, 1990.

Communist leadership employed very tough anti-American rhetoric regarding American policy. "So I think it is a mixed record and I think they acted in the UN in their own national interests and not to do us any favors," sentenced Lord.[601] As shown in this chapter, many in Congress did agree with Lord and kept challenging the president's authority in the elaboration of foreign policy toward China.

According to *The New York Times*, overall, Beijing had greatly benefited from the Gulf War and was likely to regain global legitimacy due to its cooperative stance in the strategic decision-making leading to the use of force against Iraq. "While most of the world has suffered from the gulf crisis, China has been a beneficiary. Scholars, diplomats and Chinese themselves say China benefited in two ways: Saddam Hussein's behavior gave the West a new enemy and China won gratitude for its cooperation in imposing sanctions against Iraq."[602] Additionally, diplomats in Beijing observed that China's position allowed it to reintegrate with the West without losing its reputation or influence among developing nations. However, Beijing's cooperative stance on the Persian Gulf issue – arguably one of the most visible and appreciable outcomes of President Bush's insistence on managing relations with China independently – received little recognition on Capitol Hill.

Among others, Richard Nixon was notably displeased with this lack of acknowledgment. According to the former president, Congressmembers "don't give China the credit it deserves but even more revealing, they don't give the President and his associates in his Administration credit for not going along with the China-bashers who demanded that we virtually ostracize Beijing because of the tragedy of Tiananmen Square. If he had followed the advice, China might well have exercised the veto, and we would be in a much weaker diplomatic position than is the case presently." In a confidential letter to Scowcroft, Nixon contextualized these developments within a Cold War framework and cautioned the Bush Administration about the potential erosion of Washington's influence in Asia. He noted that while Gorbachev had no choice but to accept German unification and the sovereignty of Eastern European nations, he continued to employ adept Soviet geopolitics in Asia. "While the Cold War may have ended in Europe, he is still practicing skillful Soviet geopolitics in Asia," warned Nixon. Nixon predicted that Gorbachev's anticipated concessions, such as the probable surrender of the northern islands to Japan, would be lauded by American media as a significant and generous

[601] Ibid. *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing*, May 29, 1991, p.115.
[602] Nicholas D. Kristof, "China Gains in Mideast Crisis But Loses Cold War Benefits," *The New York Times,* November 11, 1990.

act. This praise, however, would overlook the earlier U.S. concession of Okinawa – "a far more important piece of real estate" – two decades years prior. Additionally, Gorbachev's actions were expected to enhance economic and strategic ties between Japan and the Soviet Union, while Tokyo, "ever keen on economic opportunities," had substantially restored its economic relations with China. Nixon highlighted Gorbachev's outreach to China and Japan's opportunistic engagement with Beijing, writing, "Gorbachev is also reaching out his tender loving hands to China. And the Japanese, always looking for a fast buck, have virtually restored full economic relations with China."[603]

Somehow relying on an anachronistic Cold War logic, Nixon emphasized the importance of reestablishing a normal relationship with Beijing as a strategic imperative. He argued, "I believe it is vitally important that we reestablish a normal relationship with Beijing at the earliest possible time." According to Nixon, President Bush should have pursued his own course of action, minimizing the impact of criticisms from Capitol Hill and dissenting voices within his own administration. Nixon argued that even the positive resolution of the Gulf War had not alleviated the animosity directed at Beijing, suggesting that no compromise would have been effective. He argued that accommodating Congressional demands would likely weaken the United States strategic position in Asia, thereby jeopardizing America's pivotal influence in the region and losing the momentum gained at the end of the Cold War. Without the U.S., contended the former president, "we have in effect a three-legged stool in Asia – the Soviet Union, Japan, and China. This is an unstable situation and a dangerous one for us. At a time when we are developing closer relationships with the Soviet Union and continue to nurture a good relationship with Japan, it is vital that we reestablish, at the very least, a cooperative economic relationship with China. A four-legged stool is far more stable than a three-legged stool!"[604] President Bush could not help but agree.

[603] Letter to Brent Scowcroft from Richard Nixon, September 14, 1990, GHWBPR, WHORM Subject File General, CO 034-02 187227.
[604] Ibid. Letter to Brent Scowcroft from Richard Nixon, September 14, 1990.

Chapter 3

America's Disenchantment with China

The Role of U.S. Sponsored Human Rights in the Post-Cold War China Debate

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3.1 The *Tank Man* and the Age of Human Rights. The Beijing Breakthrough

"It has been said that one picture is worth a thousand words. In this case, a picture is worth a thousand deaths. At least a thousand deaths," argued Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) on October 18, 1990, delivering a statement before the U.S. House of Representatives while standing next to a tripod displaying the *Tank Man* photograph taken during the Tiananmen Square crackdown a year earlier.[605] Pelosi strongly criticized President Bush's decision to grant China Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade privileges for the following year, emphasizing the lack of concrete progress or commitment by the Chinese government in advancing human rights. The image of a lone student standing defiantly before a line of tanks in Beijing's central square during the brutal suppression of the pro-democracy protests in June 1989 would become not only a central reference point for how the American public understood the struggles and aspirations of Chinese society, but also the quintessential symbol of individual power and rights, resonating globally in a way that had never been seen before. This image captured the essence of a global shift that had unfolded since the human rights breakthrough of the mid-1970s, where the individual emerged as the focal point of international attention, celebrated with unparalleled prominence.[606] The notion that, in a world where national entities were

[605] Pelosi China Tiananmen Square, October 18, 1990, C-SPAN, online at https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5026128/pelosi-china-tiananmen-square (last accessed February 22, 2023).
[606] On the 1970s human rights breakthrough, see Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn, *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the1970s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). See also Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde, and William I. Hitchcock, *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012). For a European perspective of how the human rights discourse intertwined with the European Community's activity since the 1970s, see Sara Lorenzini, Umberto Tulli, and Ilaria Zamburlini, *The*

increasingly challenged, discredited, and at times weakened, and where territoriality no longer held the same influence, the individual had emerged as the primary defender of its own rights progressively became a compelling narrative.[607] In this evolving global context, transnational dynamics eroded state sovereignty, and individuals were viewed as empowered to uphold inalienable rights that transcended national borders and the legal constraints of citizenship. This new understanding of human rights offered external actors the moral and rhetorical justification to intervene in a state's internal affairs, particularly when that government failed to protect or, worse, actively threatened the fundamental rights of its citizens.[608] It also empowered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to effectively define their missions and advocacy objectives, while contributing to the increasing professionalization of their operations and campaigns, ultimately positioning them as influential political actors.[609]

Alongside the stark reality that many Chinese students and workers were imprisoned or killed during the violent repression of their protests in the late spring of 1989, the enduring image of the lone man standing before tanks in Tiananmen Square came to symbolize the transformative force of human rights discourse. *The New York Times* journalist James Barron observed, "it all started with a man in a white shirt who walked into the street and raised his right hand no higher than a New Yorker hailing a taxi." The act, captured by the cameras of foreign reporters, highlighted the courage and resolve of this lone individual, who shifted from side to side to obstruct the tanks' advance. This scene became emblematic of both the strength of individual resistance and the apparent weakness of the Chinese government. As Barron noted, "the determination of the demonstrators, brave and unyielding in ways that might have been unthinkable a few weeks ago. In its quiet way, this little confrontation seemed to symbolize the fragility of the Government's position."[610] Reflecting on the historical significance of the images coming from Beijing – images that Americans were witnessing in real-time on their television sets – *The Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen wrote: "At moments like this we can only stand aside, mouths agape. The revolutions of our textbooks are

Human Rights Breakthrough of the 1970s: the European Community and International Relations (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

[607] See Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

[608] This reasoning would soon apply for justifying waging war as shown in Samuel Moyn, *Humane: How the United States Abandoned Peace and Reinvented War* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

[609] See Aryeh Neier, *The International Human Rights Movement: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[610] James Barron, "One Man can Make a Difference: This One Jousted Briefly with Goliath," *The New York Times*, June 06, 1989.

happening right on the television screen. Here is Valley Forge and the Bastille. Here is the taking of the Winter Palace and a massive demonstration led peaceably by Gandhi. Here are the anti-apartheid blacks (and some whites) of South Africa or, even, the ordinary soldier on Mao's Long March. Here is revolution."[611]

History was unfolding once again, and despite the geographic distance from the United States, Americans could sense its momentous impact. Cohen argued that the Chinese authorities had gravely underestimated their own people – those who had once brought them to power and now had the potential to force them to step down. As current events seemed destined to be chronicled in future history books, Cohen suggested that China's central government would face significant challenges in securing external approval and legitimacy. The notion that a liberal and progressive influence had permeated China and its leadership, rapidly gaining traction within the former Middle Kingdom, had suddenly become obsolete. "Here is the vaunted evil of communism in living color. Here are the formerly smiling leaders of China turning, almost instantly, into ogres. Just a few months ago, they were being interviewed on television, pleasantly saying such nice things about the United States, about reform and, of course, human rights. Like the prayers of the forcibly converted, their words hardly came from the heart," Cohen observed. He further reflected on the symbolic power of the lone man who stood before the tanks in Tiananmen Square: "Who is that man who stopped the tanks in Tiananmen Square? Who is that guy and what prompted him to do what he did? He is that most dangerous of individuals: a man with an idea. Stand aside and wish him well. In the past he has changed history, and he may do so again."[612]

A replica of the *Tank Man* image had previously been on exhibit outside Capitol Hill during a press conference held on January 23, 1990, where representatives of the Republican and Democratic parties spoke in favor of the visa extension for Chinese students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities (refer to Chapter One). "This body alone stood as the bastion of democracy and human rights in the world," contended Pelosi.[613] Namely, those very same values that America had sought to replicate on a global scale while fighting the Cold War and that a young generation of Chinese students was now making its own. This young man, and the way his photo was used and conveyed in the American public debate, ultimately served as a powerful synecdoche of the late Cold War age of human rights. At a time when the rights and

[611] Richard Cohen, "Facing Down a Tank," *The Washington Post*, June 06, 1989.
[612] Ibid. Cohen, *The Washington Post*, June 06, 1989.
[613] Ibid. Pelosi China Tiananmen Square.

power of the individual had taken the center stage of global assets while being celebrated as never before, the *Tank Man* became the symbol of a shared human rights defense effort. Trying to give voice to his absolute and inalienable rights and relying on his power as a human being, this individual captured the hearts and minds of the American people and their way to value human rights beyond national borders. As the United States was forced to reevaluate its relations with China *tout court*, U.S. Congress, as well as new stakeholders, would no longer stay on the margin as they had done for the previous two decades. "I have in my office a poster of the sole young man standing in front of the tanks," Tom Lantos (D-CA), a prominent advocate for human rights promotion and defense in Congress and founder of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus in 1983, thundered against Richard Solomon, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, on May 24, 1990, as if that photo alone served as the evidence of his devotion and commitment to the cause of human rights in China.[614]

Images of the Tiananmen crackdown entered people's living rooms in an unprecedented way, forcing U.S. society to confront the immediate reality of interactions with Beijing. In this regard, sociologist Richard Madsen observed that, thanks to extensive live coverage of the massacre by U.S. broadcasting channels, the American public experienced "a heartbreaking experimental connection to China's suffering" as the media "provided something never before achieved in the history of the West's relationship with China."[615] Some of the most powerful moments in the media's coverage of the crisis were those that engaged viewers "in a collective experience of cultural shock."[616] In 1992, reasoning on how crucial the media had been in galvanizing policymakers to take a strong stance on the China issue, Bob Packwood (R-OR) claimed: "I do not think we would be having this debate but for the television pictures from Tiananmen Square, and the picture of the boy standing up to the tanks." According to the senator from Oregon, American domestic debate about China presented "a more interesting

[614] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, May 24, 1990, p.269.

[615] It is worth emphasizing that such humanitarian sentiments and emotionally driven collective responses in the United States have significant historical antecedents. Notable examples include the public reaction to the civil war in Biafra (1967–1970), the Bangladeshi refugee crisis in the 1970s, and the "We Are The World" campaign of the 1980s, which sought to provide relief to famine victims across Africa, with a particular focus on Ethiopia. See Tobias Hof, "'We Are the World': Visions of Humanity in 1980s Charity Songs" in Sönke Kunkel, Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Sebastian Jobs (eds.), *Visions of Humanity: Historical Cultural Practices since 1850* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2023): pp.250-278.

[616] Richard Madsen, *China and the American Dream. A Moral Inquiry* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1995)

philosophical discussion, and the impact of the news media than, perhaps, any we have had in years."[617] The American public's response to the Tiananmen Square crackdown was marked by deep disillusionment and frustration. Prior to the events, China had been viewed favorably, with a Gallup poll conducted in early 1989 reporting that 72% of Americans held a positive opinion of the country. However, following the violent suppression of the pro-democracy movement, public sentiment shifted dramatically. By August 1989, favorability had plummeted to 34%. A Times Mirror survey from July of the same year revealed that approximately half of Americans had seen the now-iconic image of the *Tank Man*, which came to epitomize the struggle for democracy and the violent response by the Chinese government.[618]



Figure 23. Representatives Pelosi and Lantos (2nd R) at a press conference on Capitol Hill in May 1995. Photo credit: Tom Lantos Papers, Bancroft Library UC Berkley, Box 91.3 Foreign Affairs: China 1992-95.

[617] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Finance, *Extending China's MFN Hearing before the Committee on Finance*, 102nd Congress, 2nd Session, July 30, 1992, p.2.
[618] Both the Gallup and the Times Mirror polls are cited in Richard Wike, "How America's opinion of China has changed since Tiananmen," *Pew Research Center*, June 3, 2014.

This chapter engages with the extensive historiography on human rights to illustrate how the United States experienced a crescendo of concern, condemnation, and advocacy in response to the Chinese government's violent crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy protests.[619] As historian Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann argues, "human rights are the *doxa* of our time, belonging among those convictions of our society that are tacitly presumed to be self-evident truths."[620] Yet, in the context of U.S.-China relations, these principles only became fully self-evident after the events of June Fourth. This chapter situates the ascendance of human rights as a pivotal and defining issue in U.S.-China relations specifically within the early post-Cold War period. Building on Hoffmann's assertion that the human rights discourse gained prominence in the wake of "concrete experiences of violence and conflict," rather than as a driver of such events, and that Western-led human rights frameworks gained hegemonic influence "as an explanatory framework for understanding what had just happened," this section demonstrates how the human rights vocabulary became a key mechanism for articulating a moral and credible response to China's actions.[621] This discourse also shaped a broader disillusionment with China's perceived path toward liberalization. Despite efforts by the Bush Administration to sideline the human rights discourse in its handling of U.S.-China relations, human rights became a dominant theme in the domestic debate. This rhetoric was widely embraced by a range of actors, including policymakers, Chinese dissidents, and influential advocacy groups. However, the adoption of human rights rhetoric was not without its limitations and contradictions. This chapter illustrates that the U.S. debate over engagement with Beijing, framed around human rights concerns, frequently overlooked the complexities inherent in a country as multifaceted as China, which required more nuanced analysis. Instead, the domestic discourse frequently adhered to a binary perspective, largely due to the Administration's insistence on centralizing decision-making concerning relations with China.

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[619] The historiography on human rights has boomed and radically evolved in the past two decades while trying to answer this question. Due to the wide variations in the methodology used, the discussion among historians has been, and still is, fervently intense. Different angles of analysis, from legal to intellectual to social, have provided a wide range of interpretations, as well as the geographical scope of the studies, be it either global, national, or regional, filling what Doug Rossinow has dubbed a "mushrooming scholarship." According to Devin O. Pendas, the absence of "a clear lack of consensus among leading historians of human rights about even the most elementary contours of the subject" indicates that the field as a whole is still in its infancy. See Devin O. Pendas, "Towards a New Politics? On the Recent Historiography of Human Rights," *Contemporary European History*, vol.21, no.1 (February 2021): pp.95–111.

[620] Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman, "Introduction. Genealogies of Human Rights," in Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (eds.), *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.1.

[621] Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Viewpoint: Human Rights and History," *Past & Present*, no.232 (August 2016).

This section also draws on historian Mark Bradley's analysis, which argues that human rights exerted significant pressure "on more conventional notions of American state sovereignty and power in the late twentieth century."[622] Bradley's work, focusing on the "structures of feeling that gave human rights meaning and power in an American context," emphasizes how the human rights lexicon became "believable for American publics in particular times and places."[623] The Tiananmen Massacre stands as a critical juncture in the history of human rights, profoundly affecting American attitudes toward China. This chapter engages with the role of non-governmental actors and their deployment of human rights discourse, following Bradley's suggestion to "disaggregate American state and nonstate actors" to capture the diverse positions Americans occupied in global human rights politics and the intensity of their involvement.[624] Building on the scholarship of legal historian Samuel Moyn and transnational human rights late-Cold War movement expert Sarah B. Snyder, this chapter explores the increasing professionalization of human rights advocacy and its profound impact on U.S. policy towards China.[625] It explores how non-governmental actors successfully challenged Washington's foreign policy priorities, introducing moral, legal, and emotional imperatives that reshaped the discourse on China. In line with historian Barbara Keys, who contends that "the content and practices of universal human rights have never been fixed," this chapter argues that these principles were not just driven by legal frameworks but also shaped by imagination and emotion, reflecting the evolving and often contested nature of American human rights advocacy in this period.[626]

Third-party groups proved successful in capitalize on the claims of Congress members, whose positions on China matters were influenced by the demands and interests of their constituencies, as well as district-specific concerns. As the discourse on conditionality related to the annual renewal of the MFN commercial status became prominent in 1991 and 1992 (refer

[622] Mark P. Bradley, "General Introduction: What is America and the World?" in David C. Engerman, Max Paul Friedman, and Melani McAlister (eds.), *The Cambridge History of America and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p.6.
[623] Bradley's work offers an insightful analysis of how images, especially photographs from the Great Depression, circulated widely and influenced global perceptions of human rights. See Mark P. Bradley, "American Vernaculars: The United States and the Global Human Rights Imagination," *Diplomatic History*, vol.38, no.1 (January 2014), p.5. Similarly, historian Lynn Hunt have argued that the notion of universal human rights in 18th century Europe emerged not ultimately due to the circulation of epistolary novels affecting people's sense of empathy toward each other. See Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007).
[624] Ibid. Bradley, "American Vernaculars," p.5.
[625] Ibid. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*.
[626] Barbara Keys and Roland Burke, "Human Rights," in Petra Goedde and Richard H. Immerman (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War – Challenging the Cold War Paradigm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.347.

to Chapter Two), it provided a platform for the expansion of human rights considerations in U.S. foreign policy.[627] Policymakers increasingly framed the conditions for renewing MFN status in ways that included demands from various stakeholders active in Washington. "Issues considered under the 'human rights' umbrella have multiplied to include demographics and family planning issues, sentencing and treatment of prisoners, crackdowns on nascent political and social movements, aspects of religious worship, environmental and other quality of life issues, rule of law and democracy-building initiatives, and a host of others."[628] As highlighted by Kerry Dumbaugh, Specialist in Asian Affairs for the U.S. Congressional Research Service, the geography of third-party groups can be mapped along four primary compass directions: human rights organizations (Amnesty International AI and Human Rights Watch HRW being the most effective), religious groups (such as the Christian Coalition and The Family Research Council), regional lobbies (the so-called "Taiwan Lobby" and "Tibet Lobby"), and pro-democracy entities (National Endowment for Democracy). Additionally, a fifth and sixth dimension is acknowledged, comprising non-proliferation groups (such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) and labor unions (AFL-CIO and its youth chapter Frontlash).

Reflecting on the changing scenario and dynamics related to the elaboration of U.S. China Policy, Dumbaugh argued that "this fluid and uncertain atmosphere in the American political scene has proven fertile ground for a range of interest groups and individuals competing for influence over U.S. policy decisions involving China." Bush's reluctance to share foreign policy prerogatives with stakeholders beyond a select group of advisors within his Administration "created an atmosphere that effectively empowered more organized groups able to combine forces and work through an increasingly receptive Congress to pursue alternate objectives to those set by the President."[629] Policy analysis and briefings onChina authored by Dumbaugh between the 1990s and 2000s, along with the scholarly contributions of political analysts such as Robert Sutter, Robert Ross, and Steven Teles, are invaluable resources for constructing a comprehensive understanding of the landscape of actors and their respective

[627] For a comprehensive account of human rights in U.S. foreign policy, see Sarah B. Snyder, "Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy" in Mark Lawrence (eds.), *Oxford Reference Encyclopedia (ORE) in American History* (Oxford University Press, 2016).
[628] Kerry Dumbaugh, "Ten Years in U.S.-China Policy; Interest Groups and Their Influence, 1989-2000," December 12, 2000, CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service – The Library of Congress.
[629] Ibid. Dumbaugh, "Ten Years in U.S.-China Policy."

advocacy role within the framework of the MFN debate.[630] This section builds on these studies offering insights on the claims of some of these groups through archival sources and interviews with some of the key protagonists of the events under consideration.

3.2 "This is not Disneyland." Coming to terms with post-Tiananmen China

"To many Americans, China is still a faraway place, unknown, unseen, and fascinating. And we are fascinated. […] We associate China with vitality, enormous vitality, and something that doesn't always go along with that – subtlety, the subtlety of discerning and intelligent minds."[631] With these words President Ronald Reagan addressed a cheering crowd of students at Fudan University in Shanghai on April 30, 1984, during a six-day trip to China, the first by an American president in almost a decade since President Ford had travelled to Beijing in 1975. Reagan outlined the unique equilibrium between the two nations, stating, "There exists between us a kind of equipoise. It speaks of a fine and special balance." He continued, "We are two great and huge nations on opposite sides of the globe. We are both countries of great vitality and strength. You are the most populous country on Earth; we are the most technologically developed. Each of us holds a special weight in our respective sides of the world." Despite the substantial differences in values, languages, cultures, and political systems, Reagan framed the United States and China as complementary powers, inherently linked through a collaborative relationship that promised mutual benefits for both societies.

In the United States, the unique dynamics of the relationship with China were accentuated by a burgeoning curiosity and optimism regarding the People's Republic of China's new leader, Deng Xiaoping. Deng, who implemented significant market-oriented reforms, became emblematic of American hopes for a more liberal and democratic China. His recognition as Time magazine's Person of the Year in 1978 and again in 1985 highlighted this perception. The January 1986 issue characterized Deng as the leader of an "audacious but risky Second Revolution," emphasizing the transformative nature of his sweeping economic reforms that challenged traditional Marxist doctrines.[632] Deng's visit to the United States in January 1979

[630] See Kerry Dumbaugh and H. Comet, *U.S. China Policy: Interest Groups and their Influence* (Huntington, N.Y.: Novinka Books, 2001); Robert G. Sutter, *U.S. Policy toward China: An Introduction to the Role of Interest Groups* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 1998); Robert J. Ross, (eds.), *After the Cold War: Domestic Factors and U.S.-China Relations* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe 1998).
[631] Remarks at Fudan University in Shanghai, China, April 30, 1984, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, The Public Papers of the President 1981-1989.
[632] -, "China. Deng Xiaoping Leads a Far-Reaching, Audacious but Risky Second Revolution," *Time Magazine*, January 6, 1996.

marked a significant moment in U.S.-China relations, coinciding with the diplomatic recognition of Beijing by Washington under President Jimmy Carter. Enthusiastic accounts of his visit were prevalent, with *The New York Times* noting his political dexterity and the admiration he garnered in Washington: "No wonder Deng Xiaoping did well among us," the report stated, highlighting his ability to navigate an unfamiliar political landscape with ease: "He moved through an alien world with a political dexterity that connoisseurs of such deftness in Washington admired."[633] During his tour of the U.S., which included stops in cities such as Atlanta, Houston, and Seattle, Deng became a symbol of the potential for improved U.S.-China relations. His iconic moments, such as wearing a cowboy hat at a rodeo in Houston, captured public attention. He signed agreements focused on consular, scientific, and cultural exchanges while also warning against Soviet hegemonism. Deng was depicted as "tireless, amiable, and shrewd," adept at engaging with the American public. "Whether sharing a podium with the President, parrying questions or stealing the show at a Kennedy Center gala, Dr. Deng (he received an honorary doctorate from Temple University for his effort to re-establish civil liberties in China) proved adept at projecting a disarming directness and in reaching the American public," commented *The New York Times*.[634]



Figure 24. Deng Xiaoping attending a rodeo in Houston, Texas, on February 2, 1979.
Photo credit: UPI/Bettmann Archive/*Getty Images.*

[633] -, "Mr. Deng's Triumph," *The New York Times*, February 4, 1979.
[634] -, "Deng Plays China's American Card, *The New York Times*, February 4, 1979.



Figure 25. Deng Xiaoping and Jimmy Carter at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. in January 1979. Photo credit: Wally McNamee/Corbis via Getty Images.

The foundations of the United States' special relationship with Beijing have been extensively examined by historians who have studied the origins and reasons behind the peculiar fascination that Americans have historically held toward China. This fascination allowed Americans to idealize the former Middle Kingdom beyond the strategic constraints and imperatives of the Cold War. In doing so, they frequently overlooked critical elements that were at odds with American rhetoric and ideals, particularly concerning human rights advocacy. Beijing was not only granted an exemption from the human rights campaign that had defined U.S. foreign policy since the mid-1970s, largely due to strategic considerations that positioned China as a crucial counterbalance to the Soviet threat in Asia, but also because of a widespread belief that China would eventually make substantial progress toward becoming an open and liberal society where individual rights would be safeguarded through ongoing dialogue and engagement.[635] Historian David A. Hollinger traces this unique relationship back to what he terms "missionary cosmopolitanism," a phenomenon that, since the early 1900s, has

[635] See David F. Schmitz and Vanessa Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights. The Development of a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History*, vol.28, no.1 (January 2004): pp.112-143. See also Hartmann, Hauke, "U.S. Human Rights Policy Under Carter and Reagan, 1977–1981," *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol.23, no.2 (May 2001): pp.402-430.

assisted Americans in "reimagin[ing] their nation's place in the world."[636] This messianic impetus, prominent from the late nineteenth century through the post-World War II era, influenced not only the nations – such as China – where American evangelicals conducted their missions but also profoundly impacted American society and culture itself. As these missionaries endeavored to disseminate Christianity and Western values abroad, their immersion in diverse cultural contexts prompted them to challenge and reevaluate their own perspectives and beliefs. Hollinger's scholarship illuminates the unintended consequences of these missionary activities, demonstrating how such individuals were instrumental in fostering a more inclusive and globally conscious America, even as they sought to exert influence over other societies. He offers a nuanced analysis of the intricate interplay between religious missions and cultural exchange, elucidating how these dynamics contributed to significant transformations in American public opinion and policy.

In *Fateful Ties*, historian Gordon H. Chang offers a persuasive analysis of America's longstanding "preoccupation with China." Chang posits that the United States has perceived China as a crucial element of its national destiny since the period when "the Far East was the reason to reach the far west."[637] A key dimension of Sino-American relations, according to Chang, has been shaped by the "the intangible, feelings, and will, as well as the promise or potential of the relationship instead of the tangible present." He asserts that Americans have often projected their attachment to China onto an imagined future, envisioning China not in terms of its current state, but as what it might become and what it could signify for the United States: "China was more a matter of an imagined future, of what it could become and what it might mean for America."[638] This forward-looking perception of China's potential greatness and strategic relevance was particularly evident during the two decades spanning from President Nixon's landmark visit to China in February 1972 to the brutal suppression of

[636] David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017). Hollinger tells the story of those missionaries that, while trying to change the world (for the most part in China and South-East Asia), ended up changing America as they "pushed their fellow Americans to renounce the provinciality of their own society". Moved by the desire to share America's democratic values while, at the same time, willing to understand and respect foreign social practices, these missionaries became influential in spreading a sentiment of alien values recognition in America public life. Coming closer to the topic of my research project, the missionaries also helped embracing the cause of human rights under the authority of the United Nations.
[637] Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America's Preoccupation with China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p.-. See also, Mario Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero. Libertà e Impero: Gli Stati Uniti e il mondo, 1776-2006* (Roma: Laterza, 2008).
[638] Ibid. Chang, *Fateful Ties.*

protesters in Tiananmen Square in June 1989.[639] The crackdown, however, forced the United States to confront the immediate realities of its relationship with China and its government. In the aftermath of the violence, American perceptions of China were profoundly and irrevocably altered, with the discourse of human rights emerging as a reflection of the widespread disillusionment and erosion of faith in the bilateral relationship.

Political analyst Robert Sutter offers a critical perspective on the commonly idealized narrative of the unique bond between Washington and Beijing. He argues that historians and international relations experts have often provided a "partial and misleading" interpretation of this complex relationship by focusing disproportionately on the positive aspects and collaboration during the two centuries of contact preceding the rapprochement of the early 1970s.[640] In his work *U.S.-China Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present*, Sutter contends that these sometimes romanticized perceptions of a special relationship are grounded in a selective reading of historical events, including America's anti-imperialist stance toward China, its advocacy for an open door policy aimed at preserving Chinese territorial integrity in the late nineteenth century, U.S. support for China against Japan during World War II, and the efforts of American missionaries and entrepreneurs to promote modernization in China, particularly in the fields of education and business. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, Sutter notes, "many of the religious-minded in the United States viewed China as a large pool of "heathen" for conversion to Christianity, while […] American business has regarded China as a vast and potentially profitable market for trade."[641] These historical factors contributed to the development of a perception of a special relationship between the United States and China, a narrative that Sutter suggests has often overshadowed the more complex and less flattering realities of U.S.-China relations.

[639] It could be argued that the United States recognized China's strategic importance significantly earlier than the 1970s, as evidenced by post-World War II diplomatic developments. During this period, President Franklin D. Roosevelt regarded China as a crucial actor for sustaining peace in Asia, foreseeing its role within a new framework of global governance. See, among many, Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995). However, the subsequent inward-focused campaigns that characterized Communist China's trajectory – including the Great Leap Forward (1958–60) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) – marked a watershed period that fundamentally altered the dynamics of Sino-U.S. relations. See Yafeng Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[640] Robert G. Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations. Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), p.8.

[641] Benson Lee-Grayson (eds.), *The American Image of China* (New York, NY: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1979), p.1.

The argument for unprecedented ties between two such different countries as the United States and China was reflected in the attitudes and narratives of American elites and public opinion. According to Sutter, there was a persistent tendency among Americans "to emphasize what [they] saw as a uniquely and positive role the United States played as a supporter of Chinese national interests and the well-being of the Chinese people, especially when compared to the imperialistic and bold behaviors of European powers in the region."[642] However, numerous examples reveal the hypocrisy underlying this portrayal of a special relationship. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which remained in effect until 1943, serves as a quintessential example of the limitations of this supposed bond. Other instances include the American government's reluctance to take significant risks in the region – favoring cosmetic rhetoric over the use of force – despite pressure from U.S. envoys and missionaries, as well as the support for policies designed more to advance American strategic and commercial interests in Asia than to benefit China.[643] In his examination of Sino-U.S. relations from the nineteenth century to the present, Sutter concludes that "without powerful, practical reasons for pragmatic accommodation and cooperation, strong and often deeply rooted and enduring differences between the two governments and the broader societies are likely to emerge."[644] This perspective challenges the notion of a uniquely positive and mutually beneficial relationship, instead highlighting the complexities and contradictions that have characterized U.S.-China relations over time.

Was there truly a special relationship, a unique tension, or an exceptional preoccupation that drove China and the United States toward one another? Based on the existing literature on this complex but thought-provoking topic, the answer is nuanced and ambivalent. However, when examining the period between 1970 and 1990, it becomes difficult to deny that this marriage of convenience conveyed a certain level of mutual attraction, despite the many contradictions and conflicting national interests at play.[645] To better understand this dynamic, Arne Westad's *Restless Empire* offers valuable insights by incorporating Chinese perspectives

[642] Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, p.10.
[643] Sutter recalls that "the U.S. government only occasionally gave high-level attention to the appointment of envoys or the receptions of Chinese delegations." [643] Ibid. Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, p.18.
[644] Ibid. Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, p.5.
[645] Following the diplomatic recognition, China became "America's 14th-largest trade partner," accounting for "1.7 percent of total American foreign trade in 1988 and 2.2 percent in 1990." During the 1980s, U.S.-China trade "increased sevenfold, from about US$1 billion to over US$7 billion." See Dong Wang, *The United States and China: A History from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013).

into the narrative of Sino-American relations.[646] Westad's work, which traces China's numerous transformations from 1750 to the present, refers to the final decades of the twentieth century as "America's decades in China."[647] Since Mao's decision to open China to the United States, America had "dominated the sense most Chinese had of "abroad" in a way that had never happened before and probably will never happen again," Westad observes.[648] According to the Yale historian, a special relationship did indeed exist, characterized by fantasies and obsessions, expectations and resentments. "For a while," Westad concludes, "it seemed that all that mattered in China's relations with the world was the relationship, for good and bad, with the United States."[649] Nevertheless, significant disagreements persisted regarding the extent to which the United States should serve as a model and aspiration for China, particularly in matters of democracy and human rights. These tensions were evident both within Chinese society and among policymakers, reflecting the complexity and ambivalence of the Sino-American relationship during this period.

As outrage and bewilderment mounted among the American public following the Tiananmen massacre, former President Richard Nixon advocated for a more realist approach to U.S. policy toward China. He urged both policymakers and the public to move beyond the idealized and overly simplistic perceptions of China that had been constructed on fragile and superficial grounds. In an op-ed published in *The Los Angeles Times* two weeks after the Tiananmen Square massacre, Nixon stated: "Despite the fundamental national self-interest behind our rapprochement with China, many Americans have gone overboard and turned it into a romance. China has a limitless capacity to fascinate. But it is not Disneyland. It is, as it has been since 1949, a communist dictatorship held together by brute force. No one who knows China should be surprised when its leaders turn to violence in pursuing their political goals. They have done far worse before Tiananmen Square." While Nixon conceded that the Tiananmen Square crackdown was "shockingly cruel and incredibly stupid," he maintained that the Chinese leadership had "done worse" in the past, despite these actions receiving relatively little attention from the American public and Congress.[650] This perspective sharply diverged from the romanticized narrative of China that had dominated American discourse since the early 1970s.

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[646] Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire. China and the World since 1750* (London: Vintage Books, 2013).
[647] Ibid. Westad, *Restless Empire*, p.-
[648] Ibid. Westad, *Restless Empire*, p.-
[649] Ibid. Westad, *Restless Empire*, p.-
[650] Richard Nixon, "China Policy: Revulsion Real, Reprisal Wrong," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1989.

The fascination with China and the messianic projections that Americans directed toward the former Middle Kingdom during the 1980s greatly amplified the impact of the televised Tiananmen Square massacre on the American public.[651] The crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy protestants employing slogans and rhetorical frameworks resonant with American values, was a significant shock to those who had placed substantial faith in the idealized narrative of China. This narrative, once pervasive, suddenly appeared anachronistic, exposing the shared imagination of many Americans as little more than an illusion. This sense of disillusionment was reflected in Congress, among others, by Lloyd Bentsen (D-TX), Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, who remarked, "events in Tiananmen Square brought about a dramatic change in the way the American people viewed China. The images we held of China's cultural wealth – of Marco Polo, of Confucian principles, and of the Great wall – were replaced by visions of tanks, and guns aimed at the Chinese citizens exercising rights we hold so dear in this country; the right to speak freely and to assemble peacefully."[652]

In contrast to the prevalent narratives surrounding U.S.-China relations, Lawrence Eagleburger, then Assistant Secretary of State, sought to introduce a more grounded and nuanced perspective into the discourse. He critiqued the tendency of American policymakers and the media to swing between excessively idealized and overly negative depictions of China. Eagleburger specifically pointed to the romanticized view that emerged in the 1970s, shaped by "ping pong diplomacy, panda bears and the exotic banquet cuisine of sea slugs and maotai." This, he argued, masked the ongoing repression of the Cultural Revolution and the complexities of China's political transformation during the period. Eagleburger stressed the importance of acknowledging China's multifaceted reality, cautioning against binary perceptions that depicted China either as the "good China" of wartime alliances or the "bad China" of Red Guard violence and revolutionary upheaval. He called for a more sophisticated and balanced understanding, warning that both overly positive and demonized views failed to grasp the true nature of China, a nation undergoing profound change. "In the real world," he argued, "we need to see that China is less completely charming than the land of panda bears and the Great Wall, and also less completely evil than a night in June when the "Goddess of Democracy" was crushed by tanks in Tiananmen."[653]

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[651] See the polls by Gallup highlighting this love-affair in the introductory chapter of this dissertation.
[652] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Finance, *China Most-Favored-Nation Status Hearing before the Committee on Finance*, 102nd Congress, 1st Session, June 19 and 20, 1991, p.2.
[653] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *United States Policy Toward China Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, February 8, 28 1990, p.18.

As examined in Chapters One and Two, in the aftermath of the June 1989 events, the Bush Administration pursued a restrained approach toward China, emphasizing a response that balanced the achievements of the preceding decades of rapprochement with broader long-term strategic objectives. Observing a perceived neglect of human rights concerns – evident in President Bush's positions on both the extension of Chinese students' visas and the issue of the MFN status annual renewal – Congress identified an urgent need to address widespread public discontent. In doing so, it adopted a moral framework that transcended ideological and partisan boundaries, positioning itself as the primary advocate for human rights in U.S. foreign policy toward China. In this context, the annual release of the State Department's *Country Report on Human Rights Practices*, which gained increased significance in the aftermath of the crackdown, became – unintentionally – a magnifying glass in the hands of policymakers to scrutinize and expose the inherent contradictions, limits, and double standards of the Administration's approach to China. Originally introduced in 1978 to comply with a law enacted by Congress, which mandated human rights considerations in U.S. decisions related to foreign assistance, the annual report fell under the purview of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. The reports issued for the years 1989, 1990, and 1991, typically released in February of the following year, highlighted the escalating repression carried out by the Chinese Communist leadership in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown. These reports documented a range of repressive practices, including political killings, disappearances, torture, and curtailment of civil rights such as freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and religion. The issuance of the report and the ensuing debate surrounding it evidenced several key aspects.

The most striking one was the discrepancy between the condescending posture toward Beijing that the Bush Administration had been shown since June 1989 and the State Department's awareness of the well-documented human rights situation in China acknowledged by the report. Despite the PRC being a signatory to the United Nations Charter, the leadership was depicted as indifferent to the concept of universal human rights and opposed any foreign attempt to condemn its conduct. "Officials strongly reject any criticism of China's human rights situation by international human rights organizations and other nations, and they assert that international groups and foreign nations use human rights as a means to interfere in China's internal affairs," signaled the 1989 report. Various members of Congress – and NGO representatives along with them – praised the great work done by the State Department but questioned the extent to which the report had a meaningful impact on the formulation of the U.S. China policy. Among them, there was Tom Lantos, who believed that the section on China

– "which clearly is not read at the very top level" – represented the best part of the report but regretted the fact that it also "reflects a schizophrenic approach on the part of this Administration to China." According to the representative from California, "China was given the wink at the highest levels that they have a double standard with respect to our expectation of human rights which we are meticulously demanding vis-a-vis others, but not visa-vis China, for mysterious, nebulous, and incomprehensible reasons."[654]

Echoing Lantos' remarks, spokespeople from various human rights organizations commended the scope and meaningful work accomplished by the State Department but expressed concerns about what they perceived as a contradiction within the Bush Administration. Holly Burkhalter, Human Rights Watch Washington Director, believed that, despite the report being "very factual, very accurate, and very tough," its substance would be compromised when the State Department appeared inconsistent in its approach to China and human rights. Burkhalter highlighted that the President "was using his own personal prestige in a highly publicized way" to limit the ability of Congress to shape the China policy, as exemplified by the Pelosi Bill journey. Joseph E. Ryan of Freedom House, a U.S.-based organization conducting research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights, pointed out that the situation in China was even worse than the one portrayed in the State Department report, particularly regarding repressive actions against minorities like Tibetans and Uighurs. He argued that President Bush's continued dialogue with the authoritarian leadership appeared even more troubling and disturbing in light of these omissions. Michael Posner of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights contended that, despite the report suggesting limited improvements in China's human rights situation, the Bush Administration credited cosmetic gestures by the PRC leadership – in particular, the lifting of martial law did not signify a genuine relaxation of control on citizens, especially minorities – pretending that the human rights situation was slowly but steadily improving. He therefore called on Congress to "hold the Administration's feet to the fire on this issue."[655]

The congressional debate over the State Department's report also shed light on the occasionally irrational fascination exhibited by key figures within the U.S. Administration who

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[654] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *U.S. Human Rights Policy and Review of the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1989 Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, February 21, 28, and March 14, 1990, p.13.

[655] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations*, February 21, 28, and March 14, 1990, p.60.

were instrumental in shaping policy toward China. Despite substantial evidence indicating a deterioration of human rights in China following the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the report had consistently portrayed China's human rights record in a negative light since the early 1980s. However, in the post-Cold War context, these practices assumed heightened significance. This shift was particularly emphasized in the testimony of Pat Derian, the first individual to serve as Assistant Secretary for Human Rights under the Carter Administration. It was during this period that, for the first time in American history, human rights were placed at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy, serving as a strategic tool to restore American prestige and as a narrative providing moral authority on the global stage.[656] Reflecting on the diplomatic opening to the PRC, Derian suggested that the prevailing optimism about China's future and the absolute belief that Beijing would embrace U.S.-sponsored values influenced Americans' perceptions. Unlike the Soviet Union, China was seen as a valuable ally for short-term security strategy and a potentially significant economic partner in the long run.

However, the fascination and romanticization of relations with Beijing needed to be understood beyond the context of the Cold War, a point even Derian found challenging to explain, as her witness suggested. "From the moment we had our first interaction there, we have absolutely been entranced, like fourteen-year-olds in love. With our eyes, we are blind to every fault," confessed Derian. Despite the Carter Administration being aware of the unfair and inhumane practices of the Communist leadership – "we have had democracy movement after democracy movement, each one, thousand flowers springing up and then being mowed right down by the government" – Derian acknowledged that Washington had indirectly and involuntarily aided the Chinese government in their authoritarian projection of power. "Time after time, we have sent them police equipment, not lethal, finally; but, fingerprinting equipment, computers, things that would assist them in controlling their own people." In her analysis of the contemporary state of the relationship, Derian dismissed the Chinese leadership's objections to external involvement in their domestic affairs, particularly in the context of advocating for human rights beyond the Great Wall. She emphasized that, over the past decade, the PRC had benefited from substantial military assistance, training, and advice, in addition to receiving loans from the World Bank. "And if the security of a nation is not one of its internal affairs, then I am not sure what is," Derian asserted, stressing her argument that

[656] See Barbara Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

both security and human rights were inherently domestic concerns.[657] The former Assistant Secretary for Human Rights suggested that it was imperative to move beyond such narratives and confront the harsh realities of the PRC leadership's conduct.

The U.S. Administration, while advocating for the continuation of trade benefits to Beijing, sought to persuade Congress of its genuine commitment to advancing human rights in China. Lawrence Eagleburger, in congressional testimony, argued that the core of the MFN debate should not hinge on whether the Administration cared about human rights or democratic reform in China. Instead, he emphasized that these concerns were integrated into a more comprehensive and balanced foreign policy approach.[658] Richard Schifter, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, reinforced this stance, asserting that the Administration did not view the severing of relations with countries like China as a viable means of promoting human rights. Rather, Schifter stressed the importance of maintaining diplomatic channels to foster ongoing dialogue about shared values and human rights principles. While acknowledging that "we have not yet reached the 'end of history' as far as the human rights cause is concerned," he pointed out that those advocating for human rights had to accept that other strategic and economic considerations also played a critical role.[659] Officials within the Administration would often employ the notion of "romanticizing" U.S.-China relations as a rhetorical leverage to counter demands for a harsher stance on China's human rights abuses. They argued that, while the Chinese government's actions were concerning, they were not without precedent and should be addressed through a gradual, diplomatic approach. The Administration recognized the idealization of China by parts of the American public, viewing it as a society undergoing significant reform. Nevertheless, they pointed out that China remained a communist, authoritarian one-party state where fundamental rights were routinely ignored. Yet, the Administration placed priority on economic integration, sustained dialogue, and cultural exchanges as the foundation for a productive bilateral relationship, viewing these elements as essential for fostering long-term progress in China.

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[657] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations*, February 21, 28, and March 14, 1990, p.164.

[658] "We do not accept the premise that what is at stake in the MFN debate is the Administration's concern for human rights in China, or its desire to promote democratic reform," argued Eagleburger in Congress. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *United States-People's Republic of China Trade Relations, Including Most Favored Nation Trade Status for China Hearing before the Committee on Ways and Means and the Subcommittee on Trade*, June 12, 1991, p.5.

[659] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations*, February 21, 28, and March 14, 1990, p.23.

In May 1990, as President George H.W. Bush sought to renew China's MFN trade status amidst rising concerns over human rights, Richard Solomon, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, testified before the House Subcommittee on Human Rights. In his testimony, Solomon critiqued the idealized view that many Americans held of China: "The brutal attacks ordered by the PRC leadership against peaceful and unarmed demonstrators at Tiananmen last year shattered our idealization of a modernizing China; of an enticing and exotic country of panda bears and ping-pong diplomacy." Solomon further highlighted the complexities China faced as it sought to modernize while retaining its cultural and political distinctiveness. He framed this tension as a "long-standing dilemma" for Chinese leaders, one that had preoccupied them for over a century and a half: the challenge of adopting Western technology and scientific advancements without compromising China's cultural values or the political authority of its ruling regime.[660] Solomon urged a nuanced understanding of China's progress despite recent disillusionment, noting, "In our current disillusionment, we must not overlook the fact that last year's tragic events were the culmination of a decade of remarkable growth and experimentation in China." Despite the brutality of the massacre and the global exposure of the PRC's persistent authoritarianism, American assessments of relations with Beijing could not deny the remarkable advancements the country had made in just one decade. "These unprecedented initiatives cast China as the pioneer of reform in the communist world and Deng Xiaoping as the bold innovator. Yet, China's economic expansion steadily generated new pressures on static social and political institutions. The economic reforms fostered a new generation of entrepreneurs, technicians, consumers and intellectuals with new expectations that could not be contained within China's authoritarian political institutions." Disregarding the romanticized projections that Americans held about China's potential future, evaluations of the country should have been situated within the broader context of its ongoing and complex transition. The Administration believed that sustained engagement and dialogue, rather than condemnation and the frequently debated retreat to isolation, would provide the most effective incentives for guiding China back onto a path of reform.

"What I am concerned about," countered Representative Pelosi in response to the Assistant Secretary's statement, "is how you are trying to turn the pig's ear into a silk purse."

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[660] In Solomon's words: "The question of how to obtain the fruits of science and technology from the West, yet not dilute or undermine Chinese culture and political authority, is a long-standing dilemma that Chinese leaders have been trying to come to grips with for nearly a century and a half." Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.227.

She argued that the situation in China differed significantly from other countries with human rights violations that the U.S. granted MFN status to. Pelosi highlighted that the Chinese government had blatantly suppressed the pro-democracy movement, with the violence broadcasted on international television. She insisted that the U.S. needed to respond appropriately. If withdrawing MFN status was deemed not in the nation's economic interest, then an alternative course of action should be proposed, which, according to Pelosi, had yet to happen.[661] Similarly, Representative Lantos voiced his dissatisfaction with Solomon's assertion that policymakers had been misled by an incorrect mythicization of China, leading them to be overly shortsighted in their current judgments. Lantos criticized Solomon's statement, calling it "one of the most least persuasive and patronizing performances by any Administration official I have heard in many, many years." He expressed deep concern about the lack of substantive argument in the Assistant Secretary's remarks, which he found "unprincipled" and "embarrassing." Lantos further asserted that Solomon "owe[d] Congress an apology," stating that it was inappropriate to suggest that those who disagreed with the Administration's judgment were merely seeking a convenient outlet for punitive impulses, an accusation that disregarded the legitimate concerns of both Republicans and Democrats alike.[662]

Did the enduring fascination and romanticization of China truly come to a close? While the Tiananmen Square crackdown certainly disrupted the favorable course of U.S.-China relations, it did not fully extinguish American idealism regarding China's political evolution. The pro-democracy protests of 1989 brought into sharp focus a generation of Chinese citizens – students, workers, and ordinary individuals – who appeared to embody values closely aligned with core American principles, such as democracy, human rights, and individual liberty. This cohort, particularly those who had participated in academic exchanges in the United States, was regarded as the bearers of liberal and democratic values. It was seen as critical interlocutor for future U.S. engagement with China and potential driver of reform. Members of Congress and media outlets even began to liken these activists to the U.S. Founding Fathers, suggesting they could spearhead a new democratic movement in China. This analogy reflected an ongoing tendency to romanticize the prospects of liberal transformation within China, despite the authoritarian repression in place (refer to Chapter One). Therefore, rather than signifying an

[661] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.274.
[662] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.267.

abrupt end to idealized visions of China, the Tiananmen protests shifted that idealization onto the individuals perceived as champions of democracy and freedom. This continued to fuel optimism – at least until the mid-1990s – about China's potential political future, despite the harsh realities of the Chinese government's response.

Critics of the Bush Administration's cautious approach contended that the generation of Chinese students and activists involved in the 1989 pro-democracy protests represented the most promising trajectory for China's future. They argued that Washington should prioritize engagement with this cohort, which appeared to embody values aligned with democratic principles. As the emphasis on human rights grew within U.S.-China relations, divisions within the policymaking community intensified, heightening the debate regarding the true representation of China's future. This discourse crystallized around two competing factions: one supporting the aging leadership, which sought to maintain political control while implementing market reforms, and the other advocating for the younger generation, perceived as more open to liberal values. The contrasting perspectives within Washington's domestic debate revealed a significant dichotomy. On one hand, a quasi-*realpolitik* approach focused on pragmatic engagement with the current Chinese leadership, hoping that the transformation they were instrumental in engineering would create an environment more conductive to liberalization and democratization; on the other, a romanticized interpretation of Chinese society, propelled by human rights discourse, positioned this younger generation as harbingers of change. The aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown further complicated this dialogue, revealing the challenges of reconciling pragmatic engagement with the moral imperatives that had emerged in its wake. As the tensions escalated, they revealed the competing strategic priorities within U.S. foreign policy, highlighting the difficulties of navigating a path that addressed both the need for engagement and the push for ethical considerations in bilateral relations.

3.3 "A Mandate to Meddle:" Third Party Groups Climb the Hill

"We should have started much earlier," argued Sidney Jones, Executive Director of Asia Watch.[663] In a 1991 speech delivered at the American Coalition for Chinese Democracy gathering in Toronto, Jones reflected on the missed opportunities for early intervention in

[663] Sidney Jones' speech at the American Coalition for Chinese Democracy gathering in Toronto, April 6, 1991, Columbia University Center for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch Records, General Correspondence 1991-1993, Box 472, Folder 01/15/17-18-17a-18a.

supporting China's pro-democracy movement. She emphasized that the movement did not begin with the April 1989 Tiananmen protests, nor did it end with the crackdown on June 4. She called attention to the efforts of Democracy Wall activists like Wei Jingsheng and Xu Wenli, who had been imprisoned for over a decade for advocating political reform.[664] Furthermore, Jones urged the audience to focus attention not only on the well-known student leaders such as Wang Dan, Liu Gang, Chen Ziming, and Wang Juntao but also on the "thousands of nameless, faceless workers, not just in Beijing but all over China, who were also victims of the 1989 crackdown." These individuals had often been overlooked by the international press, which was unaware of their identities or whereabouts. The executive director advocated for redoubled efforts to document their cases, as international recognition could provide vital protection. She also pointed out other groups unjustly detained on 'counterrevolutionary' charges, including "Tibetan monks and nuns, Catholic priests and layworkers, Hong Kong and Macao Chinese." Finally, Jones highlighted the importance of not only securing the release of those in custody. "We need to build an awareness of the kinds of institutions and safeguards that can be built in China to protect human rights, including a legal system that dispenses justice rather than repression," she contended.[665] Sidney Jones worked toward this objective by leading a team that became increasingly influential within Washington policy circles.

Jones was appointed executive director of Asia Watch in 1989. Prior to this, she had spent four years with Amnesty International (AI) in London, focusing on human rights violations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Before her time at Amnesty, she worked for seven years as a program officer at the Ford Foundation, first in its Indonesia field office and later in the Developing Countries Program in New York. In 1988 Aryeh Neier, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) Executive Director, invited her to lead the Asia chapter of the organization. Ironically, one of Jones' last acts at the Ford Foundation was to approve a grant for the establishment of Asia Watch, which she would later go on to direct. Asia Watch was part of the broader Watch Committees established by HRW, an organization originally founded in 1978 by American publisher Robert Bernstein as U.S. Helsinki Watch.[666] This initial body focused on monitoring

[664] For a first-hand account of Wei Jingsheng's activism see Jingsheng Wei and Kristina M. Torgeson, *The Courage to Stand Alone: Letters from Prison and Other Writings* (New York, NY: Viking, 1997).
[665] Ibid. Sidney Jones' speech at the American Coalition for Chinese Democracy gathering in Toronto, April 6, 1991.
[666] See Bernstein's memoires, Robert L. Bernstein and Doug Merlino, *Speaking Freely: My Life in Publishing and Human Rights* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2016).

Soviet compliance with the 1975 Helsinki Accords.[667] By the 1990s, Helsinki Watch had expanded to include regional committees for the Americas (1981), Asia (1985), Africa (1986), and the Middle East (1989).[668] The creation of these Watch Committees was made possible by funding from the Ford Foundation, which provided a $400,000 grant that helped set up Asia Watch, making the foundation a key supporter of HRW well into the 1990s, despite earlier hopes that the organization would become financially independent.[669] Reflecting on her journey, Jones later remarked on the irony of her involvement in approving that initial grant, never suspecting that she would later direct Asia Watch herself.[670]

This section aims to contextualize the rising influence of human rights groups in shaping U.S. foreign policy, contributing to the scholarship of historians such as Sarah B. Snyder, Barbara Keys, and Akira Iriye.[671] In particular, in her seminal work *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War*, Snyder highlights the development of a transnational network of human rights activists originating from the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. In Snyder's words, "domestic actors, confronted with obstacles to influencing their own governments, identified external actors who could raise concerns internationally and exert pressure more effectively." This shift helped make human rights one of the key 'working languages' of official and unofficial diplomacy, contributing significantly to the Cold War's conclusion. In the U.S. context, Snyder argues that the increasing professionalization of NGOs, particularly symbolized by the establishment of headquarters in Washington, D.C., and their growing expertise in providing political and legal guidance to members of Congress, led to greater legislative engagement on human rights issues. The 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment stands as a prime example of this dynamic (refer to Chapter Two). Moreover, innovations such as the creation of the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in the State Department, the

[667] For a comprehensive account of the historical and political significance of the 1975 Helsinki Accords, refer to Michael Cotey Morgan, *The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). See also Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).
[668] The records pertaining to the activities of these two prominent human rights organizations are preserved at the Columbia University Center for Human Rights Archives. Nevertheless, a significant portion of these records remains classified, thereby providing only a fragmented view of the events and dynamics of that era.
[669] This information is taken from Barbara Keys and Amy Hodgson, "Human Rights Watch Takes on China," in Jan Eckel and Daniel Stahl (eds.), *Embattled Visions. Human Rights since 1990* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2022), p.145.
[670] Interview with Sidney R. Jones, Asia Watch Executive Director from 1989 to 2002, September 19, 2024.
[671] See Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

appointment of human rights officers in regional bureaus, the introduction of human rights reports for aid-receiving countries, and restrictions on military and economic assistance to nations involved in gross human rights violations further institutionalized these concerns within U.S. policy-making.

The rapid proliferation of third-party advocacy groups lobbying on Capitol Hill in the aftermath of June Fourth sharply contrasted with the Bush Administration's efforts to shield decisions about Sino-American relations from domestic political pressures. This surge in advocacy amplified the difficulty of maintaining autonomy in foreign policy decision-making, as the Administration faced increasing pressure from domestic actors advocating for sanctions and punitive measures against China. In contrast, the Administration argued that continued engagement would promote greater openness in China (refer to Chapter Four). These advocacy efforts, coupled with the debate on MFN conditionality, expanded the scope of human rights discourse, broadening it to encompass issues such as demographic and family planning policies, treatment of prisoners, the suppression of political movements, religious freedoms, environmental concerns, and broader quality-of-life matters. Additionally, the promotion of the rule of law and democracy-building began to emerge as central themes in the human rights agenda. This evolution represented a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to human rights within the shifting global political landscape.[672] This section analyzes the cases of two prominent human rights organizations that, while differing in their missions and areas of focus, shared office space at 45 Fifth Avenue in New York City for a designated period. One organization, Asia Watch, was an American entity committed to monitoring and documenting human rights abuses, with a strong emphasis on lobbying the U.S. government to strengthen its human rights policies and practices. On the other hand, Human Rights in China (HRIC), founded by a collective of Chinese scientists and scholars in the early 1989, aimed primarily at enhancing awareness of the human rights landscape in China through the dissemination of documents and intelligence, drawing upon a comprehensive network of informants.

Sidney Jones joined HRW at a pivotal moment when the organization was undergoing a significant reevaluation of its mission and scope, seeking to clarify its identity amidst the rapid expansion of its regional chapters.[673] This growth, coupled with the proliferation of a "myriad

[672] Ibid. Dumbaugh, "Ten Years in U.S.-China Policy."
[673] See Jeri Laber, *The Courage of Strangers: Coming of Age with the Human Rights Movement* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2002).

overlapping committees and programs, each with its own public face," led to public uncertainty about HRW's role and structure. Historians Barbara Keys and Amy Hodgson argue that it was only by the late 1990s that HRW successfully consolidated a coherent, unified identity.[674] In March 1992, Aryeh Neier, had called for HRW's internationalization. He acknowledged that while HRW had been strongly identified as a U.S.-based entity, its global influence had largely depended on America's power in world affairs. However, the executive director foresaw the diminishing capacity of the U.S. to exert economic and military influence, pointing out the decline of U.S. foreign aid relative to countries like Japan and European nations.[675] "Governments all over the world, though in greatly varying degree, are concerned about their image in the United States; also, they are concerned about the military power of the United States; and the United States has had great economic power to influence other governments. The last of these has been declining. The relative weight of the United States in the world economy has declined and, almost certainly, will decline further. An even more rapid decline is taking place in direct assistance by the United States to other countries," wrote Neier in a background paper to be used at an extended meeting of HRW Executive Committee. Instead, HRW director emphasized the enduring influence of U.S. cultural and media institutions as the primary means of shaping global thinking, suggesting that HRW's future impact would be greater if it also sought to influence the foreign policies of European and Japanese governments, alongside other international bodies.[676]

While some within HRW aligned with Neier's advocacy for expanding the organization's scope, others expressed concern that such a broadening might dilute its core mission. By the early 1990s, HRW remained a relatively modest New York-based organization, employing approximately 100 staff members and operating on an annual budget of around $7 million.[677] It was predominantly funded by private foundations and individual donors.[678] The organization's primary aim was to document and publicize human rights violations while

[674] Ibid. Keys and Hodgson, "Human Rights Watch Takes on China," p.146.
[675] "Today, U.S. foreign aid is less than that of Japan; only a little higher than French foreign aid; and is only a fraction of the aid given out in combination by such governments as those of the United Kingdom, Germany, the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands. Given the growing, isolationism and xenophobia in the United States, and the end of the Cold War, it seems likely that U.S. foreign aid will be of only minor significance in the future except in the case of a few countries such as Israel and Egypt." Arye Neier, "(DRAFT) The Internationalization of Human Rights," March 23, 1992, Columbia University Center for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch Records, Administration 1991-1992, Box 472 Folder 01.
[676] Ibid. Neier, "(DRAFT) The Internationalization of Human Rights," March 23, 1992.
[677] Ibid. Keys and Hodgson, "Human Rights Watch Takes on China," p.147.
[678] Among the foundations that have provided major support were John and Catherine MacArthur, Aaron Diamond, Ford, Carnegie, J.M. Kaplan, John Merck, Revson, Edna McConnell Clark, Open Society, J. Roderick MacArthur, Merts-Gilmore, Cummings, Scherman, The Rockefeller Foundation and Overbrook.

mobilizing international opposition against abusive regimes. A significant portion of its efforts was devoted to influencing U.S. foreign policy by shaping its human rights agenda.[679] By the end of 1992, Aryeh Neier would step down as the head of HRW after a significant internal conflict with the staff, which centered on his leadership style. Neier, described by some as having an authoritarian personality, faced increasing pushback from within the organization. His departure led to the appointment of American attorney Kenneth Roth as his successor. Under Roth's leadership, HRW adopted a more consultative and collaborative approach, marking a shift from the more centralized style of Neier to one that involved greater participation from staff and regional directors in decision-making processes.

At that time, HRW was seen as "the new dynamic kid on the block" in the global human rights movement, distinguishing itself from more established organizations like Amnesty.[680] Both organizations played pivotal roles in advocating for human rights but differed in focus. AI primarily concentrated on advocating for the protection of individuals' fundamental rights, whereas HRW focused on exposing systemic governmental abuses within the broader human rights framework. HRW's agility in producing reports and offering timely insights was seen as particularly valuable, especially for policymakers seeking to make decisions based on human rights concerns. This period, marked by the global expansion of human rights advocacy organizations, saw newer groups like HRW emerge, equipped with a "leaner, quicker" model of operations, enabling them to respond more rapidly to emerging issues compared to larger, more bureaucratic organizations.[681] Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, HRW played a key role in shifting global perceptions, positioning China, rather than the Soviet Union, as the foremost human rights violator in Western eyes. This shift came at a time when many in the U.S. government and business community were hesitant to openly challenge the CCP government on human rights abuses. HRW was instrumental in advocating for a stronger stance against these abuses, leveraging its credibility and expertise, particularly through its Asia division.

When Jones assumed leadership of Human Rights Watch's Asia division, her knowledge of human rights conditions in China was admittedly limited. "I myself wasn't pay attention to

[679] Human Rights Watch, Questions and Answers, Columbia University Center for Human Rights**,** Human Rights Watch Records, Series 2: Country Files, 1978-1997, Fund for Free Expression 1992, Box 472, Folder 01/15/17-18/17a-18a.
[680] Ibid. Interview with Sidney R. Jones, September 2024.
[681] Ibid. Interview with Sidney R. Jones, September 2024.

China in the 1980s," she later acknowledged, "and it wasn't until 1989 that I began to seriously engage with the issue."[682] Since its founding in 1985, Asia Watch had largely neglected China, with the notable exception of its focus on repressive policies in Tibet.[683] Jones initially viewed this emphasis with skepticism, attributing it to Aryeh Neier's personal fascination with the Dalai Lama, rather than a deliberate and broader organizational strategy concerning China.[684] In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, Asia Watch's focus shifted sharply toward Beijing, advocating a combination of public and private initiatives, as well as official sanctions aimed at pressuring the Chinese government. The organization specifically called for transparency regarding the events of June 3-4, urging the Chinese government to provide "a full accounting of what happened," thereby distinguishing facts from rumors. Asia Watch also demanded an end to further arrests, the release of individuals detained for non-violent offenses, fair trials, humane treatment of those in custody, and respect for international human rights standards, including the right to free expression.[685] Over time, the organization concentrated on three major issues: the use of prison labor, the harvesting of organs from executed prisoners, and the conditions in Chinese orphanages, particularly those involved in facilitating adoptions by Americans. Its ability to collect reliable and valuable data, while effectively using that information to engage the American public and build broad-based support within Congress, became unrivaled in Washington.

In this respect, key figures such as Mike Jendrzejczyk, Washington Director of HRW's Asia Division, and Robin Munro, Director of the Hong Kong Office, played pivotal roles in solidifying HRW's credibility and influence on U.S. China policy. Jendrzejczyk, recruited by Jones from AI, was "the critical person on China policy." Known for his talent in cultivating relationships – "he was a genius" –, particularly with congressional staff, Jendrzejczyk established a network that became invaluable in advocating for human rights-based policy changes. His reliable information, coupled with his strategic relationship-building, enabled him

[682] Ibid. Interview with Sidney R. Jones, September 2024.
[683] "Political imprisonment under harsh conditions is the principal means by which the authority of China has been brought to bear upon dissenting Tibetans since Deng Xiaoping came to power. This practice is in clear violation of the internationally recognized right to freedom of political belief and to the peaceful expression of such beliefs. Asia Watch's first report on Tibet, completed in early 1988 shortly after the first in the recent round of demonstrations in the region, was unequivocal in describing and condemning the Chinese authorities' extensive use of political imprisonment prior to those protests." See Asia Watch Report, "Merciless Repression. Human Rights Abuses in Tibet," May 1990, p.25.
[684] Ibid. Interview with Sidney R. Jones, September 2024.
[685] This list of actions was provided by Sidney Jones while attending the Wingspread Conference on U.S.-China relations. Confidential Report from Sidney Jones to Aryeh Neier and Orville Shell, July 9, 1989, Columbia University Center for Human Rights**,** Human Rights Watch Records, Series 2: Country Files, 1978-1997, July – December 1989, Box 472, Folder 01/15/17-18/17a-18a.

to push for legislative innovations by becoming a trusted resource for congressional aides. Similarly, Robin Munro's contributions were crucial. Hired at the time of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, Munro had traveled to China in May 1989, accompanying Sidney Jones on her first trip there, as she had been invited by Orville Schell, co-founder of Helsinki Watch, and his Chinese wife. While Jones left China on the same day General Secretary Gorbachev arrived in Beijing for his historic visit, marking a significant moment in Sino-Soviet relations after two decades of estrangement, Munro remained in Tiananmen Square. He became closely involved with the demonstrators and later assisted many in fleeing China to Hong Kong. Reflecting on this time, Jones joked, "There was a point where I wasn't asking questions. I didn't want to know," alluding to the sensitive and dangerous nature of Munro's efforts to aid the protesters. He played a critical role when, at the end of October 1990, Asia Watch opened a branch in Hong Kong, which became instrumental in collecting on-the-ground information that would be used in Washington to support the organization's advocacy activities, provide lawmakers on the Hill with up-to-date dossiers on China, and challenge the Administration's China policy.

As the HRW 1992 World Report acknowledged, "the office in Hong Kong produced a steady stream of information that in some cases changed the nature of the debate over human rights in China and others gave new and important substance to the debate already under way."[686] In Hong Kong, the organization's officers like Munro were often able to access leaked government documents and restricted-circulation journals, which helped in shedding light on the rationale and objectives of the central government's internal directives and Chinese Communist Party policies. These documents included information on the living conditions of political prisoners jailed following the 1989 unrests, the trials of so-called pro-democracy dissidents, plans to limit or, worse, crack down on initiatives by minority groups, such as those in Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang, and – as detailed later in this chapter, the intention to use products made in forced labor camps to boost exports. "I think Robin managed to get back surreptitiously into China, but it certainly wasn't with official clarence," recalled Jones. This intelligence, transmitted from Munro to Jendrzejczyk, allowed HRW to keep policymakers in Washington informed, ensuring that Asia Watch remained one of the most authoritative sources on human rights neglects in China at that time. Jones herself noted the effectiveness of this collaboration, stating: "Robin's information transmitted to Mike could give policymakers

[686] Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Watch World Report 1992 – China and Tibet, 1 January 1993.

briefings of what was going on in China after Tiananmen and then Mike could push for changes."[687]

Growing increasingly skeptical and critical of the Administration's approach to China policy – both in terms of its substance and diplomatic style – since the June 1989 crackdown, Asia Watch skillfully leveraged the dissatisfaction among representatives and senators who felt sidelined by President Bush's unilateral decisions. "The Bush administration's policy toward China has been one of maintaining relations at any cost and sacrificing human rights in the process," claimed the annual report on the organization's activities in 1990. President Bush's human rights policy was perceived as even more inadequate than that of his predecessor, Ronald Reagan. HRW had denounced the former president for exploiting human rights rhetoric strategically, aligning it with an anti-Soviet agenda while neglecting to address the widespread abuses in China.[688] Bush, however, was seen as even more inconsistent in his approach, particularly in his restrained response to China's human rights violations following the massacre, which further fueled concerns about the Administration's commitment to human rights advocacy. "The Bush Administration has raised hypocrisy to new heights by coupling public expressions of concern with behind-the-scenes efforts to patch things up with those responsible for the slaughter and arrests following the June 4 crackdown," accused the organization.[689]

Attending a three-day conference on U.S.-China relations held in July 1989, Sidney Jones concluded that "these policy-making types don't like Congress any more than they like human rights organizations, but they have to tolerate it." Asia Watch executive director referred to a number of "venerable" China scholars and experts such as Doak Barnett, Bob Scalapino, and Arthur Hummel who had convened the conference and "who were full of platitudes and short on data."[690] Several scholars attending the conference, including Harry Harding, Ken Lieberthal, and Mike Oksenberg, adopted a cautious perspective on U.S. policy toward China. They recognized the moral outrage among the American public regarding the events in China;

[687] Ibid. Interview with Sidney R. Jones, September 2024.
[688] For an in-depth exploration of Ronald Reagan's approach to human rights, see Aryeh Neier, "Human Rights in the Reagan Era: Acceptance in Principle," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol.506 (1989): pp.30-41. See also David F. Schmitz, "The Reagan Turnaround on Human Rights," *Diplomatic History*, vol.46, no.1 (January 2022): pp.212-215.
[689] Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Watch World Report 1990 – China, 1 January 1991.
[690] Doak Barnett (Johns Hopkins University), Bob Scalapino (UC Berkeley), and Arthur Hummel (former U.S. Ambassador to China and then Director of the Johns Hopkins University–Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies).

however, they warned against the potential ineffectiveness of direct sanctions imposed on what they characterized as an unstable regime. Instead, they advocated for "sanctions of the marketplaces," suggesting that American businesses should approach their dealings with China with increased caution. There was a general consensus among these scholars that the resumption of student and academic exchanges, as well as the continuation of business engagements and high-level diplomatic interactions, was essential. As Harding concluded that the American response should not be dictated by the events of a single evening but should be informed by a careful examination of long-term trends in U.S.-China relations, Jones expressed concern that the emphasis on the sentiment "We don't want to turn China into an enemy" was overly pronounced among the participants at the gathering.

Since 1990, Asia Watch had issued several reports which contributed to shed light on the restrictive measures enacted by the CCP government against individuals involved in pro-democracy activities, as well as religious and ethnic minority groups believed to be a potential destabilizing force for the country. Geographically, these reports spanned from the ongoing repression in urban areas like Beijing, Shanghai, and Chengdu to the more rural or de-centralized regions such as Tibet and Mongolia. According to the organization, "the effect of these measures was to nullify the tentative liberalization of the previous decade and reassert the firm ideological control of the conservative wing of the CCP."[691] Asia Watch specifically warned about the Chinese central government's two-face strategy characterized by "outward relaxation and internal intensification." This strategy entailed cosmetic actions designed to convey the illusion of a shift in policy concerning the repressive measures implemented following the June 1989 unrest. Examples included the lifting of martial law in January 1990, after more than six months, and the release of political detainees, aimed at fostering an international perception of stability and tolerance within China. Concurrently, the government persisted with subtler repressive measures, such as conducting unfair trials and carrying out purges. Asia Watch pointed out a pattern where the Beijing authorities strategically timed the relaxation of oppressive measures to coincide with significant decisions in Washington that could negatively affect the CCP central government. For instance, they highlighted instances where the release of prisoners arrested during pro-democracy demonstrations was announced just before crucial votes or decisions in Washington. In January 1990, 573 prisoners were released before the vote on the presidential veto of the Pelosi Bill. Similarly, in June of the

[691] Ibid. Human Rights Watch World Report 1990 – China.

same year, another 211 individuals were freed before President Bush's decision to renew China's MFN status. Furthermore, 97 prisoners – as well as Fang Lizhi and his wife, Li Shuxian – were released just before the World Bank gathering in Houston in July 1990 where, as mentioned in Chapter Two, measures related to China were on the agenda.

The work done by Asia Watch during those hectic years dedicated pivotal attention on the issue of political prisoners – those who were being unfairly detained due to their political stances and opposition to the central government – and their living conditions while in jail. In particular, the organization focused on Chinese workers who had been pivotal in either support or actively participate in the May protests.[692] Asia Watch believed that they had been "virtually ignored as Americans focused instead on imprisoned students and intellectuals." As shown by historian Jeremy Brown in his recollection of the pro-democracy protests in China, the 1989 pro-democracy unrest was a large phenomenon – in terms of geographical reach inside of China and social groups involved – that stretched well beyond the students' protest in Beijing Tiananmen Square. These individuals included the leaders of the Beijing Autonomous Workers Federation, the organization formed during the protests, effectively galvanizing Chinese laborers who had dissociated from the state-endorsed All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU).[693] According to Asia Watch, these workers had suffered what was described as "the severest government retaliation." In a report released in 1991, the organization stated: "In an effort to quash politicization of the workforce (termed the *Polish disease*), the government characterized these detainees as *thugs* and charged them as common criminals. Workers comprised the majority of those tried and convicted, frequently drawing heavy prison terms in the 10-to-15-year range. Workers and peasants accounted for all officially announced executions through the end of 1990."[694] Asia Watch referred to the fact that, following their arrest, workers had been classified as regular prisoners rather than political prisoners. This classification hindered their ability to mount a defense or lodge an appeal against potential death sentences.[695] While international attention had primarily focused on students, persecutions against pro-democracy activists had mainly targeted other groups within Chinese

[692] See Jeremy Brown, "Workers and Citizens," in Jeremy Brown, *June Fourth: The Tiananmen Protests and Beijing Massacre of 1989, New Approaches to Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp.82–88.
[693] For a recollection on the formation of the Beijing Autonomous Workers Federation at the time of the pro-democracy protests in the spring of 1989 see Andrew G. Walder and Gong Xiaoxia, "Workers in the Tiananmen Protests: The Politics of the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no.29 (January 1993): pp.1–29.
[694] Ibid. Human Rights Watch World Report 1990 – China.
[695] Ibid. Human Rights Watch World Report 1990 – China.

society involved in the protests. The detention and trials of these individuals, often conducted in decentralized provinces, received limited media coverage. According to Asia Watch, three years after the crackdown, "workers and minor functionaries, rather than students or intellectuals, continued to bear the brunt of this less visible aspect of the crackdown. Held in the worst prison conditions and stigmatized as mere common criminals, they formed the great majority of those detained since June 1989 and have on average been handed significantly heavier sentences."[696]

Over the years, the collaboration between Asia Watch and Capitol Hill – particularly with those policymakers most involved in human rights advocacy such as Nancy Pelosi and Tom Lantos – grew increasingly intense. The organization frequently provided detailed reports on current issues related to China, which members of Congress used on the floor to build their arguments against the Administration's attempts to advocate for what it was believed to be a non-constructive prolonged use of sanctions against the PRC. The organization was particularly active throughout the debate on the granting of MFN status, advising lawmakers on the formulation of provisions to be included in the bills envisioning conditionalities to trade benefits. As an example, in 1991, Asia Watch worked with Congresswoman Pelosi to include a provision mandating humanitarian groups – the reference was especially to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – to be allowed access to China to the MFN bill she indented to introduce in the House.[697] It was said that the ICRC could play a relevant role in addressing concerns related to prisoners and lead "to long-term improvements in the condition of individual political detainees and offering them protection from abuses."[698] Being allowed in Chinese prisons – as a mandatory condition to be granted MFN commercial status – ICRC would operate confidentially, negotiating with the PRC government the conditions to provide humanitarian services to prisoners as provided by the Geneva Conventions regarding the involvement of humanitarian organization in detention facilities in case of "mass arrests, large number of persons detained for security reasons, allegations of ill-treatment and poor conditions, and suspension of fundamental legal guarantees."[699]

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[696] Ibid. Human Rights Watch World Report 1992 – China and Tibet.
[697] See H.R.2212 - United States-China Act of 199, https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/house-bill/2212/text (last accessed June 2024).
[698] ICRC Access to China, Letter to Greg Mastel, Michael Punke, and Senator Baucus by Asia Watch Mike Jendrzejczyk and Holly Burkhalter, July 9, 1991, Columbia University Center for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch Records, Series 2: Country Files, 1978-1997, Correspondence: 1989-1995, Box 395 Folder 20-27.
[699] Ibid. ICRC Access to China, July 9, 1991.

Since the summer of 1989, Asia Watch focused primarily on gathering information regarding political prisoners in China. Its primary concerns involved three key groups: "people accused of direct involvement in the student or worker autonomous federations based in Tiananmen Square or their branches elsewhere in the country; people involved in demonstrations throughout the country after June 4 to protest the use of force in Beijing; and people accused of aiding the underground railway which has helped about two hundred people reach Hong Kong and points west."[700] According to Asia Watch's estimates, following the crackdown, between 6,000 and 20,000 people had been detained with the charge of "counter-revolutionary rebellion." These arrests occurred in conjunction with broader anti-crime and anti-corruption campaigns, complicating efforts to determine the precise reasons for specific arrests. Given the large number of detainees, conditions in the prisons were likely "appalling." While numerous students and intellectuals had been arrested during the pro-democracy protests, the majority of those detained, and all of those executed, were workers or unemployed people. The trials were conducted swiftly, lacking due process, even in cases involving the death penalty. The legal proceedings often relied on coerced confessions or reports from informers. "One section chief in a factory was arrested because he permitted his workers to join the demonstrations. He was pressured into pleading guilty, pressured not to have a lawyer, and pressured not to appeal when he was sentenced to a year in prison," reported a December 1989 report.[701] Imprisonment was not the only form of repression. First-year students at several universities in Beijing were required to undergo political re-education in military camps before beginning their studies, while graduating students were sent to rural areas before being assigned jobs. Both students and workers were mandated to study Deng Xiaoping's speeches for several hours daily. In response to the Administration's perceived inaction on human rights issues, especially following its successful lobbying machine against the congressional attempt to override of the President's veto on the Pelosi Bill (refer to Chapter One), Asia Watch increasingly placed its hopes in congressional intervention. The organization asserted that "the burden of trying to shape a policy that reflects concern for human rights still rests largely on the Congress."[702]

[700] Asia Watch Report, December 1989, Columbia University Center for Human Rights**,** Human Rights Watch Records, Series 2: Country Files, 1978-1997, May – December 1989, Box 404, Folder 29.
[701] Ibid. Asia Watch Report, December 1989.
[702] Robin Munro, *Punishment Season: Human Rights in China after Martial Law* (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 1990).

One noteworthy initiative that highlighted the collaboration between Asia Watch and sympathetic members of Congress was the *Adopt-A-Prisoner* program. Its significance lies not in its results, which are difficult to assess and quantify, but in the modalities of the collaboration it exemplified. It was initiated in the spring of 1990 by Representatives John Miller (D-WA) and Ted Weiss (D-NY).[703] This initiative was described as "a Chinese prisoner of conscience program in Congress where Members of Congress have tried to adopt individuals imprisoned."[704] A letter sent to all members of Congress explained the program's implementation and how each member could contribute. Using the model of the congressional campaign on behalf of Soviet Jewry, members were invited to "adopt an individual Chinese political prisoner." Those who agreed to participate would receive a brief one-page biography of the case and a few suggestions on how to support their "adoptee." For instance, members could write to Chinese authorities, insert statements in the Congressional Record, or raise the case during travels to China or meetings with Chinese officials in Washington.[705] To further promote the initiative, Asia Watch encouraged the involvement of Chinese students in the United States, urging them "to call their favorite representatives or senators and ask them to become part of the project." In 1991, as many of their colleagues back in China had been arrested due to their involvement in pro-democracy remonstrations, Asia Watch provided Chinese students in the United States with a list of more than 1,000 entries about political prisoners. The students were asked to review it and identify any individuals they recognized. In such cases, they were requested to provide detailed information, including biographical

[703] In late June 1990, Representative Miller also sponsored a bill (H.R.5129) based on the draft principles Asia Watch drafted for American businesses operating in China "Expresses the sense of the Congress that U.S. nationals conducting industrial cooperation projects in China or Tibet should adhere to specified principles, including to: (1) suspend the use of merchandise manufactured by convict or forced labor; (2) seek to ensure political and religious freedom without fear of one's employment status; (3) ensure that methods of production do not pose a danger to project employees and the surrounding environment; (4) strive to use business enterprises that are not controlled by China; and (5) promote human rights in China. Requires the Secretary of State to forward a copy of such principles to member nations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and encourage them to promote such principles. Requires U.S. nationals to register with the Secretary of State and indicate whether they agree to implement such principles. Sets forth specified reporting requirements." Online at https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/5129?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22china%22%7D&s=2&r=3 (last accessed September 2024).

[704] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, 102nd Congress, 1st Session, May 29, 1991, p.94.

[705] "China Adoption Project," April 20, 1990, Columbia University Center for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch Records: Record Group 6: Asia Watch, Series 2: Country File, 1978-1997, Box 414, Folder 26 A (Restricted to 2023).

details, dates of arrest or sentencing, and information on prison conditions.[706] Similarly, Chinese scholars and scientists, who had previously been active in advocacy efforts – the case of Fang Lizhi was the quintessential example – were also encouraged to support the initiative as they "may have connections on the Hills as well, and of course it's more self-promotion."[707]

As Congress members and staff traveled to China regularly, Asia Watch began assisting these delegations in the preparatory phases of their trips to maximize the effectiveness of their meetings with Chinese officials. The organization urged Congress delegations "to raise human rights concerns, while minimizing the opportunities for the government to generate its own propaganda." To achieve this goal, Asia Watch circulated a ten-point list of actions for Congress members to follow. First, seek the collaboration of the Chinese Embassy in the United States to facilitate visits to prisons, administrative detention facilities, and local jails, and meet with prisoners believed to be unfairly jailed and, when possible, attend political trials. Second, ask the Chinese Embassy to arrange meetings with government officials to raise human rights cases. Third, meet with family members of prisoners in Beijing, possibly at the U.S. consulates in China. Fourth, inform U.S. media about the trip and its purposes. Fifth, when interviewed by Chinese media, clearly state Americans' preoccupation and disappointment with human rights violations in the PRC. Six, be prepared to raise specific cases of concern, providing names and details regarding their activity and unfair reasons of imprisonment. Seven, make all possible efforts to obtain lists of prisoners held in connection with pro-democracy activities, any charges filed against them, and lists of those the authorities claim to have released. Eight, raise the issue of Tibet, where the harshest and most restrictive government measures had been implemented, and demand the allowance of international human rights and humanitarian organizations in the region. Nine, stress the U.S. Congress' commitment to human rights in China in meetings with Chinese academics, journalists, and businesspeople. Ten, upon returning from China, debrief U.S. journalists in Beijing, Washington, and Congress members' home districts on the trip's outcomes to counterbalance any negative or misleading attempts by the official Chinese media to chronicle the visit.[708] Although the list of actions to

[706] Asia Watch Letter to Overseas Chinese students and scholars, July 11, 1991, Columbia University Center for Human Rights**,** Human Rights Watch Records, Series 2: Country Files, 1978-1997, Congressional Advocacy, 1991-1994, Box 404, Folder 29.
[707] Ibid. "China Adoption Project," April 20, 1990.
[708] Letter from Mike Jendrzejczyk, Human Rights Watch Washington Director, to Michael Zarin, Office of Senator Dave Durenberger, March 21, 1991, Columbia University Center for Human Rights**,** Human Rights Watch Records: Record Group 6: Asia Watch, Series 2: Country File, 1978-1997, Box 414, Folder 26 A (Restricted to 2023).

be taken during the trips was extensive and many objectives were unlikely to be achieved, Congress members could serve the goal of keeping Chinese authorities under pressure, signaling the continuous commitment to human rights in China by both lawmakers and the American public, and gathered information, albeit partial, about the ongoing repression.

Although Asia Watch officers maintained closer relationships with Congress, they generally enjoyed productive collaboration with the Administration's East Asia Bureau of the State Department. According to Jendrzejczyk, the organization's approach to U.S. policymakers was "schizophrenic but functional." HRW officers often "wore two hats" in the U.S. policy process, "participating in information exchanges with U.S. government offices, and sometimes adopting an adversarial position on policy issues."[709] One prominent example of collaboration between the Administration and HRW was the organization's involvement in aiding Chinese dissidents granted entry to the United States. With assistance from Human Rights in China (HRIC), HRW played a key role in managing the logistics of resettling these individuals. As Jones remarked, "We met them at the airport and arranged their housing. We were the unofficial arm of the State Department for that part of the operation." While the U.S. government would lobby for their release and assist in their departure from China, HRW and HRIC assumed responsibility for their welfare once they arrived in the United States.[710]

The establishment of Human Rights in China (HRIC) adds an important dimension to understanding the intricate and multifaceted nature of U.S. foreign policy-making in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. The organization was founded in March 1989, notably before the protests by Chinese students and workers had even commenced. The impetus for its creation came from a group of Chinese graduate students in the United States who were inspired by what they viewed as the bold actions of Chinese astrophysicist Fang Lizhi (refer to Chapter Two). In January 1989, Fang addressed an open letter to Deng Xiaoping, urging the PRC Chairman to mark two critical anniversaries: the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement.[711] Fang called for these occasions to be honored by granting amnesty to political

[709] Interview with Mike Jendrzejczyk, Washington Director of HRW's Asia Division, by Kerry Dumbaugh in "Ten Years in U.S.-China Policy; Interest Groups and Their Influence, 1989-2000," December 12, 2000.
[710] Ibid. Interview with Sidney R. Jones, September 2024.
[711] The May Fourth Movement, which unfolded from 1917 to 1921, was a social and intellectual movement primarily driven by Chinese students and intellectuals, aimed to reject traditional Confucian values and promote new ideologies, such as science, democracy, and nationalism, as a way to modernize China. See Sabaree Mitra, *China's May Fourth Movement: New Narratives and Perspectives* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022); Ying-shihi Yü, "Neither Renaissance nor Enlightenment: A Historian's Reflections on the May Fourth

prisoners, many of whom had been detained for being outspoken against the CCP government. Additionally, Fang stressed the significance of 1989 as the bicentennial of the French Revolution and expressed hope that the ideals it represented – "the ideas of liberty, equality, fraternity, and human rights (*renquan*)" – would soon find resonance within Chinese society.[712] Fang's public letter was groundbreaking, marking one of the first rare instances in which a member of China's intellectual elite had openly questioned the regime's imprisonment of political dissidents. This act not only galvanized support from within China's academic and intellectual circles, prompting others to issue similar letters to Deng, but also played a crucial role in inspiring the formation of HRIC. Approximately one thousand Chinese students residing in the United States signed a letter in support of the efforts initiated by Chinese scholars and scientists. Among them, a small group of fewer than a dozen Chinese students gathered in New York, motivated by a desire to take concrete action for China. With only a vague understanding of what a human rights organization typically did, they reached out to Asia Watch to offer their assistance in collecting information about human rights abuses in China. Eventually, the group of students was offered a desk by Sidney Jones at Asia Watch's headquarters in New York, where Human Rights in China (HRIC) would begin its operations with one paid staff member to support its work.

In early 1991, following Li Xiaorong's decision to leave office and return to Stanford to complete her Ph.D. in philosophy, Xiao Qiang was appointed as the Executive Director of HRIC. Xiao, a trained theoretical physicist, had graduated from the University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) in Hefei, located in Anhui province.[713] He entered the university in 1979, as part of the third cohort of students allowed to resume their education after the Cultural Revolution, during which universities across China had been closed for nearly a decade.[714] This reopening marked a period of renewed intellectual vitality, particularly at USTC, which had become one of the most prestigious institutions for advanced training in science and technology. The university housed faculty displaced from leading Chinese

Movement," in Michael S. Duke (eds.), *Chinese History and Culture: Seventeenth Century Through Twentieth Century* (New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2016): pp.198-218.

[712] The text of the letter was first translated in English in Fang Lizhi, *Bringing Down the Great Wall: Writings on Science, Culture, and Democracy in China* (New York, NY: Norton, 1990).

[713] For a comprehensive overview of Xiao Qiang's background and work, visit his faculty page at the University of California, Berkeley's School of Information: https://www.ischool.berkeley.edu/people/xiao-qiang (last accessed October 2024).

[714] On the Cultural Revolution and its impact on China's culture and education, see among others, Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2016); Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

universities such as Peking and Tsinghua, positioning it as a central institution for grooming elite scientists to serve the state. One of USTC's most prominent figures during this period was Professor Fang Lizhi, a distinguished physicist who had managed to continue his research even during the Cultural Revolution, earning international recognition. Fang's outspoken advocacy for democratic reforms attracted widespread attention and had a significant impact on the university's intellectual environment. He regularly delivered public lectures on democracy and political reform, which resonated deeply with students. Although Xiao Qiang was not politically active at that time, he was among those students who attended Fang's talks and was influenced by his ideas. Upon completion of his studies, Fang even provided Xiao with a recommendation letter for his application to graduate programs in the United States.[715]

In 1986, Xiao Qiang moved to South Bend, Indiana, to pursue a Ph.D. in astrophysics at the University of Notre Dame. Prior to his arrival, his knowledge of the United States was limited and derived primarily from three American films he had watched in China – "one was Superman, the other two were very bad" – as well as accounts from peers who had previously studied there. His understanding encompassed various aspects of American academic life, including the impressive university facilities, the availability of basketball courts, and the comparatively spacious dormitory arrangements, where students shared rooms with only one other peer instead of being housed in larger, overcrowded quarters. He was also aware of the opportunity to own a car. Reflecting on his decision to study in the U.S., Xiao remarked, "Coming to the U.S. was very natural. It was a trend. No Chinese family could afford to send their kids to university in the U.S. But for graduate students, particularly in chemistry, math, and physics, the U.S. would offer teaching or research fellowships."[716] However, he soon discovered that life in the United States was more challenging than many young Chinese students had anticipated. They often struggled to culturally integrate and adapt to a new lifestyle, frequently experiencing feelings of isolation. Xiao noted that this pervasive sense of loneliness, coupled with the advanced technological resources available at U.S. universities, facilitated communication among Chinese students. At their departments, many were able to access early electronic mail systems, which became crucial for coordinating efforts (refer to Chapter One, Part Two). By early 1989, these tools enabled students to sign the above-mentioned letter supporting Fang Lizhi and other Chinese scholars advocating for the release

[715] Interview with Xiao Qiang, Human Rights In China Executive Director from 1991 to 2002, September 26, 2024.
[716] Ibid. Interview with Xiao Qiang, September 2024.

of political prisoners and the promotion of liberal social and political values. Furthermore, these same communication channels allowed Xiao to gather information about the pro-democracy protests occurring in major cities across China in the spring of 1989. Eventually, this prompted his decision, to fly back to Beijing, two days after the massacred in Tiananmen Square.

In Xiao's reflection, he noted, "Before Tiananmen, I had not fully grasped how deeply I cared for China and how significant it was to me. I viewed China as part of my past. However, when the events unfolded, they reminded me of my childhood and of the students who were akin to me. Had I been in China, I would have joined them; they felt like my brothers and sisters. Living in the United States, I had experienced the freedoms that these students were now demanding in China, and I recognized the validity of their aspirations."[717] During his two-month stay in China, Xiao came to realize his commitment to advancing the human rights cause, even while residing abroad. Upon his return to the U.S., his supervisor – whom Xiao had informed of his trip to China only through a voicemail prior to leaving – was notably upset and advised him to find another academic advisor. This incident provided Xiao with a justification to suspend his graduate studies. Through Liu Yadong, a close friend who had become the Secretary General of the newly established Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars (IFCSS), Xiao relocated to Washington, D.C., where the organization had established its headquarters (refer to Chapter One, Part Two). He was appointed as an assistant to the president and commenced his advocacy efforts. However, he departed from the organization a year later, feeling that his perspectives were in the minority. The IFCSS had gained increasing prominence on Capitol Hill, advocating against the PRC government and lobbying for the passage of the Pelosi Bill, arguing that Chinese students unable to remain in the U.S. would likely face repercussions upon returning home. Nevertheless, Xiao began to question this narrative, perceiving it as exaggerated; he believed that most students did not require political asylum, as they had not engaged in politically active behaviors that would endanger them upon their return to China. Instead, he observed that many were capitalizing on the opportunity to prolong their stay in the United States, where the living and working conditions were deemed superior to those in China, often with the intention of obtaining a green card. Prioritizing the advancement of human rights in China over advocating for the extended

[717] Ibid. Interview with Xiao Qiang, September 2024.

residency of his peers in the U.S., Xiao ultimately left IFCSS and later joined HRIC as executive director.[718]

At HRIC, Xiao Qiang was able to fully implement his vision for human rights advocacy. With an initial loan of $5,000 from Sidney Jones to cover his salary for five months, he began his work, assembling a small but efficient team of five volunteers. The group's composition reflected the multicultural and dynamic nature of New York City. It included a British journalism student from Columbia University who took on the role of English editor, a Taiwanese poet and writer who became the Chinese editor, a French translator who managed UN advocacy, and Liu Qing, a former political prisoner, who served as the Chinese chairman. Xiao himself described HRIC as "the Chinese adopted child of Asia Watch," a statement that reflects the strong ties between the two organizations. Despite their relative inexperience, the team rapidly established a solid network, providing critical intelligence on issues such as the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the fate of political prisoners, and China's reeducation-through-labor system. Their information, combined with intelligence from Robin Munro in Hong Kong, significantly bolstered the credibility of Asia Watch. "Next to Jones' door, there was a small active Chinese intelligence team directing feeding her with useful information. We were part of the Asia Watch success. We made Asia Watch distinct from all the other organizations," Xiao remarked.[719] Together with Asia Watch, HRIC progressively became a focal point for Chinese dissidents and refugees in New York, playing a crucial role in establishing a network of political dissidents whose connections in China provided valuable information. However, over time, HRIC developed a distinct mission from Asia Watch. While the latter focused primarily on influencing U.S. policy toward China, HRIC aimed to raise awareness of human rights issues, arguing that human rights were not solely Western constructs imposed on China, but universal values. HRIC's growing reputation was reflected in its board of advisors, which included prominent figures such as China scholars Perry Link, Andrew Nathan, Orville Schell, and Anne Thurston, alongside Fang Lizhi, whom Xiao personally brought on board, as well as Chinese journalist and dissident Liu Binyan. By the mid-1990s, HRIC's budget grew from around $250,000, derived mainly from donations, to nearly $1 million per year. This expansion was largely driven by the involvement of Robert Bernstein, the chair of Human Rights Watch, who joined HRIC and marked a clear break from Asia

[718] Ibid. Interview with Xiao Qiang, September 2024.
[719] Ibid. Interview with Xiao Qiang, September 2024.

Watch, further enhancing HRIC's stature within the human rights advocacy community.[720] As HRIC gradually distanced itself from its earlier affiliation with Asia Watch, it became an increasingly active advocate on the global stage. HRIC expanded its efforts by engaging with international institutions such as the World Bank, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, and other prominent global organizations.[721]

Although differing in their organizational structure, tools, and objectives, both Asia Watch and Human Rights in China (HRIC) offer important case studies that illuminate broader trends in human rights advocacy following the Tiananmen Square massacre. Three preliminary conclusions can be drawn from these cases. First, the massacre spurred the emergence of numerous third-party organizations increasingly focused on China's human rights situation. Collaboration between these groups proved mutually beneficial: HRIC, for example, supplied critical intelligence and reports to Asia Watch, bolstering its credibility in lobbying efforts, while Asia Watch provided initial institutional support to HRIC, aiding its early development and establishing its footing in the advocacy landscape. Simultaneously, the case of Asia Watch also reveals how the massacre exposed the previous neglect of China by established human rights organizations. The events of 1989 highlighted significant gaps in the attention that major organizations had paid to China's human rights record, prompting them to expand their focus and engage more systematically with Chinese issues. This dynamic not only illustrates the power of inter-organizational cooperation but also demonstrates the challenges posed by historical oversight in addressing human rights violations in China.

Second, Xiao Qiang's experience serves as an original – and understudied – perspective to challenge the tendency to oversimplify and homogenize the post-Tiananmen advocacy undertaken by Chinese nationals in the United States. The diverse aims and strategic uses of human rights rhetoric within the overseas Chinese community varied significantly, sometimes leading to ethical tensions among different advocacy groups. These differences in focus and approach had direct implications for the longevity and effectiveness of these movements. For instance, organizations like the IFCSS and HRIC adopted distinct strategies and goals, which influenced their ability to maintain momentum over time. The IFCSS, primarily focused on the immediate and tangible objective of securing visa extensions for Chinese students in the U.S. and later lobbying for Most Favored Nation (MFN) status reform, saw its influence wane as

[720] Ibid. Interview with Xiao Qiang, September 2024.
[721] Ibid. Dumbaugh, "Ten Years in U.S.-China Policy."

the specific political climate that gave rise to its advocacy changed in the mid-1990s. Its narrow, policy-driven agenda was highly contingent on domestic political developments, and when these debates diminished, so did the organization's relevance. Conversely, HRIC, with its broader mandate of exposing human rights violations in China, was more resilient. By maintaining a focus on long-term issues of human rights and political repression, HRIC was able to adapt to changing circumstances and sustain its operations even as the immediate post-Tiananmen advocacy landscape evolved.

Third, the reflections of both Sidney Jones and Xiao Qiang also offer valuable insights into the inherent limitations of human rights advocacy, particularly within the Chinese context. The emotional impact of the televised Tiananmen Square crackdown contributed, at times, to an oversimplified, polarized rhetoric, which often obscured the complexities of the situation. Jones, for instance, pointed out that the human rights discourse frequently lacked the necessary nuance, and the dissemination of information was often chaotic, complicating advocacy efforts. She observed that human rights organizations, such as Asia Watch, could strategically supply key information to congressional staff to influence legislative processes, initiate hearings, or include specific provisions in legislation. However, she remained skeptical about the long-term effectiveness of such efforts in bringing about meaningful change within the Chinese government. Moreover, Jones critiqued the tendency to oversimplify complex issues by reducing them to 'black and white' rhetoric, which undermined the depth of the problems at hand. This reductionist approach was partly driven by the need to communicate clear, concise messages, particularly in media appearances where public consumption demanded straightforward narratives. Despite being well-versed in China-related issues, Jones acknowledged that she often relied on scripted briefings to navigate these complexities in public forums, as the intricacies of the situation required a level of detail that was difficult to convey in simplified interventions.[722] Consequently, the tension between the emotional appeal of human rights rhetoric and the strategic necessity for nuanced advocacy – particularly in a context like China, where public perception and political discourse often demand clear moral stances – emerged as a defining, yet problematic, aspect of the debate.

[722] Ibid. Interview with Sidney R. Jones, September 2024.



Figure 26. Mike Jendrzejczyk (R front), Xiao Qiong (L), Wei Jingsheng (3rd L) and Harry Wu (2nd R) during a press conference in Washington, D.C. in February 1999.
Photo credit: JOYCE NALTCHAYAN/AFP via Getty Images.

3.4 *Laogai*. Uncovering the Force Labor Camp Practice

The Tiananmen Massacre and its aftermath significantly impacted the United States, bringing several prominent Chinese figures to the forefront as symbols of resistance against the oppressive measures enacted by the PRC government. A government that, until the early 1989, was perceived by many in the United States as attempting to liberalize the country, and that following the crackdown exposed itself to international criticisms. These figures played a crucial role in fostering empathy among the American public for the plight of the Chinese people and often posed significant challenges to the Bush Administration, as they embodied the spirit of resistance. Several of them have been already presented in the previous chapters. It is the case of Wu'er Kaixi, a Chinese dissident involved in the Tiananmen protests who continued to inspire Chinese students in the United States passing the torch of the contestation overseas. As well as Fang Lizhi, who spent thirteen months sheltered at the American Embassy in Beijing before being allowed by the PRC government to leave the country. From his new base in the United States, Fang actively challenged the Administration's policy, particularly as the debate over MFN status for China intensified on Capitol Hill. His advocacy resonated deeply with Chinese students and scholars, inspiring them to promote democratic ideals, as

evidenced by the establishment of organizations like Human Rights in China (HRIC). During the heightened Congressional discussions on the extension of commercial privileges to China, another influential figure began to capture American media attention and further strain U.S.-China relations. This figure was Hongda Wu, widely known as Harry Wu, who played a critical role in exposing human rights abuses in China and became a prominent voice in the broader international human rights discourse. Through his vehement criticism of the Chinese government, Harry Wu eventually attracted the support of some of Capitol Hill's most conservative anti-communist figures, who saw him as a powerful embodiment of why Washington should refrain from engaging with the repressive CCP regime.

"Harry Wu, former Chinese political prisoner, has a message that he hopes will shock Congress, the White House and the public: some of the goods Americans buy – including even the clothes they are wearing – may have been manufactured in the harsh conditions of Chinese labor camps and imported here in violation of U.S. laws," wrote *The Washington Post* in September 1991.[723] Born in Shanghai in 1937, Harry Wu was arrested and sentenced to life in a re-education labor camp – known as *laogai*, literally "reform through labor" – in his early twenties.[724] He was charged as a 'counterrevolutionary rightist' after criticizing the Chinese Communist Party's shortcomings and condemning the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 as a violation of international law. These critiques were voiced during the 'Hundred Flowers Movement,' an initiative promoted by Mao Zedong that temporarily allowed intellectuals to express criticisms of the CCP and offer suggestions for improvement.[725] Wu's family was profoundly impacted by China's stringent measures against dissent: his mother committed suicide following his arrest, and his brother was likewise imprisoned and ultimately beaten to death. After nineteen years of imprisonment, Wu was released in 1979 during the liberalization and opening season initiated by Deng Xiaoping. As a geologist, Wu moved to the United States as a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, and later accepted a research position at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. The American public became familiar with the name and face of Harry Wu on September 15, 1991, when the CBS show *60 Minutes* aired a journalistic investigation into Chinese prison labor camps. This broadcast, which earned

[723] Daniel Southerland, "The Witness Against China," *The Washington Post*, September 28, 1991.
[724] For a comprehensive recollection of Chinese labor camp practices, see Nicole Kempton and Nan Richardson, *Laogai: The Machinery of Repression in China* (Brooklyn, NY: Umbrage Editions, 2009).
[725] For an in-depth study of Mao's liberalization process contradictions, see Frank Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution, 1945-57* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). See also the hyper critical review of Dikötter's monograph by Felix Wemheuer published on *The China Quarterly*, no.219 (2014): pp.849–60 and Dikötter's response on the same issue, pp.860–63.

an Emmy award for the *60 Minutes* segment, revealed for the first time significant visual evidence of individuals subjected to forced labor to produce goods potentially intended for international markets.

In the mid-1980s, Harry Wu began delivering lectures on China's prison labor camps at universities and colleges across the United States. Wu claimed to have provided the U.S. government with substantial evidence regarding the conditions and operations of these Chinese facilities but criticized State Department and Customs officials for failing to act on the information he had supplied. He remarked, "they trust the Chinese authorities' statements more than they trust me."[726] He was later invited on Capitol Hill by Steven W. Mosher, the Director of the Claremont Institute Asian Studies Center, who was asked to testify at a hearing called by the Senate Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs in June 1990. This marked the first instance of the Chinese laogai system being discussed on Capitol Hill. Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC), a former leader of the pro-Taiwan congressional lobby in the 1970s and one of the most fervent Cold Warriors on Capitol Hill, was among the first to raise the issue of labor camps in Congress when the Senate debated the status of Sino-American relations a year after the Tiananmen massacre. "Karl Marx accused capitalists of exploiting the workers. What an irony. Nothing the capitalists have done can match the atrocities of the Chinese Communists," Helms asserted in Congress, further stating, "there are many evil regimes around this world today, but none more deserves to be overthrown by its people than the one in Beijing."[727] Helms had become increasingly concerned about the impact of products manufactured through cheap labor in China on the economy of his home state, North Carolina. The textile industry, a key economic driver in the state, had been experiencing significant declines since the 1980s and was likely to face further challenges from the intensifying competition resulting from trade with China.[728] While President Bush had recently announced his decision to renew Beijing's MFN commercial status without conditions, senators convened to deliberate on the appropriateness of this decision, calling Richard Solomon, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, to testify on behalf of the Administration.

[726] Ibid. *The Washington Post*, September 28, 1991.
[727] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Sino-American Relations: One Year After the Massacre at Tiananmen Square Hearing before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs*, 101st Congress, 1st Session, June 6, 1990, p.3.
[728] See Brent D. Glass, *The Textile Industry in North Carolina: A History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

In a heated exchange with Solomon, Helms contended that the Administration's conciliatory approach towards the PRC leadership, along with the decision to grant MFN status despite significant human rights violations, would likely encourage unfair and unlawful practices, including the importation into the United States of products made by Chinese prisoners in forced labor camps. The senator referenced a letter from a Chinese individual who had spent twenty years in labor camps cultivating cotton. According to the letter, by allowing the import of vast amount of Chinese cotton textile products into the American market without stringent checks on production conditions, the United States was contributing to "the oppression and exploitation of those who live in the camps," which led "to even more good people being persecuted to death."[729] Senator Helms' concern over labor camp practices grew significantly, particularly as William C. Triplett, a key staff member and chief Republican counsel to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, emerged as a leading supporter of Harry Wu. According to *The Los Angeles Times* correspondent James Mann, Triplett, who had a vested interest in issues of arms proliferation involving Beijing, became the principal drafter of legislative sanctions against China on Capitol Hill. He also regularly exchanged information on human rights issues with the staff members of Senator Mitchell and Representative Pelosi.[730] Through intermediaries like Triplett, Wu expanded his network in Washington, leading to an introduction to David Gelber, a producer for CBS *60 Minutes*. Gelber facilitated Wu's return to China to document the labor camp system, an endeavor that, along with a follow-up trip involving journalist Ed Bradley and a CBS cameraman, "gave Wu his taste of the influence of television."[731]

[729] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs*, June 6, 1990, p.22.
[730] Ibid. Mann, *About Face*, p.242.
[731] Jonathan D. Spence, "The Risks of Witness," *ChinaFile*, December 19, 1996.



Figure 27. Senator Helms, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with Harry Wu, May 4, 1995. Photo credit: LUKE FRAZZA/AFP via Getty Images.

Financed by CBS, in the summer of 1991, Harry Wu, accompanied by his wife Ching-li, both holding an American green card, travelled twice to China. He had been trained on how to use a hidden micro camera so that he could take videos while on his trip. The couple visited more than twenty camps "and came away with 240 still photographs, 40 hours of videotape and several internal Chinese documents revealing prison camp trade practices."[732] Their footage advanced the charge that some goods produced in these camps had reached the U.S.

[732] Ibid, Southerland, *The Washington Post*, September 28, 1991.

market, in violation of American law. In order to access the camps and talk to the police officials presiding over the prisons, Wu posed as a businessman, eager to do business with the prison factories which used forced labor to produce goods for secret export abroad. His previous experience working for a California's Silicon Valley import-export company had provided him with the necessary skills and know-how to sound credible when bargaining with the officials at the Chinese prison labor facilities. In an article authored for *Newsweek* magazine in September 1991, Harry Wu recounted his life in numerous Chinese labor camps and mines, as well as the strategies he employed – and the high risks he took – to return to those same facilities in order to uncover and document the forced labor practices occurring within them. "I had brought one of my old Mao suits, and my old Chinese identity papers, which were invaluable for paying the role of a local. In Qinghai I wore a police uniform so that I could get close enough to prisoners in the fields to film them. And once or twice, I went without disguise – even visiting with a former warden," wrote Wu.[733] During their second trip, the couple was accompanied by CBS journalist Ed Bradley. "Harry Wu is a man on a mission," praised Bradley. "He has the tools of journalism in an activist's role. He's very good at what he does."[734] Bradley eventually conducted interviews with Chinese government officials, including Tong Zhi Guang, the Vice Minister of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade, who unequivocally denied that goods produced in China's labor camps were being exported to the United States. This stance was echoed by Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wu Jianmin, who added a nuanced clarification: while acknowledging the possibility that some labor camp products may have entered the U.S. market, he emphasized that this was not the result of Chinese government policy. Jianmin further asserted that the U.S. bore some responsibility for the issue, suggesting that the American side should also monitor its own trade practices. "If some labor products flowed into the U.S. market, that's not the result of China's policy," the spokesman said. "The U.S. side should also be held responsible for itself."[735]

[733] Harry Wu, "A Prisoner's Journey," *Newsweek Magazine*, September 23, 1991.
[734] Frank Houston and Connie Cao, "Harry Wu: Back to the Gulag," *Columbia Journalism Review*, vol.34, no.3 (September 1995), p.34.
[735] -, "Chinese Deny Export of Prison-Made Goods," *The New York Times*, September 20, 1991.

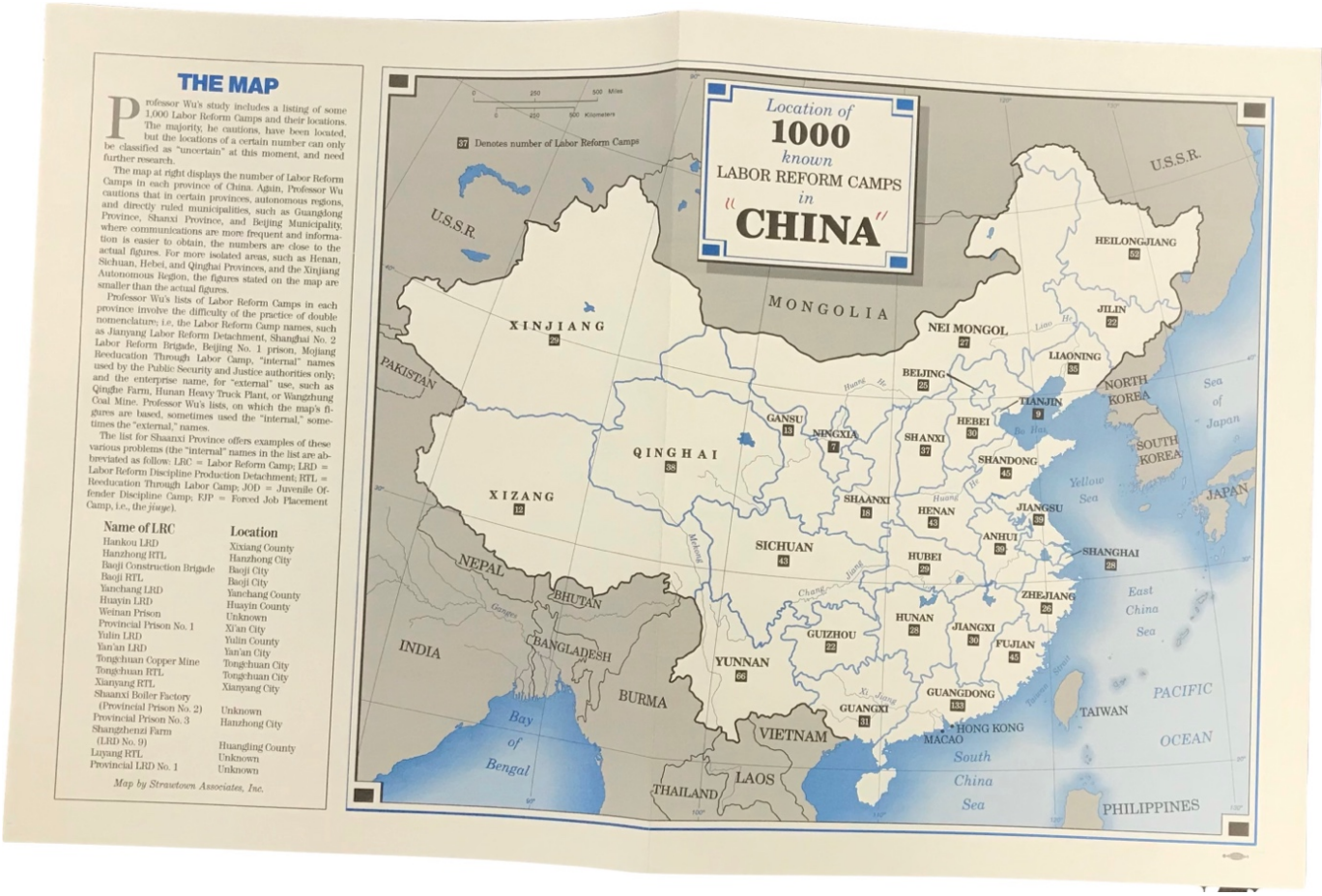

Figure 28. Maps of China's Labor Camps.
Image credit: George Meany Memorial Archives, The University of Maryland.

The issue of the prison labor camps was multifaceted. Firstly, it constituted a clear violation of the human rights of Chinese citizens. Secondly, the export of prison-manufactured goods to the United States via an import-export company system routed through Hong Kong contravened U.S. legislation, which prohibited since the 1930s the importation of goods produced with forced labor since the 1930s. Lastly, this practice had detrimental effects on American workers by introducing cheap, prison-made products that created unfair competition for U.S.-based companies and their employees. Soon after the investigation was broadcast, on September 23, 1991, a congressional hearing was called by the House Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Economic Policy and Trade. Evidence that trade with China was indirectly supporting Chinese illicit practices was posed to become a powerful asset for those in Congress advocating for a severe cut of business relations with Beijing in the contention of the MFN annual renewal. Congress members had grown increasingly concerned about the practice of re-education through labor camps, particularly because some prisoners included those arrested during the May-June 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations. In the spring

of 1991, Representatives Christopher Smith (R-NJ) and Frank Wolf (R-VA) traveled to China to address the issue of Chinese labor camps. During their visit to Beijing Prison Number One, they observed the production of goods, such as footwear, made by prisoners. They reported that young men and women were "forced to labor under unbearable conditions, 16-hour days, no pay, little food, and no outside communication."[736] As Wolf argued during the September hearing, "imagine those who went down to Tiananmen Square and demonstrated in 1989 and are now making socks that maybe some people in this audience are wearing. You just feel very unclean if that were the case. Yet people may be riding bicycles, maybe wearing socks, maybe fixing their cars with wrenches that have been made by slave labor."[737] It was the case of those former prisoners who were arrested in 1989, accused of being involved in activities of spying and counterrevolution against the PRC government. They testified in Congress shedding light on the inhumane living conditions they experienced in the camps such as food and water shortage, the inability to lie down while sleeping due to the overcrowded cells, physical torture, and lack of treatment in case of infections due to poor hygienic conditions.

For the first time, Harry Wu was invited to testify before Congress, sharing insights from his two trips to China the previous summer. Wu's testimony revealed that Chinese prison facility managers were aware of the U.S. Congress's efforts to limit imports from China due to unfair and unlawful practices. "From our conversations, it was clear that they were already exporting goods to the U.S. and that they were eager for more such trade," he testified. Wu recounted that a factory manager had said, "We need to speak quite openly with you because in the U.S., Congress recently made quite a deal about the special nature of our enterprises." The manager explained that the factory did not export directly but used China's state-run import/export company system. When asked by Representative Sam Gejdenson (D-CT), chairman of the Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade, Wu noted that while the Chinese frequently mentioned congressional inquiries, they never mentioned pressures from the U.S. Administration or the American Customs Service.

At the hearing, officials from the U.S. Department of State demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of China's detention system, providing accurate data related to the prison population. This system comprised four main components: prisons, labor reform camps, labor

[736] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Chinese Forced Labor Exports to the United States Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, 102nd Congress, 1st Session, September 23 and December 5, 1991, p.1.
[737] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, September 23 and December 5, 1991, p.57.

education camps, and detention centers. Individuals convicted of relatively serious offenses were sent to prisons or labor reform camps, while those guilty of minor crimes or antisocial behavior were assigned to re-education camps. Suspects awaiting trial were held in detention centers. Chinese officials reported approximately 1.1 million inmates in prisons and labor reform camps, but sentencing statistics suggested the actual figure could range from 1 to 2 million. Estimates of China's total imprisoned population ranged from 2 to 3 million, though researchers proposed that the figure might be higher. Regarding political prisoners – a category of particular interest to members of Congress – Chinese government officials denied their existence but acknowledged that 0.5 percent of prisoners had been convicted of "counterrevolutionary crimes." This percentage likely excluded many individuals detained without trial since the 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations, those in labor re-education camps, and those sentenced for religious activities, implying that the actual figure was significantly higher.[738]

Additionally, there were strong indications that prisoners often remained in prison labor camps even after completing their sentences. "These former prisoners may live outside the prison walls, but in many cases their labor is not fully voluntary," reported Robert M. Perito, the State Department Official in charge of Chinese and Mongolian Affairs. Former prisoners described conditions in labor and re-education camps as extremely poor, including overcrowding, frequent beatings, food shortages, and inadequate sanitation and healthcare. State Department officials lamented that in 1990, the PRC Justice Ministry had provided inconsistent figures regarding the value of goods produced in Chinese prison farms and factories. According to their statement, approximately 70 percent of this production was consumed within the prison system, with the remainder sold domestically. However, the 1989 China Law Yearbook indicated that China had exported $100,000 worth of goods produced within the prison system. Officials concluded that while there was no concrete proof that prison labor products had reached the United States, reports of such exports and evidence of Chinese prisons' willingness to export suggested that these products might have entered the country through a network of intermediaries, including trading companies in China and abroad, making the source challenging to trace.[739]

[738] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, September 23 and December 5, 1991.
[739] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, September 23 and December 5, 1991, p.7.

In this context, the hearing became increasingly contentious when Perito remarked that, despite Chinese officials' pledges to prevent the export of prison-made products to the United States, "there is substantial evidence that products are produced by prison labor for export and that the Chinese government's policy is either not widely known or ignored." He further noted that the Chinese government had not responded to requests for copies of regulations prohibiting prison exports, and to their knowledge, China had no specific laws banning the export of products made by prison labor. Further complicating the Administration's stance before Congress, Stephen B. DeVaughn, Acting Director of the U.S. Customs Service Office of Investigative Programs, asserted that U.S. regulations on banning prison-made goods were exceedingly restrictive. Despite evidence indicating that certain goods were produced through prison labor, the law hindered the ability to prohibit an entire category of merchandise that a country might also legitimately produce. U.S. regulations necessitated tracking individual shipments from China to U.S. ports – a task already challenging in open societies and virtually impossible in a centrally controlled economy like China "with an extensive bureaucracy specifically responsible for concealing and even misrepresenting the origin of prison-made exports."[740] Additionally, as noted by *The Washington Post*, "identifying the products can be difficult because their origin can be disguised by sending them through third countries, changing brand names or wiping out 'Made in China' marks."[741]

Heading the House Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade, Sam Gejdenson expressed strong dissatisfaction with the testimonies of Administration officials, emphasizing how the issue of China's labor camps, uncovered by Wu, had the potential to further cast doubt in Congress on the White House's assertiveness in addressing Beijing's restrictive human rights policies, as well as its unlawful trade practices. "It seems to me you have given up this fight," the representative from Connecticut remarked to the U.S. officials. Speaking on behalf of many of his colleagues on Capitol Hill, Gejdenson reiterated their unwillingness to compromise or accept the Administration's justifications for the impediments to effectively investigate and counter Chinese misconduct. "I don't know whether you are here to keep Congress happy and to tell Congress we have moved all these bureaucrats around, we have got this new structure, but the basic operating method you are going under says to me that there is no way on this earth that you are ever going to stop one item coming in from China, because you have set up a structure that there is no way you are going to be able to identify

[740] -, "Why Reward China's Slave Labor?," *The New York Times*, September 30, 1991.
[741] John Burgess, "U.S. Blocks Exports by 4 Chinese Firms," *The Washington Post*, October 5, 1991.

those goods made for certain prison labor," lamented Gejdenson. The Chinese labor camp system not only represented a significant issue proving the denial of fundamental rights to a large population in a country with which Washington was increasingly involved, but it also posed a major challenge to the argument that continued business with China would promote the country's liberalization. Instead, the camp labor system revealed a reality in which China engaged in business with foreign countries through unfair practices, undermining the liberties of its own people and compromising the health and competitiveness of American industries and workers. "This is more than human rights. I can go up and down my District and I will bet you every one of these fellows' Districts here and show you factories closed. They didn't like competing with countries whose workers got two and three bucks an hour. Can you imagine how mad they are going to be when they find out their government isn't doing anything about having to compete with workers in jail?" Gejdenson rhetorically demanded. It appeared that the Administration prioritized not upsetting the PRC leadership while attempting to curtail lawmakers' efforts to influence China policy in Washington. "What you are telling me is that you have got no interest in this. You are setting up a scam not to scare the Chinese into doing anything but to send Congress to sleep. You tell them we are serious, we are going to do something, and then in another day or two the Congressmen will forget about it. I can guarantee we won't," assured the representative from Connecticut.[742]

Mike Jendrzejczyk, Washington Director of Asia Watch, expressed frustration, stating, "it's only after worldwide publicity that they're finally doing something, even in this very narrow, limited sense." The revelations made by Harry Wu had confirmed long-standing claims made by Chinese exiles and human rights organizations, who had struggled to provide concrete evidence of forced labor in China's prison system. HRW had been particularly active in bringing attention to the issue. In his testimony before the House subcommittees, Jendrzejczyk praised the efforts of Harry Wu and his wife, noting that their work had further substantiated HRW's assertion that the Chinese government systematically employed prison labor for the production of export goods. Jendrzejczyk articulated several concerns regarding prison labor in China. First, numerous prisoners involved in the production of export goods were incarcerated without any judicial hearing, and many were compelled to remain in the camps even after their sentences had expired. Second, among these detainees were individuals incarcerated for political reasons, who were forced into labor – an act explicitly prohibited by

[742] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, September 23 and December 5, 1991, p.24.

the International Labour Organization's conventions. Third, living conditions in these camps were reported as inhumane, with prisoners suffering from hunger, malnutrition, illness, and poor hygiene, with some prisoners receiving no remuneration for their labor. Lastly, the importation of goods produced by prisoners convicted because of their political stances contravened not only U.S. laws, but also international regulations.[743]

In April 1991, Asia Watch made public some Chinese secret governmental documents which proved that Beijing authorities had allegedly promoted a policy of exporting prison-made goods to the United States. According to the Human Rights Watch 1992 World Report, "the official documents made it plain that China's central leadership was not only aware of the practice but was actively promoting such exports to the United States, in contravention of U.S. law," therefore proving that the Chinese authorities could not be trusted.[744] Asia Watch's efforts, in close collaboration with Harry Wu, were instrumental in raising awareness about human rights violations in China's prison labor system.[745] This information turned into an important asset in Washington for lawmakers who sought to oppose the Administration's claims that the continuation of MFN privileges to China would serve as a tactical framework to keep the debate on human rights with China alive and to discourage the isolation of those regions which seemed to have embraced a liberal free-market model. Asia Watch also worked on the formation of the Committee to End the Chinese Gulag, a collaborative effort between prominent figures such as Chinese dissidents Fang Lizhi and Liu Binyan, former Soviet political prisoner Yuri Orlov, and members of the organization. The Committee urged the Bush Administration to prioritize the release of Chinese prisoners with the same urgency that the Reagan Administration had applied to securing the freedom of Soviet prisoners. Robert Bernstein, HRW Chairman, argued: "We have to change China's disdain for human rights. Constant attention worked for the Soviet prisoners. We have to make it work for the students, workers and intellectuals swallowed up by the Chinese gulag. Simple justice demands it – and so does any hope for the "new world order" we hear so much about these days."[746]

In addition to his close collaboration with HRW, Harry Wu had also reached out to Amnesty International, proposing that its U.S. Director, Jack Healey, join the advisory board

[743] As stated in Jendrzejczyk's written statement, ILO Convention 105 prohibited the use of forced labor or compulsory labor "as a means of political coercion or education or as punishment for holding or expressing political views ideologically opposed to the established political, social or economic system."
[744] Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Watch World Report 1992 – China and Tibet, 1 January 1993.
[745] Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Watch World Report 1992 – China and Tibet, 1 January 1993.
[746] Robert T. Bernstein, "Break Up the Chinese Gulag," *The New York Times*, February 17, 1991.

of the organization he founded in 1992. This strategic alliance proved Wu's commitment to expanding his network with key human rights advocates, thereby strengthening his organization's influence and credibility within the broader human rights community. The Laogai Freedom Foundation was meant to be "a new organization dedicated to eradicating the forced labor camps of the Communist Chinese government." In a letter introducing the mission of the foundation, Wu argued that "exposing the truth about China's laogai system is for me a personal crusade. […] It is my dream to banish the laogai from Chinese society. Establishing The Laogai Freedom Foundation is the first step towards realizing this dream."[747] Wu, as he had done before, compared the Chinese laogai system with the Nazi's concentration camps and the Soviet gulag. "The horrors of the Nazi concentration camps were halted at the end of World War II. The Soviet gulag met its demise as the Communist regime plunged to its death. In contrast, the labor reform camps of the People's Republic of China are thriving, and the Chinese Communists' despotism is sprawling as never before."[748] This particularly severe rhetoric, as noted earlier, positioned Wu as an ideal spokesperson for anti-communist Cold War hawks in Washington, who viewed his narrative as evidence of why the U.S. should refrain from engaging with the authoritarian Chinese regime.

By the end of 1991, Wu would release a book titled *Laogai-The Chinese Gulag*, which eventually became a best-seller in America. His research gave notice of "about 1000 labor reform camps, their names, and locations." In his investigation, Wu estimated "the total number [of the camps] to be 3000 to 4000, containing [from 12 to 16 million people divided in] three types of convicts: those sentenced to labor reform; re-education through labor; and forced job placement personnel." From the numbers that Congress was provided with by Wu, it emerged that Washington was somehow contributing to that system, since "at least $100 million worth of prisoner-made goods from those camps were exported" in the year 1990, the U.S. included.[749] Thanks to Wu's revelations, the American media grew increasingly concerned with the issue of forced labor camps, drawing historical parallels that put China at the same levels of oppressive regimes such as the Nazis and the Soviet. *The New York Times* issued a

[747] The letter stated that "The mission of The Laogai Freedom Foundation is to: expose forced labor camps masquerading as benign enterprises; compile statistics on forced labor products and labor camp economic output; document the treatment and conditions of individual prisoners; publicize the human rights violations which take place daily in the camps." Letter to Jack Healey from Harry Wu, April 1992, AIUSA Archives, Columbia University Center for Human Rights, Executive Director Files, Correspondence November 1991 – April 1992.
[748] Ibid. Letter to Jack Healey from Harry Wu, April 1992.
[749] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, September 23 and December 5, 1991., September 23 and December 5, 1991, p.15.

cautionary statement, drawing parallels between the denial of forced labor practices in Chinese labor camps and the pre-World War II period when many countries similarly turned a blind eye to Nazi Germany's abuses. The article warned that a similar situation was unfolding, as nations were becoming complicit by ignoring China's labor camp system. The analogy likened the contemporary economic engagement with China to the pre-war era, when "nations knew their ambassadors were accredited to a regime from hell, and their businessmen were buying its products," highlighting the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by governments and corporations engaging with oppressive regimes. Similarly, the newspaper noted how a comparable indifference occurred right after World War II, when Washington sided with Moscow despite the existence of the Soviet Gulag system. The article emphasized that, despite widespread knowledge of the Soviet labor camps, "most people did little or nothing" in response, reflecting a broader pattern of international complacency in the face of human rights abuses.[750] Thanks to Harry Wu's efforts, there was now substantial evidence that Beijing was involved in practices akin to those of Nazi Germany and, later, the Soviet Union. Wu's findings confirmed the existence of forced labor within Chinese prison camps, drawing historical parallels to the labor exploitation systems of these earlier regimes. "Communist China is not only a political prison as was the Soviet Union. It is also a vast, organized slave camp. Sixteen to twenty million men and women are beaten and starved, today, every day, into slave labor organized specifically to provide economic underpinning for Chinese Communism. The products of their sweat and blood are sold around the world," wrote Abe Rosenthal, former executive editor of *The New York Times*. "There will always be Westerners who deny the reality about Chinese slave camps, known in outline for years. There were those who deny Hitler's slaughters and the Soviet gulag. But now, because of the publication of a cool, minutely documented book, denial has to be seen as acceptance."[751]

As explored in Chapter Two, despite increasing opposition on Capitol Hill to the White House's conciliatory stance towards China, the president had successfully garnered some Democratic support for his position on the MFN issue but risked now to lose this already precarious advantage. In early June 1991, Senator Max Baucus (D-MT), Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on International Trade, rallied six other Democratic senators including Quentin N. Burdick and Kent Conrad of North Dakota, all representing farm states with substantial trade interests in China, to concur with the president's position that the annual

[750] Abraham M. *Rosenthal*, "China's Black Book," *The New York Times*, July 7, 1992.
[751] Abraham M. *Rosenthal*, "Sixteen Million Slaves," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1992.

renewal of the MFN status was not an appropriate tool for promoting human rights in China. Breaking party lines, these senators refused to support the effort of Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell to condition the annual renewal of commercial benefits to Beijing. However, allegations that products manufactured in Chinese prison labor facilities were being sold on the U.S. market, coupled with the perceived inertia of President Bush, posed a significant threat to the Administration's argument for the unconditional renewal of MFN status, risking jamming the lobbying machine the Senate. On July 19, 1991, President Bush wrote to Senator Baucus, committing the Department of State to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding with Chinese authorities. This agreement aimed to establish procedures for promptly investigating allegations that specific imports from China were produced by prison labor. Additionally, the Administration assured that it had instructed the U.S. Customs Service to block imports from China when there was a "reasonable indication" that the products were made in prison labor camps.[752] As the weeks passed, and despite the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade agreeing in principle to negotiate such an agreement, evidence of products made through prison labor entering the U.S. market increased, causing significant embarrassment for the Democratic senators who had supported the president, breaking ranks with their own party. Being China a major exporter of American grain and pesticides, Senator J. James Exon of Nebraska sought to justify his decision saying, "I was voting on this principally from a parochial standpoint."[753]

Senator Baucus grew increasingly dissatisfied with the Administration's posture on the issue of forced labor camps. He reportedly expressed his frustration by stating, "frankly, I'm just about at the end of my rope on the whole business." Even when the U.S. Customs Service took a significant step in October 1991 by banning the import of wrenches and steel pipes produced by Chinese companies identified by Harry Wu as utilizing prison labor, Baucus greeted the news with limited enthusiasm. He remarked, "I expect this to be the first in a series of new steps addressing congressional concerns with China."[754] The senator from Montana particularly appreciated Harry Wu's efforts in uncovering Chinese illicit practices. According to *The Washington Post*, Baucus stated that Wu had produced "fairly significant evidence" and had raised the prison labor issue to a higher level of concern. Wu's evidence became a benchmark for evaluating the Administration's efforts to prevent prison labor-made products

[752] Letter from President Bush to Senator Baucus, July 19, 1991, GHWBPL, –
[753] Keith Bradsher, "Prison Labor Seen in Chinese Imports: Evidence Unlikely to Provide Votes to Override Veto of Beijing Trade Status," *The New York Times*, September 24, 1991.
[754] John Burgess, "U.S. Blocks Exports by 4 Chinese Firms," *The Washington Post*, October 5, 1991.

from entering the U.S. market. "I understand the difficulty of identifying forced labor goods, but I am troubled that a single Chinese scholar can discover more about this matter in two visits to China than can the entire U.S. Customs service," remarked Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND), one of the Democratic senators who had sided with the Administration in the MFN vote, expressing his frustration in a letter to the President. Despite reiterating that MFN was not the proper vehicle to address many of the problems posed by China's policies, the Administration seemed not to have done enough to counter China's illicit practices. Furthermore, Beijing appeared to be mocking Washington, and the Administration seemed complicit. Conrad noted, "U.S. officials have only been allowed to visit certain Chinese prisons, and U.S. trips to these prisons have been carefully scripted by the Chinese government. Yet, the Administration has not questioned what goes on at the other prisons. It seems that our country has been too willing to accept the Chinese facade."[755] In parallel with the outcome of the Chinese Students Protection Act (refer to Chapter One), congressional negotiations with the Administration culminated in a 1992 prison labor agreement with China. This agreement aimed to curtail the export of goods produced in Chinese labor camps and to grant American inspectors access to facilities where forced labor was suspected. However, as the agreement failed to meet these objectives, President Clinton's 1993 Executive Order established compliance with the prison labor agreement as a mandatory condition for the annual conditional renewal of China's MFN trade status.

[755] Letter to the President from Senator Kent Conrad, November 14, 1991, GHWBPR, WHO of Records Management, China. On the issue of arm proliferation, Conrad wrote: "My second area of concern is Chinese weapons exports and nuclear proliferation. It was recently revealed that China is now assisting Iran with its nuclear program. This adds another country to China's list of clients, which already includes Iraq, Syria, North Korea, Pakistan, Algeria, and Libya. I support the Administration's efforts to push China to join the Missile Technology Control Regime (MCTR) and to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, I also believe that the United States must step up its efforts to monitor proliferation around the world, and to strictly monitor compliance with the MCTR and the NPT. Increased vigilance and real pressure is needed if we hope to contain the spread of weapons of mass destruction into the next century."



Figure 29. Harry Wu at The Tonight Show with Jay Leno on October 2, 1995.
Photo credit: Margaret Norton/NBCU Photo Bank/NBCUniversal via Getty Images via Getty Images.



Figure 30. Harry Wu speaks to reporters on August 25, 1995.
Photo credit: MIKE NELSON/AFP via Getty Images.

3.5 Made in Prison. The *Toycott* Campaign and the Morality of Consumption

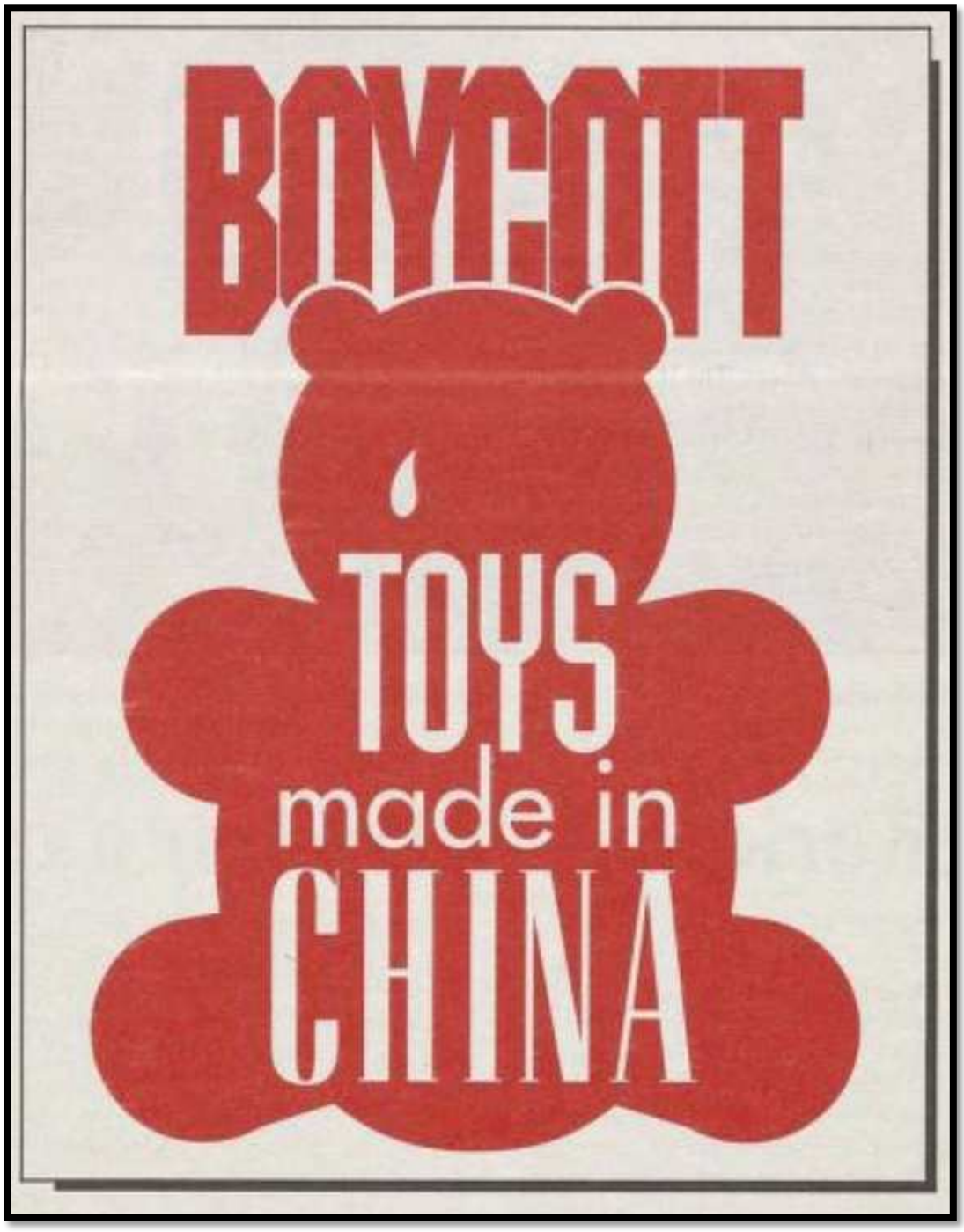

Figure 31. "Toycott" Flyer.
Image credit: AFL-CIO NEWS MAGAZINE.

As human rights organizations and lawmakers continued to advocate for sanctions against the PRC, the exploitative labor practices in Chinese manufacturing – especially in the production of goods destined for export – became a central concern. Reports from Chinese dissidents such as Harry Wu, alongside assessments from human rights organizations like Asia

Watch and Human Rights in China (HRIC), revealed systemic abuses of labor rights in China, which were not only ethical violations but also had significant economic implications for the U.S. labor market. Chinese exploitative labor conditions, characterized by substandard wages, excessive working hours, and dangerous environments, were seen as undermining the competitiveness of American labor, particularly as U.S. companies increasingly relied on low-cost Chinese manufacturing (refer to Chapter Four). These issues intersected with existing allegations regarding China's copyright piracy and unfair trade practices that posed additional challenges to American products in the marketplace. The unfair competition created by the lower cost of Chinese labor threatened to erode the standards of American workers, heightening anxieties within the U.S. about the broader economic consequences of unregulated trade with China. In response to these developments, labor unions such as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) became prominent actors in shaping the U.S. policy debate regarding China.[756] These unions argued that the influx of inexpensive Chinese goods, produced under conditions that failed to meet international labor standards, had the potential of undercutting the bargaining power and livelihood of American workers. By focusing on the exploitation embedded in Chinese manufacturing practices, labor unions expanded the human rights discourse to include concerns about fair trade and labor protections. Their advocacy gained further prominence after President Clinton's decision to de-link human rights considerations from the annual renewal of MFN commercial status with China, thus reshaping the debate on economic relations and workers' rights (refer to Chapter Four). Similarly, consumer advocacy groups, such as the National Consumers League, voiced concerns about the ethical dimensions of U.S.-China trade relations. These organizations emphasized the responsibility of American corporations and consumers to ensure that the products they purchased were not the result of abusive labor practices abroad. By doing so, they highlighted the broader implications of international trade for global labor rights and consumer responsibility, calling for greater transparency and accountability in corporate supply chains.

This section explores the role of labor unions and consumer advocacy groups as new voices in the U.S.-China policy landscape after the Tiananmen Square crackdown. By centering on

[756] The availability of primary sources related to these unions' activities on China remains limited. This section is based on the AFL-CIO-related documents filed at the University of Maryland library archives. The organization's Executive Council statements, along with congressional hearings and records, and oral interviews, provide valuable insights into its advocacy efforts. These sources help to contextualize the union's stance on trade and labor relations with China, shedding light on its broader objectives to uphold labor rights and ensure that trade agreements conform to fair labor standards.

the intersections between human rights, labor standards, and trade practices, these groups introduced additional dimensions to the post-Tiananmen U.S.-China relations debate. They pushed for a broadened human rights discourse, asserting that such rights include not only political freedoms but also economic justice and ethical business practices. A case study of this is the *Toycott* Campaign, initiated by Frontlash – a youth organization affiliated with the AFL-CIO – to boycott toys produced in China and sold in the U.S., which were allegedly made under exploitative conditions. Despite challenges in measuring the campaign's impact and some organizational naiveté, *Toycott* reflected a burgeoning American interest in Chinese labor practices and facilitated unprecedented collaboration between labor unions, human rights advocates, and Chinese dissidents.

As the debate surrounding the tension between human rights obligations and economic interdependence intensified in Washington, particularly in relation to the annual discussions on granting MFN status to China, the AFL-CIO quickly emerged as a central actor in addressing the China question.[757] The labor organization launched a pointed campaign against American multinational corporations, accusing them of being "the most enthusiastic supporters" of the Beijing regime. According to the AFL-CIO, these corporations displayed a marked disregard for democracy and human rights, driven primarily by the desire to protect their lucrative opportunities in China, which were underpinned by access to cheap and easily exploited labor.[758] The AFL-CIO's critique extended beyond the international business community, which it described as motivated by an unquenchable "thirst for profits" that contributed to the exploitation of Chinese workers.[759] The union also strongly condemned the U.S. government's policy, particularly under President George H.W. Bush, accusing it of moral complicity in human rights abuses. It denounced the administration's approach as "duplicitous and disgraceful," arguing that Bush's policies were governed by "amoral geopolitical and economic

[757] The U.S. working class and the institutional labor movement played a prominent role as advocates of anti-Soviet and anti-communist policies during the Cold War. For a comprehensive discussion, see Rosemary Feurer, "Cold War in the American Working Class," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, June 20, 2022. A global perspective on the AFL-CIO's activities during this period is provided in Robert Anthony Waters Jr. and Geert Van Goethem (eds.), *American Labor's Global Ambassadors: The International History of the AFL-CIO during the Cold War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). For an in-depth analysis of the AFL-CIO's pivotal role in U.S. Cold War foreign policy, including its close collaboration with the CIA, see Anthony Carew, *American Labor's Cold War Abroad* (Edmonton, Canada: Athabasca University Press, 2018).

[758] Statements Adopted by the AFL-CIO Executive Council, February 21-24, 1994, University of Maryland - Hornbake Library, The George Meany Memorial Archives, AFL-CIO Office of the President, RG34-002, Box 34/26.

[759] Statements adopted by the AFL-CIO Executive Council, May 23-24, 1990, University of Maryland – Hornbake Library, The George Meany Memorial Archives, AFL-CIO Office of the President, RG34-002, Box 30/2.

calculations" that compromised America's longstanding role as a global champion of human rights.[760]

The AFL-CIO called upon the Bush Administration to reconsider its stance on China and reject the business-centric, profit-driven rationale that dominated U.S. foreign policy toward Beijing. The union argued that the existing policy not only undermined fundamental American values but also resulted in a significant loss of national integrity, presenting an embarrassment for the American public.[761] Its accusations were particularly severe, as it alleged that the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service facilitated opportunities for American corporations in Chinese provinces where local economies were shaped by forced labor camps. According to the union, this amounted to the U.S. government "promoting slave labor in common cause" with the Chinese Communist regime," even if American companies did not directly utilize prison labor.[762] The AFL-CIO further contended that the Bush Administration's eagerness to grant trade privileges to China could be explained by the interests of multinational corporations, which were keen to exploit China's labor market. Dissatisfied with the wages offered by other Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, these corporations had been eager to "entering into 'partnerships' with China's communist government to exploit wages of as little as eight cents an hour."[763]

The AFL-CIO urged the U.S. Congress to assume a pivotal role in recalibrating American policy toward China, stressing the need for this policy to align with the nation's enduring tradition of defending oppressed groups. Central to the union's demands was the immediate suspension of China's MFN trade status, contingent upon demonstrable improvements in human rights conditions by the Chinese government. Furthermore, the union called for an end to all U.S. government initiatives that promoted commercial relations with China, particularly those that facilitated American corporate investment in China under exploitative labor conditions. A key proposal from the union was the implementation of a code of conduct for U.S. companies operating in China, mandating that workers be allowed to form independent

[760] Statements adopted by the AFL-CIO Executive Council, February 19-22, 1990, University of Maryland – Hornbake Library, The George Meany Memorial Archives, AFL-CIO Office of the President, RG34-002, Box 30/1.
[761] Ibid. Statements by AFL-CIO Executive Council, May 23-24, 1990.
[762] Statements adopted by the AFL-CIO Executive Council, February 18-22, 1991, University of Maryland – Hornbake Library, The George Meany Memorial Archives, AFL-CIO Office of the President, RG34-002, Box 31/12.
[763] Statements adopted by the AFL-CIO Executive Council, August 4-5, 1991, University of Maryland – Hornbake Library, The George Meany Memorial Archives, AFL-CIO Office of the President, RG34-002, Box 32/28.

unions, free from interference by Communist Party-controlled institutions. In addition, the AFL-CIO sought legislation requiring U.S. importers to certify that none of their Chinese-made products were produced through forced labor, a direct response to reports of widespread exploitation within Chinese labor camps.[764] In testimony before the House Committee on Ways and Means in June 1990, Morton Bahr, President of the Communications Workers of America (an AFL-CIO affiliate), dismantled the argument that trade with China advanced democratic ideals. He asserted that, rather than promoting political reform, such economic engagement merely reinforced the power of the Communist Party, perpetuating a system characterized by repression and exploitation. In Bahr's words, "the time has come for the Congress to address the myth that trade with China somehow promotes democracy there. On the contrary, trade with China serves to perpetuate an evil and corrupt system run by the Communist Party."[765]



Figure 32. U.S. Reps. Ben Jones (L), Nancy Pelosi, and John Miller (R) in Tiananmen Square, September 1991. Video frame credit: WYFF News 4.

In September 1991, Jeffrey Fiedler, Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO's Food and Allied Service Trades Department, accompanied U.S. Representatives Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Ben

[764] Ibid. Statements by AFL-CIO Executive Council, February 18-22, 1991.
[765] Ibid. *Hearing before the Committee on Ways and Means*, June 19 and 21, 1990, p.375.

Jones (D-GA), and John Miller (R-WA) on a fact-finding mission to China. This visit became widely known when the members of Congress staged a demonstration in Tiananmen Square, where they unveiled a banner reading "To those who died for democracy in China," before being swiftly apprehended by Chinese authorities. As reported by *The Washington Post*, the banner had been provided to Pelosi by Reverend Chu Yiu-ming in Hong Kong. Reverend Chu was a key figure behind Operation Yellow Bird, an underground network that helped many pro-democracy activists escape China after the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, with many of these activists eventually resettling in Europe (refer to Chapter One).[766] Fiedler recalled a particularly tense encounter between Pelosi and the recently appointed U.S. Ambassador to China, J. Stapleton Roy. The ambassador expressed his disapproval of the congressional delegation's protest, concerned about the diplomatic consequences. Pelosi defended the act as a necessary statement against human rights abuses in China.[767] At that time, Pelosi's office initiated a close collaboration with Fiedler on China-related advocacy. This included joint efforts by the AFL-CIO and the San Francisco representative's team to secure the release of Harry Wu following a new arrest in China in 1995 when the human rights activist remained detained for over two months.[768] The partnership between Pelosi and Fiedler's organization proved a growing alliance between U.S. labor organizations and congressional advocates concerned with human rights conditions in China.

Upon his return from China, Fiedler provided testimony before the House Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Economic Policy and Trade, focusing on the AFL-CIO's investigation into the influx of Chinese prison-made goods into the U.S. market. He reported that products such as textiles, electronics, and toys were being manufactured in Chinese labor camps under conditions comparable to those of the Soviet gulag. Fiedler's investigation revealed that this exploitative labor system not only constituted a violation of human rights but also had a devastating impact on American employment. "It can now be stated unequivocally that the massive Chinese prison labor system has destroyed American jobs," Fiedler sentenced. AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer drew a sharp contrast between the limited economic interaction the United States had with the Soviet Union, which rendered the Soviet labor camps less impactful on U.S. markets, and the growing trade relations with China, which he argued had

[766] Marianna Sotomayor, "Pelosi's Taiwan Trip a Culmination of Decades of Challenging China," *The Washington Post*, August 2, 2022.
[767] For a critical analysis of Pelosi's diplomatic approach and her confrontational stance toward the leadership of the PRC, see Mike Chinoy, "What Does Nancy Pelosi Think She's Doing in Taiwan?" *Foreign Policy*, July 26, 2022.
[768] Ibid. *The Washington Post*, August 2, 2022.

more significant repercussions on American industries and workers. This comparison was intended to shed light on the unique threat posed by China's economic practices, particularly following the normalization of Sino-American trade relations in the 1970s. Fiedler further criticized American businesses for knowingly participating in the unethical trade of prison-made products, asserting that despite legal prohibitions, these companies were complicit in the exploitation of forced labor. "While the Chinese are producing the good, American companies are buying them with the clear knowledge that it is illegal," he argued in Congress.[769]

Amid the ongoing discourse regarding the conditions for renewing MFN status, the toy industry emerged as a particularly contentious sector. As noted in earlier discussions, toys were not directly exported from China to the United States. Rather, Chinese factories leveraged the state-run import/export system to penetrate the U.S. market. This practice not only disregarded the fundamental rights of workers, including those in forced labor conditions, but also contravened U.S. legislation prohibiting the importation of goods produced under coercive circumstances. The American toy industry became a focal point in discussions surrounding U.S.-China relations and the MFN status debate, with American firms expressing concerns over the significant repercussions they might face if China were denied these commercial privileges. Such apprehensions were exacerbated by the active opposition of human rights groups, which strategically used the toy sector as a critical lever in advocating for ethical trade practices. The disclosure that toys used by American children were manufactured under exploitative conditions in China galvanized public awareness and moral outrage, thereby significantly influencing the broader discourse on trade and human rights. The *Toycott* campaign, initiated during the 1989 holiday season and sustained for several years, exemplifies the intersection of consumer activism and human rights advocacy. This campaign not only exposed troubling labor practices in China but also became central to the discussions concerning the renewal of MFN status. Furthermore, it prompted critical reflections on the nature of Sino-American relations and the ethical implications of American consumerism, illustrating the complex interplay between trade and human rights.[770]

As American toy manufacturers increasingly recognized the potential threats to their expanding trade practices with China posed by allegations raised in Congress, they undertook

[769] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, September 23 and December 5, 1991, p.115.
[770] For a comprehensive history of consumer activism in the U.S., from boycotts and the consumer rights movement to ethical consumerism see Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

a proactive campaign to highlight the possible adverse consequences for their industry and consumers. Beginning in the spring of 1990, representatives from the toy industry in Congress launched a concerted effort to convince policymakers and the public of the severe adverse effects that would ensue from altering trade relations with China. They employed rhetorical strategies aimed at appealing to American consumer interests and economic considerations, asserting that the revocation of MFN status would critically disrupt American toy manufacturing. They emphasized that China had become an essential source of labor and production resources for the industry, and that any interruption in trade relations would significantly impair U.S. toy production. Since 1980, American toy companies had made substantial investments to establish production facilities resulting in China becoming "the leading supplier of toys to the United States, [which] in 1989 accounted for 55 percent of all dolls and 40 percent of all other toys imported into the United States."[771] The denial of MFN status would escalate duty rates on toys produced in China from 6-12 percent to a staggering 70 percent, significantly impacting toy prices in the United States. "Such high cost," wrote a representative of the Toy Industry Trade Association in a letter to President Bush where he advocated for the continuation of MFN, "would mean the death to many of our toys lines, and would be a severe economic blow to our company."[772] Additionally, the evolving dynamics of the toy market, characterized by rapidly changing consumer demands and shorter product lifecycles, made mechanized production economically impractical for many products as they become quickly obsolete. Stephen Shank, President of Tonka, a prominent American toy manufacturer, presented a case to Congress using the Ghostbusters toy line as an illustrative example. He noted that, in response to the success of the 1989 film, these toys were designed for a limited market run. Shank argued that the imposition of a 70 percent duty rate would elevate the retail price from approximately $7 to around $10.50, thereby diminishing the toys' appeal to consumers.[773] Toy industry representatives emphasized that American consumers favored affordable toy prices, advocating for the necessity for U.S. companies to focus on efficient, low-cost manufacturing available in China. Access to a vast network of established, reliable, and low-cost toy factories in the country, managed by skilled personnel and supported by quality control experts, was deemed essential for competitive toy production. The revocation of MFN status for China would consequently severely limit this access,

[771] Letter to John Sununu from David A. Miller, TMA Toy Industry Trade Association, May 8, 1990, GHWBPR, WHO of Policy Development, Warren Maruyama Files, China.
[772] Letter to the President from Tonka Toys, May 22, 1990, GHWBPR, WHO of Records Management, China.
[773] Ibid. *Hearing before the Committee on Ways and Means*, June 19 and 21, 1990, p.350.

compromising the competitiveness of American toy manufacturers in both domestic and global markets.

American toy industry representatives expressed strong opposition to the potential revocation of the MFN status for China, emphasizing the reciprocal benefits of their investments. They argued that their business engagements with Chinese manufacturers had played a crucial role in advancing the liberalization of China's market and economic system, as well as improving labor conditions. The U.S. toy industry representatives maintained that Chinese workers employed in the sector had experienced measurable benefits, including higher wages and an improved standard of living. They emphasized the considerable scale of employment within the Chinese toy industry and its dependence on trade relations with the United States. For instance, Hasbro, the world's largest toy company, served as a notable example, employing 10,000 people in China alone, surpassing its total global employment figure of 8,200. These Chinese workers accounted for 25 percent of the Rhode Island-based toy company's worldwide production. David Miller, President of the Toy Manufacturers of America, highlighted that although the base hourly rate for labor in China could be as low as 18 cents, the average wage paid by the toy industry in China exceeded $1 per hour, displaying the positive impact of the American toy industry's engagement with China on the quality of life for Chinese workers.[774] Interviewed by *The Los Angeles Times*, Edmund Young, Vice President of Perfekta Enterprises, a Hong Kong toy company with plants located in the neighboring Shenzhen special economic zone in Guangdong province and heavily reliant on the American market, observed that many workers at Perfekta's factory had escaped severe poverty in rural areas. He noted that these workers could earn up to 1,000 yuan ($185) each month in pay and bonuses, approximately seven times the national average, while working eight hours a day, six days a week.[775]

"These workers are our friends," claimed A. Curts Cooke, President of Russ Berrie & Co., a company particularly known for manufacturing stuffed animals, who estimated that over one million people in the southern coastal region of China were engaged in producing goods, thereby warning on the potential repercussions of Congress's decision to deny China's MFN commercial status. Cooke emphasized that these individuals had relocated to pursue opportunities that now hung precariously due to Congressional decisions. He expressed

[774] Ibid. *Hearing before the Committee on Ways and Means*, June 19 and 21, 1990, p.287.
[775] Andrew Quinn, "Pressure from Chinese Toy Boycott Felt: Exports: Charges that the Playthings are Made by Exploited Labor have Sparked a U.S. 'Toycott,'" *The Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1991.

concerns that revoking MFN status would sever ties with these workers, effectively abandoning them and hindering their socio-economic advancement. "They have constant contact with people from the United States, from Hong Kong, and have improved their standard of living because many of those areas didn't exist 10 to 15 years ago. People from all over China have moved into these areas because of the opportunities to improve their standard of living. Loss of MFN will mean loss of contact with these people. They will look at us as abandoning them," claimed Cooke. Moreover, in an attempt to appropriate the human right vocabulary, Cooke argued against the notion of reverting these workers to agricultural labor, asserting that it would constitute a violation of fundamental rights. Similarly, Alan Hassenfeld, President of the above-mentioned Hasbro, emphasized the importance of maintaining economic engagement with China – and especially, with its most market-oriented provinces – portraying it as essential for both the welfare of Chinese workers and the economic and social development of the southern coastal region. "Sending them back to farms is not human rights," argued Hassenfeld.[776]

The advocacy efforts of American toy manufacturers to highlight the benefits of toy production for both American consumers and Chinese workers inadvertently led to the mobilization of labor unions and human rights organizations, culminating in a coordinated campaign for a boycott of Chinese-made toys during the holiday season. This *Toycott* movement was a direct response to claims by toy manufacturers that their investments in China were positively impacting the welfare of Chinese laborers. However, the campaign unveiled the alarming reality that a significant proportion of toys available in the U.S. market were produced under conditions of forced labor and child labor in China, thereby framing the boycott as a necessary measure for the United States to confront its complicity in ongoing human rights abuses. The *Toycott* stands as a noteworthy early example of cross-sector collaboration addressing issues related to China, uniting labor unions, consumer advocacy groups, human rights organizations, and student associations. Initiated in 1989 by Frontlash, a student-led nonprofit organization affiliated with AFL-CIO, the campaign leveraged the organization's historical activism. Founded in 1968 to combat political apathy and promote democratic engagement among youth, Frontlash initially focused on voter education and registration. Over time, it broadened its scope to include international issues, such as fair labor practices, child labor, and workers' rights. By the 1980s and 1990s, Frontlash was actively engaged in

[776] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Finance, *Extending Most Favored Nation Status for China Hearing before the Committee on Finance*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, June 20, 1990, p.20.

organizing boycotts and educational initiatives, mobilizing support from college campuses across the United States to advance its agenda.[777]

At the time of the Tiananmen crackdown, Cheryl Graeve was in her early twenties. A friend who shared her active involvement in student politics introduced her to the local Frontlash chapter in Minnesota, where she grew up. Later, she relocated to Washington, D.C., when Frontlash established its national office. Graeve would eventually end up being appointed Executive Director in 1992. At a conference on workers' rights organized by the AFL-CIO in the fall of 1989, Cheryl Graeve attended a panel led by the Asian-American Free Labor Institute (AAFLI), a division of the labor union focused on supporting labor movements and advocating for workers' rights in Asia. It was here that Graeve first became aware of child labor practices in China and the likeliness of the growing presence of Chinese-manufactured goods in the American market. Among these goods, toys emerged as a particularly troubling category, as it became clear that American children were likely playing with toys produced by their peers in China, often under exploitative conditions. Reflecting on this experience three decades later, Graeve recalled her shock: "I was astonished. As a young woman, I had no idea. It was then that I decided we needed to take action."[778]

She and her fellow Frontlash activists were acutely aware that the Friday following Thanksgiving, one of the busiest shopping days of the year in the United States due to widespread sales, presented a critical opportunity to engage with American families purchasing gifts for the upcoming Christmas season. Leveraging this occasion, Frontlash strategically targeted shopping malls and toy stores to inform consumers about child labor practices in China and to urge them to avoid purchasing toys manufactured in the country. The 1989 *Toycott* campaign was significantly influenced by investigation published by *Business Week* and *Child Workers in Asia*, a Bangkok publication, that revealed widespread child labor in China.[779] The report revealed that "despite China's ban on children working before age 17, and other countries' paper regulations prohibiting child labor, more than 200 million children as young as 10 years old can be found working […] 14-hour days, seven days a week, to fill the orders

[777] "Frontlash was founded in 1968 "to combat the political apathy of the 60s and to direct the restless energy of young people towards the improvement and strengthening of the democratic system." In order to reach this goal, Frontlash aimed "to develop comprehensive voter education and voter registration projects for those traditionally underrepresented in government, and to develop ongoing programs of cooperation with labor movement." "Frontlash, Inc.," Frontlash Records, The University of Maryland Hornbake Library.
[778] This section is based on an interview with Cheryl Graeve, Frontlash Executive Director from 1992 to 1996 on May 10, 2024.
[779] Luisa Tam, "Turtles Hit Back at Toy Boycott," *South China Morning Post*, November 28, 1991.

of U.S. companies for Mickey Mouse, Ghostbusters and other toys."[780] This investigation provided initial evidence that would later be substantiated by testimonies from Harry Wu and Chinese individuals who had escaped the country and recounted their experiences in labor camps. The *Toycott* campaign started initially with a modest territorial reach, beginning with leafleting efforts at toy stores in a limited number of locations. However, by 1990, it had expanded to approximately thirty sites across sixteen states. By 1991, the campaign had grown into a nationwide movement, with activities spreading from San Francisco to New York, from Fort Collins, Colorado to South Bend, Indiana.

The *Toycott* campaign garnered support from human rights advocates, Chinese dissidents, and consumer advocacy organizations. With the assistance of the AFL-CIO, the campaign developed into a more organized, structured, and strategically planned effort. Cheryl Graeve, reflecting on the formative period of the campaign, described the experience as both exhilarating and occasionally marked by a certain degree of naiveté. She recalled a particular incident when she and several Frontlash members traveled to Florida to attend the annual convention of the above-mentioned Toy Manufacturers of America, a leading trade association representing numerous companies across the youth entertainment industry, including manufacturers, retailers, and licensors. The convention attracted prominent figures, including the future Vice President, Dick Cheney. Gaining entry to the luxurious West Palm Beach hotel hosting the event, they discreetly distributed flyers advocating for their campaign throughout the venue before the lunch hour, ensuring that each seat was equipped with one to maximize visibility. Their efforts were soon detected by hotel staff, and they faced the imminent risk of arrest. Although being arrested might have attracted additional media attention to their cause, the group was reluctant to confront the legal consequences of such actions and ultimately chose to flee the scene.[781]

Over time, their commitment evolved into a more systematically organized and strategically nuanced initiative, bolstered by increasingly comprehensive information on China's prison and child labor practices, which became central to the *Toycott* campaign. One of the key strategies employed by Frontlash involved targeting both the Toy Manufacturers of America and Toys "R" Us, a major toy retailer in the United States. By acquiring shares in these companies, Frontlash representatives secured the ability to participate in shareholder

[780] Candice Johnson, "Children are the Victims of Foreign Toymakers," *AFL-CIO News*, November 26, 1990.
[781] Ibid. Interview with Cheryl Graeve, May 2024.

meetings, where they advocated for corporate policies designed to prevent suppliers from engaging in child and forced labor practices in China. Following a news conference organized by Frontlash at the National Press Club in Washington D.C., which garnered favorable media coverage, the leadership of the Toy Manufacturers of America and Toys "R" Us eventually consented to a meeting with Frontlash representatives. A delegation of the Tibetan Rights Campaign (TRC), actively sharing Frontlash's effort, was also present at this meeting. One delegate provided testimony about the dire situation in Tibet and the severe working conditions endured by Tibetans. This account appeared to resonate with the head of Toys "R" Us, who shared his daughter's concerns regarding child labor and expressed the difficulties of addressing the situation in China and identifying actionable steps that American industries could take to ameliorate conditions. Reflecting on the interaction, Graeve noted, "We touched his human cords." Despite the emotional impact of the testimony, no formal agreements were reached during the meeting.[782]

The TRC was among the groups significantly engaged in Frontlash's Toycott campaign, as it alleged that Tibetan political prisoners were subjected to forced labor in Chinese labor camps producing goods intended for the American market. Dan Hodel of the TRC reported on the severe conditions within these camps, describing them as the "worst concentration camps in world history." He contended that, at that time, approximately twenty million prisoners in China were coerced into laboring for so-called manufacturing companies within these facilities, "the worst concentration camps in world history."[783] In recounting the collaboration with Tibetan activists during the *Toycott* campaign, Cheryl Graeve expressed her surprise upon receiving a letter from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He lauded Frontlash's efforts to bring attention to the human rights conditions in China, with a particular focus on Tibet. He stated, "As a leader of the Tibetan people, my primary concern is to pursue all effective means to alleviate them from Chinese occupation and restore their freedom." In his message to the *Toycott* organizers, the Dalai Lama reiterated his unwavering commitment to nonviolence and advocated for a rational and peaceful approach to achieving change. He further noted that "The Chinese respond to firm stances and are sensitive to economic pressure." In light of this, he conveyed his support for the *Toycott* campaign, expressing hope that it would contribute to the cause of human rights throughout China. "I am pleased to endorse the *Toycott* campaign to

[782] Ibid. Interview with Cheryl Graeve, May 2024.
[783] Tom Brown, "'Toycott' on To Protest Prison Factories in China," *The Seattle Times*, December 18, 1990.

boycott toys made in China, with the hope that the winds of peace and freedom will permeate not only through Tibet but also throughout China as a whole," he wrote.[784]

As the *Toycott* movement gained momentum and expanded across various U.S. cities, it posed a significant challenge not only to American entrepreneurs but also to Hong Kong manufacturers, many of whom had shifted their toy production facilities to Shenzhen, China. By the early 1990s, China's toy manufacturing sector had grown into a vast enterprise, employing approximately 750,000 workers in 3,000 factories. This sector was central to U.S.-China trade relations, with 40 percent of all toys sold in the U.S. being produced in China, predominantly facilitated through Hong Kong intermediaries. In fact, 95 percent of all toys exported from Hong Kong were actually manufactured in China. By the start of the 1990s, Hong Kong toy manufacturers had invested approximately $1.3 billion in China's toy production industry. This industry was critical to Hong Kong's economy, with toys constituting 17 percent of the city's total exports. Re-exports of Chinese-manufactured toys through Hong Kong reached $1.7 billion from January to September 1991.[785] These figures proved the growing deep economic interdependence between Hong Kong, China, and the U.S., particularly in the toy sector and that the human rights and labor organizations' allegations had the potential to put at risk now seriously. Interviewed by the *South China Morning News*, Warren Kwok Chung-wee, director of the Federation of Hong Kong Industries, acknowledged the possibility that some products might have been manufactured through forced labor. However, he emphasized that such practices could occur without the knowledge or consent of Hong Kong manufacturers who subcontracted work to mainland entities. Kwok noted, "In some cases where local manufacturers are involved in joint ventures with state-owned enterprises or have subcontracted some work to local factories, we can never be sure. There might be some unscrupulous individuals managing these facilities who decide to cut costs by resorting to forced labor, but without informing their Hong Kong partners about it."[786]

"Manufacturers fear that it could distort perceptions, reinforce prejudices, and tarnish the image of China-made toys in the all-important U.S. Christmas market," reported *The Los*

[784] Colleen M. O'Neill, "Another Tragic Fire Reinforces Toycott Campaign," *AFL-CIO News*, November 29, 1993.
[785] These figures are mentioned in Michael Browning, "Chinese Angered by Toy Boycott Threat," *Boston Globe*, November 29, 1991. The same date is also mentioned in Luisa Tam, "Toy-Makers Angry at U.S. Boycott Proposal," *South China Morning Post*, November 27, 1991.
[786] Luisa Tam, "Toy-Makers Angry at U.S. Boycott Proposal," *South China Morning Post*, November 27, 1991.

Angeles Times.[787] This likely scenario was said to prompt considerations among Hong Kong firms of shifting production to alternative countries like Thailand and Indonesia. Frontlash's effort gained further urgency, particularly following reports of an incident at the Zhili Handicrafts factory, a joint Chinese-Hong Kong venture in southern China an hour from Shenzhen, where eighty-one workers – "mostly young women from distant provinces" – producing toys for the European and American markets perished in a fire outbreak. "The Chinese factory was a death trap," argued Lane Kirkland, President of the AFL-CIO. "Fire escapes, fire alarms, sprinklers, safety systems and the other bare minimums of decent protection were missing."[788] According to *The Guardian*, "the blocked windows contributed to the high death toll. Many suffocated in the poisonous fumes. Even the doors were locked, to keep them at their work." The UK newspaper gave notice that the news of the fire prompted calls for a *Toycott* in Europe, led by the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Lather Workers' Federation, as well as in New Zealand by a group called Trade Aid.[789]

Through the *Toycott* campaign, Frontlash, in collaboration with the AFL-CIO, actively contributed to the debate surrounding the renewal of MFN status for China. They argued that Administration had failed to adequately address the issue of forced and child labor in China, particularly in the context of U.S.-China trade relations. The petition circulated among *Toycott* supporters was explicit in its criticism: "Despite ongoing human rights atrocities, the People's Republic of China continues to enjoy Most Favored Nation status. We, the undersigned, pledge not to purchase toys made in China. We want to highlight our refusal to support the production of children's toys by a government that operates millions in forced labor camps, exploits children for labor, persecutes Tibetans, Christians, and pro-democracy dissidents, executes workers attempting to organize independent unions, and engages in blatant nuclear proliferation."[790] The petition and broader campaign sought to draw attention to China's failure to enforce its own labor laws. Despite the 1991 "Law of Protection of Minors," which prohibited the employment of children under 16 and restricted "extra-strenuous, poisonous, injurious or dangerous work" for those aged 16-18, reports indicated widespread non-compliance, especially in rural areas.[791] In these regions, economic pressures led many families to withdraw their children from school and put them to work before they reached adulthood.

[787] Ibid. Quinn, *The Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1991.
[788] Ibid. O'Neill, *AFL-CIO News*, November 29, 1993.
[789] Simon Long, "'Toycott' Urged after Chinese Factory Fire: Workers are Paying a High Price for an Economic Miracle," *The Guardian*, December 24, 1993.
[790] -, "Toycott Drive Revives Warning on China Labor," *AFL-CIO News*, November 23, 1992.
[791] Ibid. *Boston Globe*, November 29, 1991.

Although official statistics provided by the *China Daily* suggested that 97.88% of children aged 7-11 were enrolled in school, a more troubling reality emerged: a quarter of China's counties still lacked universal primary education, and about four million children were dropping out of school annually, most of them girls.[792] Bill Blaauw, a member of the Toy Council and the Trade Development Council's Toy Advisory Committee, bluntly suggested that it was plausible for young children in rural areas to be involved in assembling or packaging toys as a means of supplementing family income. But he also argued against penalizing the entire industry for, in its own words, "a few bad eggs."[793]

Assessing the broader impact of the *Toycott* campaign on U.S.-China trade relations and the toy industry's business interests involves navigating a complex set of dynamics. The response of American toy manufacturers combined elements of economic defensiveness and rhetorical minimization, reflecting their dual concerns over the campaign's immediate effects and its long-term influence on public opinion. On one front, toy manufacturers employed a strategy of victimization, emphasizing the potential harm that severing business ties with China would cause to American consumers, particularly children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. In testimony before the House Subcommittee on Trade in the summer of 1990, Stephen Miller, president of the Toy Manufacturers of America, highlighted the detrimental impact that restricting trade with China would have on low-income families and the toy market, especially during the Christmas season when two-thirds of annual toy sales typically occurred. Miller stressed, "the real losers will be children, especially those who are least able to afford to spend money on such items." He suggested that halting trade with China would disrupt the production cycle for Christmas, creating economic hardships for American families and toy companies alike. Echoing this concern, a representative from Tonka pointed out that "Christmas of 1990, for which most of the toy production is yet to be done, would be totally disrupted," stressing the industry's reliance on Chinese manufacturing during critical retail periods. A representative from the American Association of Exporters and Importers concluded during a congressional hearing that "Christmas 1990 would not be a merry one."[794] However, as the *Toycott* gained visibility, toy manufacturers also sought to diminish its relevance, framing it as an insignificant and isolated movement, a "non-event." Jodi Levin, Communications Director for the Toy Manufacturers of America, downplayed the campaign's

[792] Chris Yeung, "Child Labour Admitted by Education Official," *South China Morning Post*, December 07, 1991.
[793] Luisa Tam, "Toy-Makers Angry at U.S. Boycott Proposal," *South China Morning Post*, November 27, 1991.
[794] Ibid. *Hearing before the Committee on Ways and Means*, June 19 and 21, 1990, p.110.

impact, stating in December 1991 that "nothing has happened, nobody even cares." Levin argued that the boycott had failed to generate substantial attention or consumer backlash, describing the industry's reaction as minimal. She also sought to defend the ethical practices of American toy manufacturers, claiming that they were being unfairly portrayed as exploitative. Levin contended that the industry, composed largely of family-oriented individuals, had no interest in supporting unethical labor practices in China, though she acknowledged that improvements in Chinese labor standards were necessary.[795] The industry's confidence was seemingly validated by the reported increase in Christmas sales for major retailers such as Toys 'R' Us, which saw a 10% rise in December 1990 compared to the previous year. Michael Goldstein, a spokesperson for the company, remarked that the sales figures "speak for themselves," suggesting that the *Toycott* had little to no adverse effect on consumer behavior during the holiday season.[796]

The *Toycott* campaign's organizers articulated diverse interpretations regarding its effectiveness. The National Consumers League in Washington recognized that while quantifying the precise influence of the campaign on consumer behavior proved challenging, a growing number of consumers were increasingly interested in ethical purchasing practices.[797] Linda Golodner, the League's Executive Director, asserted that the campaign's primary message was that "toys for little children should not be made by children."[798] Similarly, the pro-democracy group China Fund expressed contentment with the campaign's ability to project the potential for an American consumer boycott of toys manufactured in China. Although precise data concerning the campaign's impact were not available, the organization believed that the initiative had struck a chord with the American public.[799] By mobilizing collective action aimed at disrupting the peak selling season, these organizations sought to convey a resolute message to the Chinese government. They aimed to emphasize a more robust connection between trade and human rights than that exhibited by the Administration, advocating for conditions to be placed on bilateral trade. AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland highlighted this perspective, asserting that "when governments will not act, people must." He noted that "history teaches that tyrants change their ways only through force, such as sanctions and boycotts," positioning the *Toycott* as a mechanism for U.S. citizens to become advocates

[795] Jon Marsh,"Mixed Views Over Effect of 'Toycott'," *South China Morning Post*, December 30, 1991.
[796] Jon Marsh, "Toycott Fails to Hit US Giant," *South China Sunday Morning Post*, January 19, 1992.
[797] Ibid. *South China Morning Post*, December 30, 1991.
[798] -, "Activists Plan Boycott of Toys Made by Chinese Child Laborers," *Chicago Tribune*, November 28, 1991.
[799] Ibid. *South China Morning Post*, December 30, 1991.

for freedom and prevent tragedies associated with factory deaths.[800] In Congress, Frontlash's efforts received commendation from Sam Gejdenson (D-CT), Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade. He emphasized that if Customs and the State Department failed to implement decisive measures against forced labor in Chinese prisons, American consumers would need to "fill the gap." Gejdenson viewed the *Toycott* campaign as a positive development for political prisoners compelled to work in Chinese factories. He expressed optimism that a substantial reduction in exports from China could lead to improved conditions for Chinese prisoners of conscience.[801]



Figure 33. Harry Wu holding a made-in-China toy product at a conference held by the Alliance 90/The Greens in Bonn, Germany, November 28, 1995.
Photo credit: Gero Breloer/picture alliance via Getty Images.

For several years, Frontlash, in conjunction with a coalition of organizations, endeavored to inform American consumers about the potential reality that toys purchased in local stores – including well-known brands such as Barbie, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and Mickey Mouse and Disney characters – were produced by Chinese children. The *Toycott*

[800] Ibid. O'Neill, *AFL-CIO News*, November 29, 1993.
[801] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, September 23 and December 5, 1991, p.132.

initiative specifically targeted major toy companies, including Mattel, Hasbro, and Coleco, as well as retailers like Toys 'R' Us and McDonald's, which featured made-in-China toys in their "Happy Meals." Each year, the coalition disseminated lists of alternative gift recommendations, promoting products that were not manufactured under dubious conditions in China. Cheryl Graeve recalled her experience overhearing discussions about the boycott in a store shortly after Thanksgiving – *"We should not buy toys made in China,"* she heard – expressing pride in the increasing consumer awareness surrounding these issues.[802] In terms of scholarly significance, the *Toycott* campaign serves as a valuable case study that illustrates how events in China reverberated within American society. It exemplifies the collaboration of diverse organizations united in their condemnation of unethical labor practices in China, presenting a considerable challenge to the U.S. Administration's policy stance towards Beijing – an area that remains under-explored in historical scholarship. Notably, Harry Wu emerged as a prominent advocate for the *Toycott*; during a sit-in at Toys 'R' Us in San Francisco, he delivered a poignant message to the store manager, declaring, "We will not give our children toys produced by a government that massacres its own children and rejects human rights." Among the limited body of research on the *Toycott* campaign, Natalie Beinisch, in her doctoral dissertation on transnational labor regulation, argued that the numerous instances highlighted during the campaign rendered it complex and ultimately ineffective. She concluded that "although significant labor abuses were taking place in Chinese toy factories, the organizers of the *Toycott* failed to identify them, seeking instead to align with human rights groups which had competing goals. The result was that the *Toycott* was received cynically by the media and business and did not lead to any types of regulatory changes."[803] When asked for her thoughts on this critical assessment of Frontlash's efforts to boycott toys made in China, Cheryl Graeve responded by asserting that "the *Toycott* initiative is a powerful story of when ideas resonate with young people, and they are allowed to bloom, fundamentally moving things along."[804]

[802] Ibid. Interview with Cheryl Graeve, May 2024.
[803] At the time being, it does not exist any work, either book or article, discussing the "toycott" campaign, its characteristic and relevance. The boycott of China-made toys is only briefly discussed in Natalie Beinisch's doctoral thesis titled *Making It Work: The Development and Evolution of Transnational Labour Regulation*, Department of Government of the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, August 2017. In her work, Beinish argued that "The campaign was opportunistic and based on limited circumstantial evidence, so businesses were easily able to dismiss it" (p.41). She also argues that the claim according to which "China used prison labour to manufacture goods for export […] was extrapolated largely from anecdotal evidence. Neither the American Federation of Labor Organizations nor its partners had undertaken any investigations to corroborate their assertions" (p.42).
[804] Ibid. Interview with Cheryl Graeve, May 2024.

UNION YES ☑ Holiday Gifts

(List may not be complete. Additional sporting goods listed in the AFL-CIO News Aug. 3, and fragrances, May 11.)

UNION	COMPANY	ITEM
Allied Industrial Workers	Today's Kid *(Division of Spang Industries)*	Large toys: workbench, toy trucks, basketball hoop, school desk, picnic benches
	Power Wheels	Motorized riding cars
Electronic Workers	Porta Court	Basketball backboard
Flint Glass Workers	Corning Inc., Lenox Crystal Inc.	Ornaments
Leather Goods, Plastics and Novelty Workers	St. Thomas Leather	Wallets
Machinists	Product Miniature Co., Inc.	Plastic model cars, trucks
	Columbia Manufacturing Co., Inc.	Bicycles
Novelty and Production Workers	Carl Goldberg	Model airplanes, boats
	Craft House	Plastic gumball banks
Paper-workers	Cleo Inc. of Gibson Greetings	Wrapping paper, tags, seals, ribbons, bags with handles, cards
	Sangamon, Crystal Tissue	Wrapping paper
Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union	Milton Bradley	Games (Shark Attack, Taboo, Mr. Bucket, Operation, Simon, Monopoly, Scrabble, Game of Life, Battleship, Electronic Battleship, Candyland, Chutes & Ladders, Pass the Pig, Lite Brite, others); assorted childrens' and adult puzzles
Rubber Workers	Blazon Flexible Flyer	Sleds, wagons, hobby horses, wheelbarrows, table and chair sets
	Hedstrom Corp.	Hoppity ball, toy balls and bats, punchball balloons
	Mattel, Inc.	Toys, games
Steel-workers	Huffy Corp.	Bicycles
	Strydel, Inc. (Subsidiary of Ohio Arts Co.)	Twirl-A-Paint; Etch-A-Sketch; Ghost Writer; Michael Jordan Jr. Jammer; Frustration; Wall Ball; Tot Traps drum set; Pfaltzgraff cook and serve set; Pfaltzgraff deluxe play set assortment; Pfaltzgraff tea set assortment
Teamsters	Ace Novelty Co.	Plush animals, toys, novelties
	American Greetings Corp.	Greeting cards, wrapping paper
	Arrow Games	Games
	Baronet Accessories Corp.	Leather billfolds, other leather goods
	Brogan, Inc.; Criterion Bead &Novelty Corp.	Jewelry
	Candle Corp. of America	Christmas candles, candle lamps
	Century Products	Infants' toys, accessories
	Chanel, Inc.	Fragrances, cosmetics
	Cosmair Canada, Inc.; Del Laboratories; Houbigant, Inc.; Shulton, Inc.	Perfumes, colognes
	Lander Co. Canada Ltd., Brucci Ltd.	Cosmetics, toiletries
	Rapid Mounting and Finishing Co. *(CADACO Division)*	Games, educational products
	Replogle Globes, Inc.	Geographical Globes
	Tyco Industries, Inc.; Tara Toy Corp.	Toys
UAW	Fisher Price	Sandbox, playhouse
	Ertl	Toy tractors, trucks and cars, toy record players, Matchbox cars
	Lionel	Model trains
	Radio Flyer	Children's wagons
	Testor Corp.	Hobby kits, supplies
	Western Publishing	Golden books, activity boxes, games, puzzles
	Shaeffer Pens	Fountain, ballpoint pens
United Textile Workers	Scooba Mfg.	Gloves
	Wigwam Mills	Gloves, scarves, socks
	Dan Dee Belt & Bag Co.	Belts, handbags



Bill Burke/Page One Photography

AFL-CIO Frontlash Director Cheryl Graeve and other Toycott supporters talk to customers and the media in front of the Toys R Us in Wheaton, Md., about human and workers rights violations by Chinese toymakers. At left is a list of some political prisoners held in China.



AFL-CIO photo

Toycotters gather in front of a Toys 'R' Us in Miami to distribute leaflets and urge holiday shoppers to reject toys made in China because of that country's worker and human rights abuses. Toycott activities extended across the country during the holiday season, including events Dec. 10 to mark International Human Rights Day.



Bill Burke/Page One Photography

Shoppers get an education in how child labor in China is used to manufacture toys as Frontlash and its consumer allies leaflet outside a store in Tyson's Corner, Va., as part of the Toycott campaign. **See story, Page 2.**

Figure 34, 35, 36, and 37.
Credit: AFL-CIO NEWS MAGAZINE:
December 16, 1991, vol.36, no.26.
December 13, 1993, vol.38, no.26.
January 3, 1994, vol.39, no.1.

Chapter 4

Entangled in Interdependency

The Imperatives of Business and Trade in the Post-Cold War Sino-U.S. Relationship

4.1 *Business as Usual*? The Rise of China as an Economic Powerhouse……...298
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4.1 *Business as Usual*? The Rise of China as an Economic Powerhouse

The July-August 1989 issue of *The China Business Review* (CBR) featured the headline "WHAT NEXT?" on its cover, reflecting the concerns and challenges facing the U.S. business community – with substantial economic interests and investments in China – in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Published by the U.S.-China Business Council – an influential organization founded in 1973 with the support of the Department of Commerce dedicated to providing market analysis, investment guidance, and advocacy on U.S.-China trade relations – the issue opened with the acknowledgment, "this is not the issue we were planning to publish."[805] The cover displayed a photo of Tiananmen Square shrouded in somber tones, evoking the impression of a dense, sinister cloud enveloping the scene. The composition was punctuated by the vivid red of the PRC official flag, which emerged as the sole bright element, contrasting starkly against the austere and somber setting. Five years later, the *Review* front page again featured Beijing's central square, but this time presented through a stylized illustration that reimagined Tiananmen as a leisure park set beyond the walls of the gateway to the Forbidden City, with Mao's portrait still prominently displayed. The cover, titled "Entertaining China," symbolized a significant shift in narrative – from the profound uncertainty that marked China's darkest hours in 1989, which had unsettled the American business community's engagement with the PRC, to a more optimistic outlook. This shift reflected the anticipated economic rise of China, symbolized by the promise of the emergence

[805] U.S.-China Business Council Staff, "Special Report: How Business is Reacting to the Crisis," *The China Business Review*, July-August 1989, pp.14-16.

of a growing middle class, marked by increasing consumer spending, greater domestic mobility, expanded participation in leisure activities, and heightened exposure to global events and political developments.[806]

The following chapter traces the trajectory that led the United States to progressively frame its relationship with China primarily in economic terms, as both nations became increasingly entangled in commercial, economic, and financial interdependence. It explores the role of the American business community in fostering a robust and influential lobbying presence, which played a pivotal role in reshaping the U.S. domestic discourse on China. This shift in perception positioned China as an indispensable – quasi vital – and unavoidable partner in the global market rather than a geopolitical and moral challenge. Within this framework, the chapter examines how the American business community reshaped the discourse on trade policy, promoting economic engagement as a dual strategy: not only to further commercial interests but also to foster broader socio-economic and political reforms. This approach positioned trade as a constructive mechanism for change, contrasting with calls to use it as a punitive tool to confront the authoritarian practices of the Chinese government. This perspective broadened the scope of the American discourse on China, shifting the focus beyond political rights to include a wider range of considerations related to social and economic transformation. This chapter further explores U.S. concerns over Hong Kong's political status and the potential risks to its autonomy in the lead-up to the territory's reversion to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. As a critical hub for American economic transactions with China, Hong Kong's stability and autonomy held strategic significance, influencing the formulation of U.S. policies toward the region. Additionally, the chapter examines how these evolving perspectives, combined with the deepening economic interdependence between the U.S. and China, influenced President Bill Clinton's 1994 decision to separate commercial interests from human rights considerations. This shift in policy, which occurred less than a year after the new presidency's inauguration, represented a significant departure from his campaign commitments to adopt a more assertive stance on human rights in U.S.-China relations than Bush's. By situating these developments within the broader context of the dissertation, the chapter stresses the increasing salience of economic factors in shaping America's new engagement policy toward China in the early 1990s, a dynamic that would continue to shape the bilateral relationship for decades to come.

[806] Lisa Atkinson, "Fun for the '90s. With Cash in Their Pockets and a Shortened Work Week, Chinese are Looking for the News Ways to Play," *The China Business Review*, September-October 1994, pp.16-22.

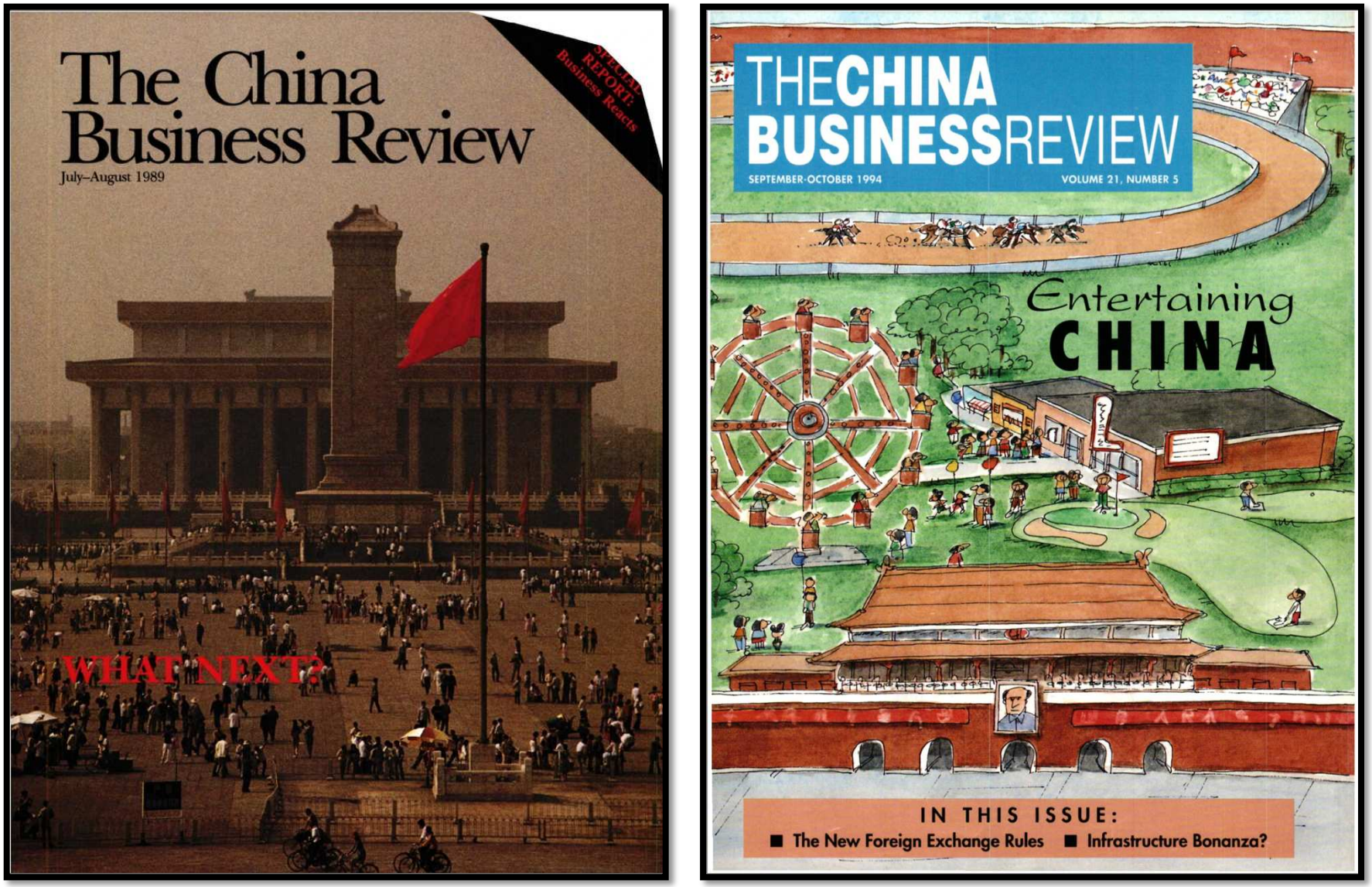

Figure 38 and 39. CBR Covers. Images credit: The China Business Review July-August 1989 and September-October 1994 Covers.

The July-August and September-October 1989 issues of *The China Business Review* addressed the significant uncertainties confronting the American business community in the aftermath of the crackdown. This period of instability had profoundly affected the U.S.-China Business Council, which faced financial difficulties as its membership temporarily declined to a low of 159 companies – they would eventually climb back to 230 members by 1994. Featuring several detailed reports and commentaries, the two issues analyzed the crisis' broader implications and offered strategic recommendations for U.S. companies operating in, or considering engagement with, China. In his opening remarks, Council President Roger W. Sullivan acknowledged the rapidly changing landscape, stating, "we are seeing the clock turned back. The only question is how far back and for how long."[807] Sullivan, who was a former senior diplomat with extensive experience in East Asia, conceded that the prevailing consensus among analysts regarding the irreversibility of China's reform agenda had been overly optimistic, if not fundamentally flawed. Therefore, in the short term, the *Guide to China's Current Business Environment* featured on the *Review* anticipated a deterioration of the investment climate in China. It advised American firms to prepare for intensified bureaucratic complexities and more protracted negotiation processes, as local entrepreneurs and officials were expected to adopt a more cautious approach due to concerns over increased governmental scrutiny.

The guide also highlighted the likelihood of delays in decision-making, as a growing number of officials became involved in procedural reviews and approvals. Picturing the tightening political atmosphere, it observed, "the current campaign to strengthen the role of politics and ideology is much stronger than many foreigners realize."[808] Chinese officials were said to be inclined to resist concessions on significant issues in negotiations and the Council recommended that companies prioritized addressing unresolved operational challenges that could be feasibly managed if met with sufficient effort by Chinese authorities. It noted that, "any grand promises made now may not be kept later." The report also forecasted increased difficulties in recruiting local employees, as individuals might fear that association with foreign enterprises could render them vulnerable to government targeting. Additionally, the political environment was deemed increasingly unconducive to progress in enhancing transparency regarding the formulation and implementation of policies, laws, and regulations – an area

[807] Roger W. Sullivan, "A Government in Transition," *The China Business Review*, July-August 1989, p.9.
[808] John Frisbie and Richard Brecher, "What to Watch For. A Guide to China's Current Business Environment," *The China Business Review*, September-October 1989, pp.10-11.

where gradual advancements had been observed in preceding years but that the Tiananmen aftermath had blurred. “The tension and mistrust that resulted from seemingly arbitrary ruled could further deteriorate the business environment,” concluded the report.[809]

In the longer term, the *Review* anticipated a period of political transition characterized by instability and uncertainty. Despite this, it argued that market forces were likely to persist, ultimately proving resilient even under adverse political conditions. The Council president contended that “the central government might assert its intent to recentralize and bring the cities and provinces of South China under control, but it will not be able to follow through on the rhetoric.” While the leadership’s struggles and efforts to suppress dissent could result in periodic disruptions and symbolic reprisals, local economic activity was expected to continue largely unabated.[810] Therefore, amidst the formal suspension of high-level government contacts between Washington and Beijing, the Council reiterated the critical role of the American business community in sustaining U.S.-China relations. Private sector channels of communication with Chinese officials had the potential of becoming increasingly significant, providing a forum for frank discussions on issues such as investment policies, intellectual property protection, and contract enforcement. These dialogues were notably free from the politicization that typically surrounded contentious issues between the two nations such as Taiwan or Tibet. Recognizing the importance of these interactions, the Council committed to preserving and eventually expanding these channels as circumstances allowed. In its strategic guidance, the *Review* advocated for caution rather than precipitous withdrawal. Sullivan advised companies to reassess their strategies in light of the shifting dynamics of the Chinese market. For firms with modest investments and long-term objectives, the recommendation was to “hunker down and wait for better days.” Businesses positioned to profit under pre-reform conditions were encouraged to proceed carefully. However, firms whose plans depended on recent liberalization trends and expectations of continued reform were urged to reevaluate their prospects, given that meaningful improvements were unlikely in the near future. As President Sullivan cautioned, “breaking new ground is going to be much more difficult than before.”[811]

The American business community observed that the challenges arising from the Tiananmen crackdown were not confined to China but extended to the United States, where Washington struggled with formulating a coherent and strategic approach to its China policy.

[809] Ibid. Frisbie and Brecher, *The China Business Review*, September-October 1989, pp.10-11.
[810] Ibid. Sullivan, *The China Business Review*, July-August 1989, p.9.
[811] Ibid. Sullivan, *The China Business Review*, July-August 1989, p.11.

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, in parallel to the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S.-China relations appeared to hold reduced geopolitical significance. Additionally, the political and ethical implications of the June Fourth events introduced significant challenges, further complicating the bilateral relationship. This environment gave rise to a deeply polarized policy debate in Washington, particularly regarding the renewal, conditionality, or revocation of China's MFN trade status – a contentious issue in which the U.S.-China Business Council, as well as other major business lobby groups, eventually played an active and influential role. Therefore, following the Tiananmen crackdown, the American business community adopted a multifaceted strategy to navigate the evolving dynamics of U.S.-China relations. The first aspect of this strategy unfolded in Washington, where trade organizations positioned themselves as influential lobbyists. These groups sought to counter the arguments of those advocating for a termination of commercial ties with the Chinese government. Concurrently, these organizations aligned with the Bush Administration's pragmatic approach to China policy and later worked to moderate the Clinton Administration's initially stringent posture toward Beijing. The second dimension of this strategy centered on sustaining constructive engagement with China. The business community actively pursued collaborative opportunities with Chinese officials, framing the gradual resumption of bilateral cooperation between key U.S. and Chinese government agencies as a positive development. This approach reflected a broader belief in the potential for engagement to foster mutual understanding and reform over time. The third, and arguably most significant, element of the strategy involved recognizing the critical role of people-to-people exchanges and embracing the deepening interdependence between the U.S. and China. This interdependency, which had begun to take shape during the mid-1980s, was viewed as an inexorable process with mutual benefits.

Dismissing the feasibility of a "business as usual" approach, the U.S.-China Business Council advocated instead for a strategy that recognized the transitional nature of the Chinese government. The organization characterized the regime as pursuing an unsustainable course of modernization coupled with repression, the suppression of intellectual openness, and a reassertion of Leninist economic controls. "The correct response to such a regime is to make it face the contradictions of such policy. That means continuing the kinds of ties that will inspire reform and greater pluralism: trade and investment, travel, and cultural and educational exchanges," Sullivan contended. At the same time, he highlighted the importance of signaling disapproval of the regime's actions, both to maintain credibility and to support those in China advocating for reform and human dignity. This stance also implicitly aimed to address potential

challenges within Congress. Sullivan proposed a nuanced policy approach that differentiated between private and official engagements, as well as between substantive and symbolic actions. He suggested that this approach should reflect China's strategy towards the U.S.: "they want maximum official recognition and minimum private interchange. We should encourage private contact and restrain official contact." Such a strategy, Sullivan argued, would strike a critical balance: fostering long-term reform through sustained engagement while maintaining a principled stance against the regime's policies. This dual approach would preserve the credibility of U.S. foreign policy while positioning Washington to effectively engage with a potential future government in Beijing.[812]

"I think that we who live within the Beltway are inclined to assume that nothing happens unless the Government does it, that if there are no Government imposed sanctions, then business must go ahead as usual," Sullivan contended in Congress. Drawing on his tenure in roles such as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Senior Staff Member for China and Southeast Asia at the National Security Council in the 1970s and 80s, Sullivan argued that the private sector's actions in response to the Tiananmen crackdown could be more effective than formal government sanctions. Businesses and individuals had independently curtailed investments and tourism in China, driven not by governmental directives but by their assessment of an unfavorable and politically repressive environment. Testifying on Capitol Hill in the late spring of 1990, Sullivan argued: "in actual fact, over the past year we have seen that people and organizations have been quite capable of deciding that either they cannot or they will not do business with a centrally-planned, bureaucratically-controlled, anti-market, and repressive transitional regime. It wasn't the State Department's travel advisory that kept tourists from going to China, it was the fact that the tourists didn't want to go to China, and the proof of that is, the travel advisory was lifted and the foreign tourists are not returning. There are no sanctions on foreign investment in China by any country, and yet foreign investment-and it is not just American, it is Japanese, and European, and Hong Kong as well-fell 37 percent in the number of contracts and 43 percent in value in the fourth quarter of last year, and that downward trend, is continuing and will continue." The U.S.-China Business Council head framed these "private sector sanctions" as particularly effective – in his own words, "the sanctions that bite" – because they imposed economic hardship that was self-inflicted, fostering domestic criticism of the Chinese regime rather than resentment toward foreign powers. He

[812] Roger W. Sullivan, "China and America in a Post-Cold War Environment," *The China Business Review*, May-June 1990, p.16-20.

contended that declining foreign investment and tourism, reflecting broader disapproval of the political climate, put pressure on Beijing to reassess its policies to create a more attractive economic environment. According to Sullivan, this dynamic demonstrated how market forces, rather than state interventions, could exert meaningful influence on the trajectory of China's economic and political reforms.[813]

American companies operating in China were suggested to acknowledge the importance of navigating a decentralized regulatory environment where local bureaucrats – who had witnessed the significant initial impact of the mid-1980s market-oriented reforms and whose autonomy was facilitated by ambiguous legal frameworks – often exercised significant discretion in their interactions with foreign investors. Success in such a context required American businesses to operate within a framework where informal practices – the "rule of man" – often superseded formal legal mechanisms – the "rule of law" – trying to accommodate localized decision-making processes.[814] Additionally, the 1989 nationwide protests further revealed prevalent aspirations for political reform, economic modernization, and individual freedoms within China. These objectives were not limited to students but extended to workers, bureaucrats, and, potentially, elements of the military. Although the PRC government highest levels in Beijing remained resolute in their authoritarian governance, many within Chinese society quietly aligned with the demonstrators' goals, signaling potential long-term pathways for reform. Reflecting on these developments, Sullivan expressed cautious optimism, writing: "to me this is the ray of hope – that when we next go to China and meet with people there, whether in government or in enterprise, we will know that most of them, if only silently, are on the side of the demonstrators, and that they represent the future of China."[815]

Therefore, the American business lobby, through sustained efforts on multiple fronts, emerged as a critical actor in preserving U.S.-China relations amid prolonged political contention in Washington – a debate that extended beyond the Bush Administration and continued well into the early years of the Clinton presidency. By late 1994, when the second *Review* cover depicted Beijing's Tiananmen Square as a leisure park, the economic relationship between the United States and China had become deeply entrenched. This rapid deepening of

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[813] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, May 16 and 24, 1990, pp.128-129.
[814] Michael F. Roehrig, "The Right Time and Place," *The China Business Review*, September-October 1994, p.7.
[815] Ibid. Sullivan, *The China Business Review*, July-August 1989, p.11.

commercial ties highlighted the growing significance of economic interdependence in shaping Sino-American relations, revealing the inherent contradictions in the United States' role as a post-Cold War global hegemon.[816] Despite the unparalleled dominance of the United States in the early 1990s, its expanding economic engagement with China introduced structural constraints, limiting its capacity to exert unrestrained influence on the global stage. Right after the Tiananmen crackdown, Washington had retained a degree of economic leverage over Beijing, which created an opportunity to press for human rights reforms during a period of political vulnerability in China – a stance strongly supported by the Democrat-led Congress. However, this leverage began to diminish by 1992, as Deng Xiaoping consolidated his leadership and redirected China's domestic and international trajectory. This shift demonstrated the evolving complexity of U.S.-China relations, where increasing economic interdependence progressively reduced Washington's ability to pursue its ideological agenda without compromise.

How did the relations reach this point in economic terms? Following the establishment of diplomatic relations and the signing of a bilateral trade agreement in 1979, along with the extension of MFN status to China in 1980, the volume of bilateral trade between the United States and China experienced significant growth.[817] By 1994, total trade in goods had escalated from $7.7 billion in 1985 to approximately $48 billion, thereby positioning China as the sixth-largest trading partner of the United States.[818] This expansion allowed China to surpass both the United Kingdom in 1995 and Germany in 1996, trailing only Canada, Japan, and Mexico in terms of total trade volume. In the early 1990s, major U.S. exports to China included transportation equipment – particularly aircraft and components – road vehicles, computers and electric equipment, agricultural products such as fertilizers, wheat, and cotton, and chemicals. Conversely, the primary imports from China encompassed a diverse array of consumer goods, including miscellaneous manufactured items – notably toys and games (refer to Chapter Three),

[816] On the broad literature of U.S. hegemony, its limits and contradictions see among others Daniel Sargent, "Pax Americana. Sketches for an Un-diplomatic History," *Diplomatic History*, vol.42, no.3 (June 2018): pp.357-376; Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment. U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, *America Abroad: Why the Sole Superpower Should Not Pull Back from the World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[817] The structure of the analysis in this initial part of the chapter draws from the framework provided by Wayne M. Morrison in his report, *"China-U.S. Trade Issues,"* January 12, 1995, produced by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) for Congress.

[818] The year 1985 represents the first year for which trade data between the United States and China is available from the United States Census Bureau, marking the beginning of a significant era of economic engagement between the two nations. In contrast, 1994 serves as the endpoint of this research, offering a definitive framework for analyzing the initial phase of U.S.-China trade relations and their intricate intersection with human rights concerns. Online at: https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5700.html (last accessed November 2024).

clothing and footwear, textile yarn and fabrics, electrical machinery, office equipment, household items, furniture, and prefabricated buildings.[819] By 1994, China ranked as the fourth-largest source of imports for the United States while only occupying the fourteenth position as a destination for U.S. exports.

The American public became increasingly familiar with these figures, as they were routinely cited in congressional hearings and media reports by business lobbyists advocating for the continued extension of trade privileges to China. According to government reports from 1993-94, the economic interdependence between the United States and China had reached a critical threshold. A withdrawal of MFN status would likely provoke retaliatory measures from China, including the revocation of MFN treatment for U.S. exports and the imposition of additional market access restrictions. Given that no other nation was expected to revoke China's MFN status despite what had happened in June 1989, U.S. companies would face a significant competitive disadvantage, particularly those involved in nearly a thousand joint ventures in China, with over $4 billion in investments. These ventures would be subjected to higher duties on U.S.-manufactured components incorporated into their exports, which would be subject to non-MFN duty rates. Additionally, U.S. consumers and retailers would encounter substantial increases in import duties on Chinese goods, and thousands of American jobs in manufacturing, transportation, and sales would be jeopardized due to the higher costs associated with the loss of MFN treatment.[820]

However, this commercial relationship was already characterized by distortions and contradictions, which many in Washington pointed to as compelling reasons for extending sanctions against Beijing. Despite hopes and assurances that expanding trade relations would yield mutual benefits, the United States found itself grappling with a growing trade deficit with China. Advocates of a more assertive response to the Tiananmen crackdown frequently pointed to this widening imbalance as a pressing concern. In addition to economic asymmetry, they raised alarms over China's systematic abuse of American patents and intellectual property, discriminatory trade practices against U.S. imports, and the use of prison labor to produce goods for export. They argued that while China had reaped substantial benefits from the

[819] Robert E. Scott, "U.S.-China Trade, 1989-2003. Impact on Jobs and Industries, Nationally and State-by-State. A Research Report Prepared for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission," Economic Policy Institute Working Paper #270, January 2005, online at https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/us-china%20trade%201989-2003.pdf (last accessed December 2024).
[820] "MFN Trade Status," 1993, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, National Security Council – Office of Press and Communications, China.

bilateral relationship, the United States struggled to exert meaningful influence. This perceived imbalance, they warned, was already having negative repercussions on key domestic sectors, foreshadowing arguments that would later fuel opposition to globalization.[821] In June 1991, Senator Donald Riegle (R-MI) articulated these concerns in Congress, stating, "it is very disturbing to me, because that trade deficit creates jobs for them, and it costs us jobs here." As chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, he stressed the tangible impact of trade imbalances, noting, "in my state of Michigan, we have got 48,000 unemployed workers that will lose their extended unemployment benefits this week." He went on to criticize the Bush Administration's economic priorities, "what I am troubled about is the administration is in here every week with an economic plan for some other country." Referring specifically to U.S. trade relations with China, Riegle expressed frustration, "you are in here in a situation where you have got a $15 billion trade deficit asking to make it easier for China to ship things in here and to take more jobs out of this country and, in effect, take them to China. I just do not understand it. I have great respect for the Chinese people. I have very little respect for the government."[822]

This increasing – and, according to many, alarming – trade deficit was framed as indicative of an unbalanced dynamic, where China profited extensively at the expense of U.S. interests. Between 1985 and 1994, U.S. exports to China increased by approximately 140.73%, rising from nearly $3.9 billion in 1985 to almost $9.3 billion in 1994. In contrast, U.S. imports from China surged dramatically by 904.4%, escalating from a figure that was nearly equivalent to exports in 1985 to one that was almost four times greater, ultimately reaching nearly $38.8 billion in trade goods. Consequently, the U.S. trade deficit with China expanded at a faster rate than that with any other major trading partner. While in 1985, the United States recorded a $6 million trade deficit with China, by 1994, this deficit had ballooned to $29.5 billion. As a result, China became the second-largest trade deficit partner of the United States, following Japan, whose trade deficit had reached $65.7 billion by the same year.[823] "If this trend continues," the 1995 Congressional Research Service *China-U.S. Trade Issues Report* warned, "the U.S. trade

[821] For discussions on the U.S. retreat from globalization, see, among others, Edward Luce, *The Retreat of Western Liberalism* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2017).
[822] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Finance, *China Most-Favored-Nation Status Hearing before the Committee on Finance*, 102nd Congress, 1st Session, June 19 and 20, 1991, p.24.
[823] These figures are sourced from the United States Census Bureau's reports on "Trade in Goods with China" and "Trade in Goods with Japan," available online at https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5700.html (last accessed October 2024). It is important to note that these data differ slightly from those presented in the 1995 Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report.

deficit with China could exceed the U.S. trade imbalance with Japan sometime in the near future."[824]

The trade deficit between the United States and China was exacerbated by a combination of increasing Chinese protectionist measures, which significantly restricted the entry of U.S. goods into the Chinese market, and persistent violations of U.S. intellectual property rights (IPR). Both the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations sought to address these issues while simultaneously managing rising political tensions within Congress. Under the umbrella of Sections 301 and 182 of the Trade Act of 1974, which were designed to protect U.S. interests from unfair trade practices and IPR infringements, President Bush initiated dialogues with Chinese officials in Beijing, while still advocating for the continuation of MFN status in Washington. Nonetheless, these negotiations ultimately failed to produce satisfactory outcomes. In October 1991, President Bush directed the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to commence investigations into China's unfair trade practices, including import prohibitions, technical barriers, and quantitative restrictions. The Congressional Research Service characterized the enforcement of Section 301 against China as "highly unusual due to its breadth of coverage," noting that, while most Section 301 cases typically focused on specific product-related trade restrictions, the investigation into China represented "the most sweeping market access investigation in the USTR's history."[825] The primary aim of this inquiry was to initiate comprehensive reforms within China's trade regime. Moreover, the USTR was tasked with investigating deficiencies in China's patent law, the lack of copyright protections, and inadequate safeguarding of trade secrets. The resolution of these disputes became linked to U.S. support for China's re-entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

In January 1992, the United States and China entered into a memorandum of understanding in which China committed to strengthening the protection of U.S. intellectual property rights. This agreement was followed by a second memorandum, negotiated just prior to the 1992 elections, which was grounded in Section 301 provisions. Under this memorandum, China pledged to reduce or eliminate a range of trade barriers and enhance the transparency of its trade regime within five years, while the United States agreed to support China's accession to the GATT. After Bill Clinton assumed the presidency, the USTR continued to oversee China's adherence to these commitments. By the end of the following year, the USTR determined that

[824] Ibid. Morrison, "China-U.S. Trade Issues," January 12, 1995, p.-
[825] Ibid. Morrison, "China-U.S. Trade Issues," January 12, 1995, p.10.

China had failed to fulfill its obligations and issued a warning regarding the potential for sanctions should China not promptly address its trade barriers. However, in early 1994, the USTR announced that China had made notable progress in reducing trade barriers across various product categories, although scrutiny remained on certain sectors, particularly agriculture. In terms of intellectual property, while new laws had been enacted in China to protect these rights, the enforcement of such laws was insufficient. Consequently, the USTR identified $2.5 billion worth of Chinese goods that could be subject to trade sanctions due to violations of intellectual property rights. The situation was further complicated by evidence that some products imported from China had been manufactured under conditions of forced labor (refer to Chapter Three). In light of these challenges, President Clinton signed an agreement in March 1994 to prevent the export of goods produced under forced labor from China to the United States, following an increase in inspections by the U.S. Customs Service on Chinese imports initiated by President Bush. Additionally, despite China emerging as the largest supplier of textiles and apparel to the U.S. market in the early 1990s, it was found that the country had repeatedly attempted to circumvent U.S. textile quotas by transshipping products through third countries and mislabeling their origins. A resolution was reached in January 1994, with China committing to comply with U.S. textile quotas.[826]

4.2 The Practicality of Morality. Framing the Imperatives of Global Interdependency

While the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown focused domestically on protecting Chinese nationals in the United States, the early 1990s saw rising concerns from the American business community with interests in the Chinese market. As Congress began questioning the annual renewal of MFN status, business leaders – initially hesitant to advocate publicly – mobilized to protect trade benefits. Recognizing the business community's potential influence over public and legislative opinion, the Bush Administration undertook targeted efforts to engage leading industry associations and corporations. This strategy sought to counter the growing movement to condition MFN status on human rights reforms, promoting instead the benefits of sustained economic engagement. By late May 1990, following President Bush's first announcement of his willingness to unconditionally renew MFN status for China, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft noted strong business support for this decision. He reported a coalition of over fifty corporations and industry associations – spearheaded by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, the U.S.-China Business

[826] Ibid. Morrison, "China-U.S. Trade Issues," January 12, 1995, pp.9-13.

Council, and the National Foreign Trade Council – working in concert to advance the president's position on Capitol Hill. The Administration's coordination with these organizations included guidance on messaging and strategic distribution of MFN-related fact sheets, which provided talking points for media appearances and congressional advocacy. In addition to mobilizing associations, the Administration extended its outreach to the Chinese American community, Republican officials nationwide, and influential legislators. In the short term, this strategy aimed to solidify informed support among key opinion leaders. Over the longer term, the Administration sought to build public support by focusing on particular constituencies and strategically significant regions, ultimately reinforcing the legislative foundation for continued economic engagement with China.[827]

With time, the Bush Administration's strategy appeared to achieve its intended objectives. As the Democrat-led Congress increasingly viewed the targeting of commercial ties with China as a means of expressing dissatisfaction with the Administration's management of post-Tiananmen relations and the president's perceived detachment from domestic debates, the American business lobby mounted growing opposition to the use of economic and trade relations as instruments for penalizing the Chinese government. It argued that such strategies were often counterproductive and failed to achieve meaningful outcomes. Critics of this approach expressed concern over the tendency to frame the debate in moral terms, with advocates for sanctions being portrayed as "principled," while those questioning the efficacy of trade restrictions dismissed as "mercantilists." This dichotomy, those within the business community with growing interests in China argued, revealed a superficial understanding of moral reasoning, failing to account for the complexities inherent in the situation. While acknowledging the ethical dimensions of human rights concerns, business representatives emphasized that sanctions were not a universally effective tool and could, in some cases, exacerbate the very issues they aimed to address.[828] They also criticized what they perceived

[827] Communications Plan for China, Memorandum for the President from Bobbie Kilberg, Sichan Siv, Deb Amend, and Jeff Vogt, May 29, 1990, GHWBPR, WHO of Records Management, China.

[828] For an in-depth overview of the historical development of economic sanctions and their role in contemporary international relations, see Nicholas Mulder, *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022). A comparative analysis of the mechanisms through which sanctions operate and their intended transformation of economic pressure into political leverage is provided by Lee Jones, *Societies Under Siege: Exploring How International Economic Sanctions (Do Not) Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). While somewhat dated, Gary Clyde, Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott, and Kimberly Ann Elliott, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered: History and Current Policy. Second Edition* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 1990), remains an influential work on the history and application of sanctions throughout the 20th Century. For a practitioner-oriented perspective on the design and implementation of sanctions, Richard Nephew, *The Art of Sanctions: A View from the Field (*New York: Columbia University Press, 2018) offers a valuable framework. For a study on how Congress has influenced presidential deliberations

as a form of "latent mercantilism" in U.S. trade policy, where economic decisions were increasingly shaped by foreign policy objectives, thereby disadvantaging American producers in global markets. This critique extended to a broader question regarding the interpretation of Congress's authority over trade, with some arguing that trade controls should primarily serve the economic interests of the United States, rather than being used as instruments to promote ideological agendas abroad. "Are we controlling [trade] for the benefit of the U.S. economy or are we controlling it for the benefit of teaching the world to look at things in our way?" demanded in June 1990 Peter Nelsen, spokesperson for the International Trade Council, a trade association representing U.S. import and export companies.[829]

The growing polarization of the China policy debate in Washington fostered a climate in which the American business lobby sought to articulate a balanced position. This stance emphasized the importance of sustaining commercial engagement with China while concurrently recognizing the necessity of addressing human rights concerns. Critiquing the dominant narratives, Roger W. Sullivan challenged the binary framing of political realism and human rights advocacy as mutually exclusive paradigms. He argued that this simplistic dichotomy reflected a limited and reductive understanding of their interconnectedness, asserting: "That so many Americans seem to believe that these are mutually exclusive approaches, that morality is not practical, and that there is little or no room in "practical politics" for human rights and respect for human dignity tells us more about the moral illiteracy of American culture than about the real world. Both approaches have their merits; each alone, at least as expounded by their defenders, is deeply flawed."[830] This perspective diverged significantly from that of human rights advocates, who posited that the Chinese government was compelled to fundamentally redefine the structure of the PRC regime to navigate the democratic pressures of the post-Cold War era. However, Holly Burkhalter of Human Rights Watch characterized China's evolving model as "market Stalinism," a system that ostensibly blended economic liberalization with persistent political repression.[831] Although initially dismissed by the business lobby as paradoxical, this framework ultimately proved to be an

on sanctions, see Jordan Tama, "Forcing the President's Hand: How the U.S. Congress Shapes Foreign Policy through Sanctions Legislation," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol.16 (2020): pp.397-416.

[829] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *United States-People's Republic of China (PRC) Trade Relations, Including Most-Favored-Nation Trade Status for the PRC, Hearing before the Subcommittees on Trade*, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, June 19 and 21, 1990, p.197.

[830] Roger W. Sullivan, "China and America in a Post-Cold War Environment," *The China Business Review*, May-June 1990, p.16-20.

[831] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.107.

appropriate fit, as the Chinese regime skillfully utilized market-oriented reforms to reinforce, rather than diminish, its centralized political authority.[832]

By the end of 1990, *The Los Angeles Times* reported on a significant shift in corporate engagement. Initially, many businesses were hesitant to advocate for MFN renewal due to the reputational risks associated with supporting a regime criticized for human rights violations. As Kerry Dumbaugh, Asian Affairs Specialist at the Library of Congress, contended, "China's crackdown in Tiananmen Square during the first year of the Bush Administration drove many investors away from the China market, eroded business confidence in China's economic potential, and made it difficult for business groups to defend U.S. relations with China."[833] However, by the early 1990s, corporate involvement had intensified markedly. Industry trade associations, corporate executives, and lobbyists actively engaged in advocacy efforts, submitting letters and position papers to Capitol Hill in support of maintaining China's MFN status. Some companies even encouraged their employees to contact congressional representatives to endorse favorable trade policies.[834] From China, the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham), representing more than hundred companies operating in the PRC, closely observed the domestic debate in Washington, expressing concerns about the potential consequences of using trade policy as a mechanism to impose human rights standards on the Chinese government's conduct. AmCham, in a May 1990 letter to White House Chief of Staff John H. Sununu, cautioned that "if MFN treatment is severed, two decades of steadily improving bilateral commercial relations would be jeopardized overnight. America would cede its trade with China to its foremost competitors, and our country would be perceived as having slammed shut the "open door" which many have worked so diligently to open."[835]

Until the annual renewal of MFN status was resolved in 1994 by an unexpected decision made by President Clinton, the business lobby framed its advocacy around three core arguments. These were designed to counter congressional initiatives – backed by human rights organizations, labor unions, and Chinese student federations and groups – that sought to condition China's MFN status on demonstrable human rights improvements. First, lobbyists

[832] See Margaret M. Pearson, Meg Rithmire, and Kellee Tsai, *The State and Capitalism in China of Elements in Politics and Society in East Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).
[833] Kerry Dumbaugh, "Ten Years in U.S.-China Policy; Interest Groups and Their Influence, 1989-2000," December 12, 2000, *CRS Report for Congress*, Congressional Research Service – The Library of Congress, p.25.
[834] James Mann, "U.S. Firms Lobbying Hard to Save China Trade Benefits Markets," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1991.
[835] Letter to John Sununu from Richard C. Gaskins, The American Chamber of Commerce in the People's Republic of China, May 16, 1990, GHWBPR, WHO of Records Management, China.

contended that withholding MFN would disproportionately harm reform-minded Chinese entrepreneurs and emerging market-driven sectors within China while impairing American enterprises that were promoting economic and social rights by facilitating improved standards of living. Second, they argued that denying MFN would inflict economic losses on American businesses, their workers, and consumers, as diminished trade would lead to job losses domestically and higher prices for both American-made goods sold on the Chinese market and products imported from China. Third, they warned that limiting trade would undermine U.S. competitive advantage, effectively ceding economic opportunities in China to other emerging global powers who would continue trading with the PRC. Collectively, these arguments presented a broader strategic rationale for maintaining open economic engagement with China, framing such interaction as not only crucial for U.S. economic interests but also as a potential mechanism for fostering gradual social and economic change within China. Proponents contended that sustained economic involvement could serve as a catalyst for incremental reforms, even if these changes were indirect and long-term in nature. A deeper analysis of these three sets of arguments is essential to understand how the U.S. business lobby, operating in an increasingly globalized and interdependent post-Cold War context, effectively constructed a persuasive case for the continued U.S. engagement with the PRC and, ultimately, for the integration of China into global economic systems.

The primary argument advanced by the American business lobby in favor of sustaining trade relations with China emphasized the significant economic progress achieved in regions that had most actively pursued market-oriented reforms. Spearheaded by Chinese capitalist-driven entrepreneurs and pragmatic local party officials, these developments had been particularly successful in China's fourteen coastal cities and four special economic zones, which had become central to the country's economic dynamism.[836] Benefiting from China's open-door policy and the pro-market initiatives introduced under Deng Xiaoping, these regions have been playing a pivotal role in U.S. investment interests, as they had become deeply integrated into the global production of consumer goods. The business lobby warned that revoking China's MFN status would disproportionately affect these reform-oriented regions. The imposition of significant tariff increases on their goods and exports, they argued, would

[836] On the topic of China's special economic zones, see Wei Ge "Special Economic Zones and the Opening of the Chinese Economy: Some Lessons for Economic Liberalization," *World Development*, vol.27, no.7 (1999): pp.1267-1285; Yitao Tao and Zhiguo Lu, *Special Economic Zones and China's Development Path. Research Series on the Chinese Dream and China's Development Path* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018); Lotta Moberg, *The Political Economy of Special Economic Zones: Concentrating Economic Development* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017).

severely hinder their economic development and progress. From this perspective, the lobby argued that U.S. policy should prioritize fostering, rather than penalizing, these areas, which were not only integral to China's broader economic transformation but also aligned with long-term American commercial interests. Furthermore, these regions were framed as potential catalysts for broader societal and political change in China, with economic engagement serving as a conduit for the diffusion of Western ideas and values. As Democratic Senator Max Baucus, representing Montana – a major wheat-producing state with significant economic stakes in the Chinese market – remarked in Congress, "it is no coincidence that the greatest reforms in China have taken place in those areas that trade the most with the West. Ideas are traded along with goods. In Southern China, the people watch CBS and CNN news broadcasts out of Hong Kong. And, in Shanghai, it is stock market speculation that has captured the people's imagination, not lectures on Marx."[837]

Additionally, as human rights increasingly turned into one of the working languages of the China policy debate in Washington, the business lobby strategically reframed the narrative to highlight the transformative impact of American corporate engagement on Chinese society. This strategy shifted the discourse from an emphasis on civil and political rights to one centered on economic and social rights, positioning economic engagement as a catalyst for societal transformation.[838] Irl R. Hicks, President of the AmCham in China, advanced the concept of "human rights by example." He argued that American-led joint ventures had significantly enhanced living standards for Chinese workers by raising wages, improving workplace safety, providing better healthcare, and upgrading overall working conditions. These developments, Hicks claimed, had empowered employees and fostered optimism for a more prosperous future. Hicks' rhetoric often assumed a quasi-paternalistic tone, framing his and his American colleagues' roles as extending beyond corporate management to encompass moral and social guidance, seemingly aligning with a missionary-like sense of purpose. Portraying himself as "most importantly, a Christian, an Eagle Scout, a City Councilman from Ohio, and a U.S. citizen," Hicks emphasized his mission to personify "American virtue, principles, and freedom" in China. He described his managerial responsibilities as extending into the private and social lives of his Chinese employees, managing not only their work but also broader

[837] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Finance, *Extending China's MFN Status Hearing before the Committee on Finance*, 102nd Congress, 2nd Session, July 30, 1992, p.8.
[838] For a comprehensive overview of the transnational history and implementation of economic and social rights within different legal and cultural contexts see Mashood A. Baderin and Robert McCorquodale (eds.), *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Action,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

community and familial matters within the factory. In his own words, "as a general manager, I get involved in the opportunity to have the responsibility for not only running a company, but also being responsible for the whole living community of our joint venture, our work unit, our *don wai*. I am responsible for marriages, divorces, passports, visas, hiring, firing, political activity, union activity, pregnancies, abortions-not literally-and so I have a very intimate knowledge of what has been going on in the last year, and in the previous 4 or 5 years and the comparison of that."[839]

The Beijing-based AmCham president also claimed that American companies' presence in China had helped in reinforcing Chinese workers' political agency during the 1989 pro-democracy protests. According to Hicks, employees of Babcock & Wilcox, the energy technology firm he managed, with tacit support from their American managers, actively participated in blocking military trucks heading to the capitol central square where thousands of citizens were protesting in late May and early June. "Our people were willing to do that because they knew that Big Nose and Round Eyes would protect them, and I have been able to do that. None of them have ended up in jail," recounted the China AmCham president. Following the Tiananmen crackdown, as tensions escalated and concerns grew over the worsening internal situation in China, foreign staff were evacuated. Hicks recounted the emotional farewell, with Chinese workers expressing heartfelt concern about whether their American colleagues would eventually return. "There was a very tearful leaving because a group of Chinese were at our gate, worried that we were never going to return. I returned one week later. I got lots of double-fisted handshakes and big smiles because we had returned and because their hope and faith for a better future was again back there working. This would not have occurred without Most Favored Nation."[840]

Similarly to Hicks, William Overholt, spokesperson for the Hong Kong AmCham, articulated a nuanced perspective on the relationship between human rights and economic engagement, distinguishing between "two levels of human rights." The first pertained to government policies, encompassing issues such as political prisoners and press freedoms, while the second related to broader societal conditions and the general "pattern of life" within China. Although progress in governmental human rights policies remained limited, significant

[839] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.158.
[840] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.159.

advancements had occurred at the societal level, largely driven by economic development and sustained trade with nations such as the United States. Overholt observed that, relative to five years prior, Chinese citizens enjoyed greater freedom of speech, increased mobility within and outside the country, and an expanded ability to engage in diverse political and policy discussions. He attributed these changes to several factors, including the presence of western visitors, the growing number of Chinese citizens traveling abroad, internal migration to coastal regions, and the proliferation of radios and televisions, all of which weakened the Communist Party's traditional control over information and employment. "All these things are a result of economic development. They are a result of our intensive trade with China," he contented, cautioning policymakers on Capitol Hill against revoking China's MFN trade status. "If you cut off MFN, you make a point about the official level of human rights, but you destroy the whole basis of what has transformed the lives of 1 billion people at the unofficial level," he argued. [841]

The second key argument advanced by the U.S. business lobby highlighted the significant economic risks for American companies and consumers should trade relations with China deteriorate. In its 1990's position paper, the AmCham in the PRC outlined six adverse consequences of revoking China's MFN status, underscoring its potential to disrupt U.S. economic interests. First, the denial of MFN status would likely provoke "immediate retaliatory actions" from the Chinese government, including the suspension of its obligations under the U.S.-China Bilateral Trade Agreement. Such retaliation would replace the currently favorable "minimum" tariff rates with far higher "general" rates on U.S. imports. This shift, AmCham argued, would be "catastrophic" for American businesses exporting to China and those operating within the Chinese market, including joint ventures, foreign-owned enterprises, and service providers. Second, the cost of operations for U.S. companies in China would rise substantially, as many American firms relied on importing intermediate goods such as spare parts, raw materials, and equipment from the United States. Increased tariffs on these imports would significantly impact business operations. These cost increases would extend to service providers, such as logistics firms, consultants, and financial institutions supporting U.S. enterprises in China, amplifying the economic strain. Third, the price escalation of American products would render them uncompetitive in the Chinese market, undermining the market

[841] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, 102nd Congress, 1st Session, May 29, 1991, p.176.

presence of U.S. goods in China. Fourth, revoking MFN status would curtail critical U.S. government programs supporting American businesses in China and diminish the government's ability to effectively advocate for U.S. interests. Under the provisions of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, revocation would terminate programs such as Export-Import Bank loans, Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), and Trade Development Program (TDP) investment guarantees, which provided vital support for U.S. firms' operations and competitiveness in China. Additionally, reduced access to Chinese government agencies would weaken U.S. lobbying efforts, a significant disadvantage in navigating the centralized nature of China's planned economy. Fifth, the imposition of punitive tariffs would likely precipitate a liquidity crisis in China, with severe implications for U.S. trade interests. China's reliance on the U.S. as a key export market would be disrupted by steep tariff increases. The resulting foreign exchange shortfall in China would limit its capacity to import goods, including American products, and service its foreign debt. This liquidity crisis would further exacerbate the U.S. trade deficit with China and destabilize regional economic conditions, including those in Hong Kong. Sixth, U.S. businesses would face diminished future investment opportunities in China. Revoking MFN status could enable the Chinese government to justify preferential treatment of non-U.S. competitors in granting approvals, loans, and tax benefits. Existing projects requiring Chinese government cooperation would be particularly vulnerable, and American firms would face increased obstacles in establishing or expanding their operations in China's evolving market. Collectively, these arguments painted a picture of deepening interdependence between the United States and China, highlighting an intricate economic relationship that, if disrupted, would inflict significant harm on both parties.[842]

A particularly illustrative case was represented by the strong opposition to economic sanctions expressed by representatives of the American agribusiness and farming sectors, who were among the most vocal critics of such measures within the United States. This group was joined by a broad coalition of stakeholders, including "importers of toys, clothing and textiles, electronic products, shoes, and other consumer goods manufactured in China; high-tech, telecommunications, energy, and manufacturing industries concerned with increasing exports; the entertainment industry; and the financial and services sectors, among others."[843] In the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown, and a year before the Democrat-led

[842] American Chamber of Commerce in the People's Republic of China, Beijing, Position Paper: In Support of the Continuation of Most-Favored-Nation Trade Status for the Import of Chinese Goods to the United States, GHWBPR, WHO of Records Management, China.
[843] Ibid. Dumbaugh, "Ten Years in U.S.-China Policy."

Congress questioned China's MFN trade status for the first time, American agricultural product producers – which included wheat, soybeans, cotton, corn, forestry, and tobacco – had already begun lobbying President Bush to avoid imposing sanctions that might jeopardize their commercial interests. During his 1988 presidential campaign, Bush had stated, "we will not use food as a political weapon," emphasizing his belief that "farmers should not be used as foreign policy pawns."[844] Nevertheless, organizations such as the National Association of Wheat Growers and the U.S. Wheat Associates had expressed growing concern about the potential negative impact of sanctions on their burgeoning trade with China. Their anxieties heightened as the debate over MFN status became central to discussions on U.S.-China policy in Washington. Year after year, these organizations petitioned President Bush to defend normal trade relations with Beijing, highlighting the strategic importance of preserving stable economic ties.

Since the late 1980s, China had emerged as the largest export market for U.S. wheat. During the 1988/89 season, Chinese purchases of American wheat reached 8.1 million metric tons. By 1990, the first year that MFN status for China faced significant opposition on Capitol Hill since its initial granting a decade earlier, exports to China accounted for nearly 20% of total U.S. wheat exports. Additionally, in 1989, total U.S. agricultural exports to China – including wheat, cotton, corn, forestry, and tobacco products – reached $1.5 billion, with related exports such as fertilizer and paper adding another $575 million. Advocates for the agriculture products industry repeatedly warned that sanctions would inflict severe economic harm on American farmers. As one industry representative argued: "we don't want to get in the middle of a political debate, but wheat farmers depend upon China. We need to decide who will receive the worst punishment through denial of MFN – the Chinese government or U.S. farmers. If we decide not to renew MFN and they retaliate, wheat farmers will certainly be the losers." These groups consistently signaled that Chinese retaliation, such as the imposition of import bans on U.S. agricultural products, would have devastating consequences, undermining the significant investments American farmers had made in cultivating this vital market. "China has been the number one customer for U.S. wheat for the past two years. Wheat farmers have invested a lot in developing this market and cannot afford to have it taken away," American producers

[844] Replay to the National Association of Wheat Growers from Cooper Evans, Special Assistant to the President for Agriculture, August 7, 1989, GHWBPR, WHO of Records Management, China. On the concept of "food weapon" in U.S. foreign policy see Paul B. Thompson, "The Food Weapon and the Strategic Concept of Food Policy," in Thompson, *The Ethics of Aid and Trade: U.S. Food Policy, Foreign Competition, and the Social Contract* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): pp. 20-40.

cautioned.[845] "We fully expect China would retaliate against having to pay higher rates of duty on goods exported to the United States by banning imports of U.S. products. Such action would have devastating consequences for U.S. wheat growers," they forecasted.[846]

During congressional discussions, U.S. wheat producer associations put forth their sustained efforts to develop China's food industry, which had commenced in the late 1970s in the wake of Mao Zedong's death. Recognizing the opportunities presented by China's market-oriented economic reforms, U.S. producers initiated their engagement in 1981 by establishing the country's first modern commercial bakery, a project that achieved notable success. This was followed by the construction of China's first instant noodle factory in Shanghai, further cementing their role in modernizing the nation's food supply chain. Their most significant undertaking came several years later with the development of China's first modern wheat flour mill in Beijing, marking a milestone in the industrialization of the country's food processing capabilities. These investments, which introduced higher-quality, diverse, and convenient wheat-based products into the Chinese market, significantly enhanced the sophistication and accessibility of the country's food systems. The associations warned that revoking China's MFN status would risk undoing over a decade of strategic investment and collaboration, leading to substantial financial losses for U.S. producers and undermining advancements in food quality and availability in China. They further noted that the broader implications for the quality of life of Chinese consumers, while difficult to quantify, would likely be profound.[847]

Advocacy groups within the agricultural sector frequently relied on historical parallels to oppose sanctions that targeted their products in response to disputes with key commercial partners. Embargoes, in particular, were a recurring reference, with U.S. producers contending that such measures disproportionately harmed American farmers while proving ineffective in achieving substantive foreign policy goals. A key example often cited was the grain embargo imposed by the Carter Administration on the Soviet Union following its invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.[848] Many in the farming community recalled the economic

[845] Letter to the President from David Haugo, Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers, April 27, 1990, GHWBPR, WHO of Records Management, China.
[846] Letter to the President from the National Association of Wheat Growers, April 22, 1990, GHWBPR, WHO of Records Management, China.
[847] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Trade*, June 19 and 21, 1990.
[848] On the topic of the grain embargo against the Soviet Union and its implications during the Jimmy Carter presidency, see David L. Evans, "Harnessing the Amber Waves: U.S. Grain Embargoes against the Soviet Union and the Politics of Insecurity, 1975–1980," *Cold War History*, vol.24, no.4 (2024): pp.499-516; Robert C. Donnelly, "Jimmy Carter's Cold War Legacy," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol.53, no.3 (September 2023).

damage caused by the policy, which had allowed other nations to fill the gap left by the United States, undermining its intended impact. "The American farmers learned a bitter lesson the last time the U.S. government imposed a grain embargo in order to influence the internal decision-making of another nation," argued representatives of major wheat associations. The economic and emotional legacies of past embargoes continued to weigh heavily on American farmers, particularly in grain-export-dependent regions commonly referred to as the "farm belt." Representatives of the agricultural sector stressed the long-term harm such measures inflicted on farming communities, both in terms of economic losses and eroded trust in government trade policies. They argued that unilateral embargoes had historically depressed commodity prices, reduced farmer incomes, and undermined the United States' standing as a dependable supplier of agricultural products.

This perspective was articulated in several letters to President Bush. James Lee Adams, Jr., President of the American Soybean Association noted, "we are only now beginning to restore America's reputation as a reliable supplier of agricultural commodities as a result of past embargoes. It would be very damaging to U.S. farmers should the U.S. declare another embargo."[849] Reflecting on the 1980 grain embargo against the Soviet Union, the letter highlighted its ineffectiveness, as competing nations swiftly stepped in to meet the Soviet demand, thereby neutralizing the intended economic impact of U.S. sanctions. Carl F. Schwensen, Executive Vice President of the National Association of Wheat Growers, and Winston Wilson, President of U.S. Wheat Associates, raised similar arguments. They emphasized the futility of imposing unilateral trade restrictions motivated primarily by moral outrage rather than pragmatic considerations. "Reliable sources have indicated to us, that the Chinese people need wheat. If they do not get it from us, there are many who will be ready and willing to supply it. We contend that embargoes just do not work, especially when they are unilateral and implemented purely out of moral outrage," they asserted.[850] This argument reinforced the view that unilateral sanctions not only failed to achieve their intended objectives but also imposed disproportionate costs on domestic stakeholders, including U.S. farmers.

This argument informed the third point raised by the American business lobby in advocating for the unconditional renewal of MFN trade status: competition with other

[849] Letter to President Bush from James Lee Adams, Jr., President of the American Soybean Association, June 21, 1989, GHWBPR, WHO of Records Management, China.
[850] Letter to President Bush from Carl F. Schwensen, Executive Vice President of the National Association of Wheat Growers and Winston Wilson, President of the U.S. Wheat Associates, June 21, 1989, GHWBPR, WHO of Records Management, China.

economic powers. As demonstrated by the lobbying activities of American agribusiness and farming sectors, critics of trade sanctions highlighted the inherent limitations of unilateral measures, especially those motivated by moral outrage rather than clearly defined strategic goals. They argued that such actions were often counterproductive, allowing competing suppliers to capitalize on the void left by the United States. This reasoning was a cornerstone of the broader case for maintaining economic ties with China. Like other sectors, American agriculture had become deeply integrated into the global framework of economic interdependence. Advocates for continued trade emphasized the competitive dynamics of the Chinese market, where the United States faced stiff competition from leading exporters such as Canada, Australia, Argentina, and the European Community. They further pointed out that none of these competitors, nor China's other trading partners, were considering withdrawing Beijing's MFN tariff status. Critics cautioned that unilateral revocation by the United States would severely undermine its standing as a major wheat supplier to China, creating substantial challenges in identifying alternative markets of equivalent scale and strategic importance.

4.3 Avoiding the Closed-Door Policy. The Hong Kong Crevice



Figure 40. Satirical Cartoon.
Image credit: "Tagging on to Uncle Sam," South China Morning Post, June 16, 1990.

In May 1990, Representative Stephen Solarz (D-NY), acting as chairman of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, convened the first congressional hearing exclusively dedicated to the renewal of MFN to China since the status was initially granted in 1980.[851] This hearing critically examined the extension of trade privileges to Beijing, despite the formal jurisdiction for the annual review of such status traditionally residing with the Trade Subcommittee of the Ways and Means Committee. Solarz's subcommittee brought together a diverse array of witnesses to discuss the multifaceted nature of Sino-U.S. relations. Among the various topics discussed, the future of Hong Kong – particularly its transition from a British colony to a Special Administrative Region of China – and the growing economic interdependencies with Washington became a pivotal aspect of the dialogue. This marked an unprecedented inclusion of Hong Kong's status in the broader discussion regarding U.S. policy towards China. Drawing a historical parallel to the late 19th Century landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that delineated the boundaries between public and private authority, Solarz invoked the Dartmouth College case: "In the last century, in the very famous Dartmouth College case, Daniel Webster, in his presentation to the Supreme Court, said, 'It may be a small school, but there are those who love it.' Hong Kong may be a small place, but there are those who love it, even over here, and I can assure you that the impact of what we do on Hong Kong will certainly figure in our deliberations."[852]

By the end of the Cold War, Hong Kong presented a notable divergence from the global trajectory toward democratization. While Eastern Europe and other regions were embracing – or about to – newly established democratic governments, signaling the triumph of Western model of liberal democracy, Hong Kong seemed to face a different future. The 1984 *Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong* laid the groundwork for the 1997 handover of the British colony to Beijing, leading many in the United States to view London's concessions as overly lenient.[853] The declaration fueled apprehensions that the transition could

[851] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, May 16 and 24, 1990.
[852] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.155. For a concise analysis of the Dartmouth College case and its significance, refer to George Thomas, "Rethinking the Dartmouth College Case in American Political Development: Constituting Public and Private Educational Institutions," *Studies in American Political Development*, vol.29, no.1 (2015): pp.23–39.
[853] "Long ago, and certainly since 1984, London should have devolved full elective local self-rule on Hong Kong to make the colony harder to reduce when China finally takes charge. Even now, the British shy from vigorously challenging the restrictive local self-government legislation China has just announced for 1997," commented American columnist Stephen S. Rosenfeld in his op-ed "Can Hong Kong Save China?" *The Washington Post*, May 3, 1990.

eventually jeopardize Hong Kong's political freedoms and economic openness.[854] American media narratives during this period reflected a complex mix of cautious optimism and skepticism. Commentators were concerned about China's commitment to maintaining Hong Kong's autonomy and upholding the principles of "One Country, Two Systems."[855] On the House floor, Representative Gerald Solomon (D-NY) cited a provocative op-ed from *The Washington Post*, authored by strategic analyst William V. Kennedy, which sharply criticized British actions in Hong Kong's reversion to China. Kennedy contended that while President Ronald Reagan took pride in ensuring "no country had 'gone communist' on his 'watch'," his close ally, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, was "in the process of turning over to Communist China 5½ million people born or become free in the British crown colony of Hong Kong." Kennedy, echoed by Solomon, argued that the U.S. should assume the burden of being the guarantor of freedom and liberal values in Hong Kong, given the substantial risks posed by the handover. The consequences of failing to do so, he warned, could extend far beyond soon-to-be former British colony, impacting Taiwan and Japan. Kennedy emphasized this in his assertion: "The shadow that is lengthening over Hong Kong falls on Taiwan, too, for the people who engineered the massacres of June 3 can no more tolerate a Taiwan moving steadily toward fully democracy than they could the martyred students. Indeed, that shadow reaches all the way to Tokyo."[856]

However, despite uncertainties regarding Hong Kong's political future, the territory remained depicted as a vibrant, multicultural, and as an economically dynamic center. Stephen S. Rosenfeld of *The Washington Post* notably characterized it as a "throbbing Las Vegas-by-the-sea," emphasizing its lively and bustling atmosphere amidst political uncertainties.[857] Similarly, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger stressed Hong Kong's unique appeal, writing on *Forbes* that "no matter how often one visits Hong Kong, it is always one of the most fascinating, vital and continuously changing cities in the world. The skyline and the

[854] The 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration established that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) would retain a high degree of autonomy, including executive, legislative, and independent judicial powers. It ensured the preservation of Hong Kong's existing legal and economic systems, rights and freedoms, and the protection of private property and foreign investments, while the chief executive and principal officials would be appointed by the Central People's Government based on local elections or consultations.
[855] For a legal perspective of the history of the making of the joint declaration see C. L. Lim, *Treaty for a Lost City: the Sino-British Joint Declaration* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
[856] William V. Kennedy, "What Now of Those 'Guarantees' for Hong Kong," *The Washington Post*, June 13, 1989 in *Congressional Records*, 101st, June 13, 1989, online at https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/result/congressional/congdocumentview?accountid=15172&groupid=94346&parmId=1922466B883&rsId=192246563F7 (last accessed October 2024).
[857] Stephen S. Rosenfeld, "Can Hong Kong Save China?" *The Washington Post*, May 3, 1990.

architecture have perhaps the greatest variety of any large city. There are only two constant threads running through its story, *growth* and *more growth*."[858] By the beginning of the new decade, the territory faced notable challenges, such as slower economic growth, rising inflation, and a substantial emigration of the middle and upper classes to countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia – fueled by concerns after the 1989 Tiananmen Square events. This trend raised fears of a potential brain drain as those leaving the colony were mostly well-educated professionals employed in sectors that had mainly contributed to Hong Kong's economic boom. Nevertheless, these challenges did not fully dampen Hong Kong's economic vitality. As *The New York Times* business journalist James Sterngold observed in 1990, "nearly every conversation in Hong Kong is interrupted by the sound of jackhammers or other construction equipment as old buildings fall and new ones go up at a furious pace."[859]

In the United States, discussions surrounding the renewal of China's MFN status increasingly brought attention to Hong Kong, drawing attestation to its significance as a critical Asian hub within the framework of U.S. global economic and financial interdependencies.[860] A June 1990 report in the *South China Morning Post* quoted a congressional analyst who acknowledged the effective efforts of Hong Kong representatives – "people from Hong Kong did a very good job" – in raising awareness about the region's concerns. While the implications of Hong Kong's impending transition to Chinese jurisdiction had previously been underappreciated in the United States, these issues had now clearly "registered on our consciousness," including among policymakers in Washington. This shift in perception proved a growing recognition of Hong Kong's pivotal role in broader U.S.-China relations. The analyst observed that Hong Kong had garnered remarkable sympathy among Americans, compared to other places of similar size and population, "with the exception of Israel." However, despite this heightened awareness, specifics regarding potential U.S. actions remained ambiguous. The analyst noted: "People know that Hong Kong is out there, and it's somehow special and it's now under great risk. They don't know the details, and they are not clear about what the U.S. can do about it, if anything."[861]

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[858] Caspar W. Weinberger, "Hong Kong Revisited," *Forbes*, June 12, 1989.
[859] James Sterngold, "In Hong Kong, a New Confidence," *The New York Times*, July 10, 1990.
[860] See Kerry Dumbaugh, "The U.S. Role During and After Hong Kong's Transition," *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Economic Law*, vol.18, no.1 (Spring 1997): pp.–
[861] -, "Tagging on to Uncle Sam. As Hong Kong Worries About its Future, the United States Seems a Likely Champion of its Cause," *South China Morning Post*, June 16, 1990.

Concerns about Hong Kong's political future bridged partisan divides within the U.S. Congress, fostering interbranch and bipartisan collaboration to address the challenges and uncertainties surrounding the territory's 1997 handover to China. Among the leading advocates was Representative Solarz, often regarded as "the brightest foreign affairs star on Capitol Hill."[862] Collaborating with Illinois Republican John Porter – whom Solarz characterized as a figure whose name "is on everyone's lips" in Hong Kong – the New York representative took the initiative to address the complexities of Hong Kong's reversion. The two lawmakers co-sponsored a multilateral immigration bill, urging the U.S. president to advocate for British cooperation with the European Community, Canada, Australia, Japan, and other willing nations to safeguard the future well-being of Hong Kong. The initiative sought to provide Hong Kong residents with the right of abode in these countries without necessitating immediate relocation before 1997.[863] The bill aimed to ensure the future stability of Hong Kong residents while strengthening the region's economic and social resilience. Additionally, it advocated for the establishing major public international organizations in Hong Kong to enhance its global standing, in alignment with the provisions of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration. Representative Porter expressed skepticism about the PRC's commitment to honoring the agreement, citing developments that appeared to contradict its stipulated guarantees. He stressed that "nothing that is happening in China today gives us any kind of assurance that they will live up to the Joint Declaration, [but] exactly the opposite," thereby justifying external measures to safeguard Hong Kong's future.[864] Solarz supported this viewpoint, contending that the opportunity for Hong Kong residents to remain would significantly contribute to regional prosperity. Furthermore, should these individuals choose to emigrate, Solarz argued, "I think it would represent an infusion of drive and talent and energy into our country which would be beneficial to America."[865]

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[862] -, "A Friend in High Places," *South China Morning Post*, February 10, 1990.
[863] H. Con. Res. 227 Concerning the establishment of a multilateral initiative to promote confidence among the people of Hong Kong, House of Representatives, November 14, 1989. Citied in Andrew Brick, "Protecting America's Stake in Hong Kong," *The Heritage Foundation*, August 21, 1990.
[864] According to Porter, Concerns in Hong Kong grew due to certain actions taken by the PRC government. One significant incident was the dismissal of Szeto Wah and Martin Lee from the Basic Law Drafting Committee, which was perceived locally as damaging to public confidence. Additionally, tensions arose when the PRC pressured the Hong Kong government following the U.S. granting a visa to Chinese swimmer Yang Yang. Beijing expressed its dissatisfaction by temporarily halting the return of illegal emigrants to Hong Kong, signaling its ability to exert pressure on the region. See U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The Political Situation in Hong Kong and Issues Relating to Emigration Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs*, 101st Congress, 1st Session, November 14, 1989, p.61.
[865] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs*, November 14, 1989, p.42.

Once again, after the contentious debates surrounding the Pelosi Bill, immigration issues tied to concerns about China re-emerged as a focal point on Capitol Hill. The United States began to be framed as a critical destination for individuals seeking refuge from political instability and potential repression, reinforcing broader apprehensions regarding China's political developments. But this time, the main objective of the initiative was to restore public confidence in Hong Kong's future. As noted by Representative Porter, "simply put, in order to ensure that Hong Kong continues to work, the people must remain in the colony."[866] However, cited in Congress by a State Department official, a 1989 survey highlighted widespread distrust in China's commitments, with 69% of respondents expressing doubts about Beijing's adherence to the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, and only 3% feeling confident in its promises.[867] This mistrust was reflected in the emigration data following the 1984 Joint Declaration. The emigration trends to key destinations – the United States, Canada, and Australia – revealed a substantial increase. From 1984 to 1989, the number of emigrants to these three countries almost doubled, rising from 23,677 to 42,228. Following the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, this number further escalated to 53,216 in 1990 and peaked at 71,238 by 1992, coinciding with the enactment of the U.S.-Hong Kong Policy Act (discusses further below in this section). After 1993, emigration figures began to decline, dropping from 59,100 in 1993 to approximately 34,911 by 1997, the year of Hong Kong's handover to China.[868] This renewed confidence, aimed at mitigating both the brain drain and capital outflow, stemmed from multiple factors, including the efforts of U.S. lawmakers like Solarz and Porter. They played a crucial role in providing Hong Kong residents with a "fire exit" in case political turmoil escalated, thereby reassuring the local population about their future security. Should they feel threatened by the evolving political climate and the expanding influence of China, they could seek refuge in the United States.

As pro-democracy protests had gained momentum in China, Hong Kong emerged as a significant hub of solidarity and concern. During this period, Donald M. Anderson, then serving as the U.S. Consul General in Hong Kong, observed a growing sense of unease within the colony, driven by both the protracted negotiations over the Basic Law – the constitutional document regulating relations between the PRC and Hog Kong guaranteeing "a high degree of

[866] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs*, November 14, 1989, p.68.
[867] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs*, November 14, 1990, p.5.
[868] These data provided by the U.S., Canadian, and Australian governments are cited in Nan M. Sussman, "A Short History of Two Hundred Years of Hong Kong Migration and Identity," in Nan M. Sussman, *Return Migration and Identity: A Global Phenomenon, a Hong Kong Case* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

autonomy" to the former British colony – and an increasing recognition that China was unlikely to uphold its commitments to non-interference as initially anticipated.[869] The 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown further amplified these anxieties, profoundly affecting the emotional landscape of the Hong Kong citizens. Anderson highlighted the transformative impact of the democracy movement on Hong Kong's social and political consciousness. This shift was vividly illustrated by a peaceful march involving approximately 800,000 participants – an unprecedented display of solidarity with Beijing's pro-democracy protesters. The movement catalyzed a significant attitudinal change among Hong Kong residents, who historically had regarded mainland Chinese with a degree of detachment and cultural superiority. However, the events of 1989 fostered a sense of shared identity and collective purpose, as Hong Kong citizens increasingly viewed themselves as integral to a broader Chinese struggle for democratic reform. "This was a whole new attitude because generally Hong Kong Chinese have looked upon people across the border, in the mainland, as sort of country bumpkins. *'We're the smart guys, we're the wealthy, we're the ones who know how to do it, and all those people up in the mainland are kind of dummies.'* And when the democracy movement started, there was all of a sudden in Hong Kong a feeling of being Chinese, of being part of the thing that they were seeing in Beijing," recalled Anderson. Hong Kong also played a critical role in supporting the democracy movement through financial contributions, material aid, as well as an escape route from China. The logistical support provided by Hong Kong, including the supply of tents used prominently in the Tiananmen demonstrations, proved the colony's active engagement in and commitment to the cause.[870] Navigating this evolving landscape presented considerable challenges, as the United States seemed increasingly determined to position itself as a guarantor of Hong Kong's political autonomy, civil liberties, and continued integration into the global economic system. This stance was driven by the strategic view of Hong Kong as a critical engine for advancing market-oriented reforms within China. The actions of various individual agencies operating within these exceptional circumstances would ultimately prove influential in shaping the outcomes of this policy trajectory.

[869] Lo Pui Yin, *The Judicial Construction of Hong Kong's Basic Law: Courts, Politics and Society after 1997* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014).
[870] Charles Stuart Kennedy, Interview with Donald M. Anderson, July 8, 1992, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project.



Figure 41. Protests in Hong Kong in the wake of the Tiananmen Crackdown, June 4, 1989 [1].
Photo credit: Hemlok via HKFR – Hong Kong Free Press.[871]



Figure 42. Protests in Hong Kong in the wake of the Tiananmen Crackdown, June 4, 1989 [2].
Photo credit: Hemlok via HKFR – Hong Kong Free Press.

[871] Hemlok, "Hong Kong on the Day of the Tiananmen Massacre: Rumours, Unlikely Protests and a Brutal Reckoning," *Hong Kong Free Press*, June 4, 1994.

On January 1, 1990, John Kamm assumed the presidency of the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Hong Kong, the largest American chamber outside North America at the time, with a membership of 2,800 registered companies.[872] A graduate of Princeton, where he studied Chinese anthropology in the early 1970s, Kamm initially pursued an academic career, serving as a tutor in the Sociology Department at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He later returned to the U.S. to complete an MA in Regional East Asian Studies at Harvard. Afterward, Kamm transitioned from academia to business, moving back to Hong Kong, where he married Irene Chan, one of his former students and the daughter of a Nationalist army officer who had fled China. Kamm then began working for a U.S. multinational corporation, overseeing chemical sales in China and other parts of Asia.[873] In January 1990, he was portrayed by the local press as someone who "proudly reels off a list of accomplishments, from his appointment, at the age of 25, to Mr. Henry Kissinger's National Council for U.S.-China Trade, to his pioneering office setups in Guangzhou and Shanghai, to his high-level negotiations of trademark and factory registration agreements."[874] Kamm's appointment as president of the AmCham in Hong Kong was unexpected, particularly given his prior role in advocating for a resolution that condemned the Chinese government's violent suppression of pro-democracy demonstrators during the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. As vice president, Kamm had used his position to champion the resolution, despite significant opposition from several corporate members concerned that such actions could damage their business ties with China. The resolution received extensive media coverage, which positioned Kamm as an unconventional choice for the presidency. Although he finished second in the election, the elected president ultimately withdrew due to professional commitments with his New York-based firm, which allowed Kamm to assume the presidency for a one-year term.

Kamm's diplomatic approach was characterized by a blend of cultural sensitivity and a non-confrontational strategy, which involved both formal meetings and private, behind-the-scenes discussions. This method was grounded in his pragmatic belief that sustained economic and diplomatic engagement with China could eventually foster greater openness and reform.[875]

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[872] John Kamm's personal recollections, compiled in the *John Kamm Remembers* section on the official Dui Hua website, are a valuable firsthand source for insights on business people in Hong Kong during the historical period under consideration. Available online at https://duihua.org/jkr-archive/ (last accessed October 2024).

[873] These biographical details are taken from Terry Lautz, "John Kamm: Negotiating Human Rights," in Terry Lautz, *Americans in China: Encounters with the People's Republic* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022).

[874] Xander Mellish, "Representing U.S. Values and Investments," *South China Sunday Morning Post*, January 14, 1990.

[875] -, "Kamm the Crusader Goes Full Time," *South China Morning Post*, September 27, 1991.

His experience offers a compelling case study, providing valuable insights into the intersection of business, politics, and human rights advocacy.[876] In an interview with *The China Business Review*, Kamm acknowledged that while the potential revocation of China's MFN status, advocated by a bipartisan group of members in Congress, could undermine business interests and disrupt the work of AmCham in advancing them – highlighting that "over the last few months China sanctions and MFN have taken up 10-12 hours a day of my time" – it also presented opportunities for Hong Kong. He noted, "on the positive side, for the first time Hong Kong and South China are being taken into account in a major foreign policy debate." He observed a growing recognition of Guangdong Province as a critical center of reform, which set it apart from other regions in China, particularly the northern areas and Beijing. This shift in perception suggested a growing distinction in U.S. policy between the central government and the economically dynamic regions, particularly in the context of Hong Kong's future.[877]

The challenge in balancing business interests and human rights concerns became particularly evident during Kamm's first testimony at the May 1990 congressional hearing on the renewal of MFN status for China. This hearing, called by three subcommittees of the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, was the first of its kind following the Tiananmen crackdown in June 1989.[878] Invited by Representative Solarz, Kamm was tasked with providing a perspective that diverged from other prominent voices, such as former Ambassador Winston Lord, Human Rights Watch's Holly Burkhalter, and Chinese Independent Federation's spokesperson Zhao Haiqing, who advocated for the revocation of China's MFN status due to its human rights abuses following the crackdown (refer to Chapter Two). Although Kamm supported the retention of MFN status, he was not simply a proponent of business interests at any cost. As president of the AmCham in Hong Kong, his leadership had demonstrated a strong commitment to human rights since the very beginning. Kamm argued that severing trade ties with China would not lead to significant improvements in human rights but would instead disproportionately affect the country's most liberal and market-oriented regions, particularly in the south, where Hong Kong's influence, interests and

[876] Kamm's leadership in this context foreshadowed his later work as a human rights advocate, particularly through the founding of the Dui Hua Foundation in the late 1990s. The foundation, named after the Chinese term for "dialogue," has been instrumental in facilitating discussions on sensitive human rights issues, with a particular focus on advocating for the release of political prisoners.

[877] Sharon E. Ruwart, "Championing U.S: Business Interests. Interview with John Kamm," *The China Business Review*, July-August 1990, pp.48-50.

[878] The Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, chaired by Gus Yatron (D-Pennsylvania), Asian and Pacific Affairs, chaired by Stephen Solarz (D-New York), and International Economic Policy and Trade, chaired by Sam Gejdenson (D-Connecticut).

dependencies were especially pronounced. He viewed these regions as emblematic of the potential adverse consequences of such a policy shift.

To ensure that his arguments were heard clearly in Washington, Kamm organized a concerted lobbying effort, raising $100,000 to secure political and legal counsel. Additionally, before departing for the U.S., he attended a banquet hosted by Zhou Nan, Director of the New China News Agency (*Xinhua*), the Chinese government's primary representative in Hong Kong. During discussions about the approaching debate on China's MFN status, Kamm made a bold and unexpected demand: if the Chinese government wanted him to advocate for U.S.-China relations, they should secure the release of Yao Yongzhan, a Hong Kong student leader involved in the pro-democracy protests in Shanghai. On his personal blog, Kamm recalled: "Finally, I told Zhou that whether or not Yao Yongzhan were released I would still go to Congress to testify in favor of retaining China's MFN status and asked him if he knew why. 'No,' he snarled. 'Because I love Hong Kong. Do you love Hong Kong?' Zhou was speechless. Here was a foreign businessman asking China's most senior official in Hong Kong whether he loved the city. After a moment's pause, Zhou said, 'Alright, I'll see what I can do.'" [879]

Once in Washington, in his congressional testimony, the AmCham president emphasized the far-reaching economic consequences of revoking China's MFN status, particularly for Hong Kong's economy and its broader ties with the United States. Drawing attention to the manufacturing sector as a key example, he noted that the United States was Hong Kong's largest foreign investor. This involvement included 158 factories employing approximately 250,000 workers – roughly 10% of Hong Kong's workforce. Kamm further highlighted that Hong Kong ranked as the 14th largest export market for the U.S., with per capita consumption of American goods exceeding $1,000 annually, a figure considerably higher than that of Japan and Europe. Additionally, 36% of Hong Kong's government procurement was sourced from U.S. firms, and American companies were poised to secure lucrative contracts from major upcoming infrastructure projects in the city. Kamm framed the debate around MFN status as having existential significance for Hong Kong, describing it as "a matter of life or death for Hong Kong and the reform movement in China." By employing a cosmetic yet convincing rhetoric – that he claimed it was "neither hyperbole nor exaggeration" – Kamm characterized the potential withdrawal of commercial privileges as one that would undermine Hong Kong's

[879] John Kamm, "The Banquet," *John Kamm Remembers*, online at https://duihua.org/jkr-archive/ (last accessed October 2024).

stability, echoing the broader anxieties that had emerged in the region in the aftermath of the crackdown. The revocation of China's MFN status, and the likely retaliatory measures from Beijing, would severely damage these vital economic ties, not only undermining U.S. business interests in Hong Kong but also threatening thousands of American jobs tied to this relationship. In his view, while Mainland China might find alternative paths to mitigate the effects of U.S. economic sanctions, Hong Kong lacked the same resilience and would be disproportionately impacted. "Make no mistake about it," Kamm warned. "China's loss of MFN will devastate Hong Kong economically and psychologically. It will be a crippling blow to confidence, completing the job begun by Chinese troops that tragic night one year ago in Tiananmen Square."[880]

"I fear you may perhaps be letting your rhetoric carry you away," commented Representative Solarz. Nonetheless, Kamm's presentation highlighted the intricate and deeply intertwined economic interdependencies already existing among Washington, Beijing, and Hong Kong. He emphasized that sanctioning one would inevitably inflict damage on the others. To substantiate this point, the AmCham president pointed to significant trade data from 1989, noting that Chinese-made goods reexported through Hong Kong to the United States were valued at $8.8 billion. This figure accounted for over one-third of Hong Kong's reexports of Chinese products and represented 11.5% of the city's total export trade, including both domestic exports and reexports. Further bolstering his argument, Kamm referenced an official Chinese estimate that over 60% of Hong Kong's reexports were manufactured by factories owned by Hong Kong-based companies. In Guangdong Province alone, Hong Kong firms had invested $4.2 billion, primarily in manufacturing assets, employing roughly two million workers. Against this backdrop, Kamm portrayed China's internal tensions as a "great civil war," pitting coastal reformers who sought a more open and prosperous China against hardline ideologues advocating a return to authoritarian central control. Maintaining economic ties, Kamm argued, would enable Washington to support the reformers and foster positive change. In closing, Kamm appealed to the legislators: "Tiananmen Square was a tragic loss, but it was a setback, not the end of reform and democratization. Don't be the ones that close the door;

[880] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.142.

don't be the ones that destroy Hong Kong. The fate of Hong Kong and South China is in your hands. The future of the American community in South China rests with you."[881]

The hearing marked the first time in American history that Hong Kong had figured prominently in decisions regarding foreign policy to the PRC. Upon his return to Hong Kong, Kamm was met with considerable enthusiasm, with the *South China Morning Post*, the Hong Kong-based English-language main newspaper, highlighting his achievements under the headline, "An Underdog with a Formula for Success." The article suggested that "if anyone deserved a brass band and hero's welcome at Kai Tak [airport] this week, it had to be AmCham president John Kamm, returning from Capitol Hill victorious on the MFN issue."[882] The newspaper emphasized that Kamm's advocacy success resulted from "tactful diplomacy all round and rallying support from every possible corner." It noted that the AmCham campaign's strength stemmed from grassroots support, which included local small business owners and even Kamm's mother, who spurred local old age residents at the U.S. club to rally round and lobby on the issue themselves."[883] Reflecting on this experience, Kamm noted with a touch of humor, "I became known as Mr. MFN," underscoring the personal significance and public recognition he gained from his advocacy work.[884] Additionally, upon his return to Hong Kong, Kamm learned that Yao Yongzhan, the Hong Kong student leader involved in the pro-democracy protests, had been released. The AmCham president's frank yet potentially hazardous interaction with Zhou Nan reinforced Kamm's belief that open dialogue with Chinese authorities, alongside sustained economic engagement, could yield meaningful progress in the realm of human rights.

As president of the AmCham in Hong Kong, Kamm would testify in Congress other two times. He would work for advocating a legislation to protect Hong Kong's special status under United States law. In his November 1990 address at the Harvard Club, Kamm emphasized the importance of aligning U.S. policies toward China with the interests of Hong Kong. He called upon various institutions, including academic and public-service organizations, to foster closer ties with their Hong Kong counterparts. Kamm recommended direct negotiations with the Hong Kong government regarding trade and investment treaties, emphasizing the need for

[881] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, and on International Economic Policy and Trade*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.146.
[882] Jill McGivering, "An Underdog with a Formula for Success," *The South China Morning Post*, June 2, 1990.
[883] Ibid. McGivering, *The South China Morning Post*, June 2, 1990.
[884] John Kamm, "My First Testimony to Congress," *John Kamm Remembers*, online at https://duihua.org/my-first-testimony/ (last accessed October 2024).

protective measures such as separate tariff treatments and dispute resolution mechanisms. Furthermore, he urged the U.S. to support Hong Kong's participation in international organizations and called for reinforced legislation to maintain its immigration status post-1997, alongside a push for greater internationalization within the Hong Kong civil service.[885] Kamm viewed his contributions to these discussions as instrumental in shaping the 1992 Hong Kong Policy Act, which aimed to preserve Hong Kong's autonomy and uphold its distinct legal treatment in U.S. foreign relations.

Similar to President George H.W. Bush and former Ambassador Winston Lord, who navigated U.S.-China relations with confidence due to their extensive personal and professional engagement with China, Kamm believed that his two decades of business experience in Hong Kong provided him with a nuanced understanding of the complexities of these relations and the most effective strategies for managing them. In his view, advocacy for human rights could be pursued without jeopardizing trade relations with Beijing. By mid-1991, Kamm resigned from his position as Vice President of the chemical company he worked for to dedicate himself fully to human rights advocacy. He predicted, "In five years there will be a human rights revolution in American business, [as companies] will have to be as much concerned about the human rights climate in which they operate as they are about their business. If we don't do it, if the business community turns a deaf ear to the concerns about democracy and human rights in China, they will make us listen." Kamm's commitment to human rights was rooted in a deeply moral vision, akin to the missionary zeal of early 20th-Century American evangelicals. Reflecting on his business colleagues in Hong Kong, he remarked, "I look at all my business colleagues in Hong Kong who go to church on Sunday, and I have to wonder what they are thinking when they listen to the gospel of Christ and what he did for those in trouble."[886] For Kamm, promoting human rights was not only a moral imperative but also a pragmatic approach to safeguarding long-term business interests. He believed that these two dimensions – ethical responsibility and economic pragmatism – were mutually reinforcing.

He pointed to the MFN debate as evidence of the interdependence between the U.S., China, and Hong Kong, as well as between economic incentives and human rights advocacy. Kamm argued that while some U.S. policymakers initially called for sanctions, many later opposed them due to economic considerations within their constituencies, highlighting the intricate

[885] John Kamm, "Going to Bat for Hong Kong," *John Kamm Remembers*, online at https://duihua.org/my-first-testimony/ (last accessed October 2024).
[886] Ibid. *The South China Morning Post*, September 27, 1991.

connections between economic and human rights agendas. “Six months later, the very people who were on the floor of Congress calling for sanctions are working behind the scenes (to stop them), because their farmers can’t sell grain, because their steel mills can’t sell steel, and they don’t have a whole lot of ex-Chinese dissidents in their constituency who can cast votes,” Kamm declared.[887] China scholar Terry Lautz included John Kamm among the notable Americans in China who significantly influenced U.S.-China relations during the closing period of the Cold War. Lautz characterized Kamm as someone who seamlessly integrated the pragmatism of a practical businessman with the principled idealism of a committed advocate for human rights. Lautz argued that Kamm did not perceive these traits as conflicting but rather harnessed them to inform a strategic approach to U.S.-China relations. What set Kamm apart, Lautz notes, was his unwavering belief that cooperation would yield more substantial and effective results than confrontation, even when addressing sensitive issues like individual freedoms. This perspective, Lautz suggested, is crucial for understanding the nuances of Kamm’s influence on U.S.-China relations.[888]



Figure 43. A Cartoon of John Kamm.
Image credit: A of appeared on The South China Morning Post, June 2, 1990.

[887] Ibid. Xander Mellish, “Representing U.S. Values and Investments,” *South China Sunday Morning Post*, January 14, 1990.
[888] Terry Lautz, , “John Kamm: Negotiating Human Rights,” in Lautz, *Americans in China: Encounters with the People’s Republic* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), p.211.

By 1992, both the Bush Administration and Congress recognized that, despite significant measures taken to bolster Hong Kong's confidence and prosperity and to maintain strong bilateral ties with the soon-to-be former British colony, existing U.S. legislation was inadequate for addressing the post-1997 relationship. Concerns arose that under current laws, Washington might be compelled to engage with Beijing and Hong Kong on a "One Country, One System" basis, rather than recognizing their distinct legal and political systems. On the House floor, Representative Porter warned that "current law does not protect U.S. interests in Hong Kong. Under current law, Hong Kong and China will be treated simply as one nation after 1997. All laws that apply to China will then apply to Hong Kong. All treaties will treat Hong Kong the same as they do China. Hong Kong will be under China's immigration and trade quotas."[889] In response, together with Senator Mitch McConnell, Porter introduced the U.S.-Hong Kong Policy Act, which received broad support from the Bush Administration. The Act, rooted in the 1984 Joint Declaration between the United Kingdom and China, outlined U.S. policy towards Hong Kong in five key areas: bilateral relations, Hong Kong's participation in multilateral organizations, commerce, transportation, and cultural and educational exchanges. Notably, it excluded foreign relations and defense, which were explicitly designated as Chinese prerogatives under the Joint Declaration.

The U.S.-Hong Kong Policy Act sought to achieve two primary objectives. Firstly, it aimed to preserve Hong Kong's unique legal status under U.S. law following the 1997 handover. By doing so, the legislation sought to ensure the continuity of essential ties between the United States and Hong Kong, particularly in areas such as trade, travel, and diplomacy, while mitigating potential disruptions to these vital connections. Secondly, the legislation sought to affirm the commitment of both the U.S. government and the public to ensuring the faithful implementation of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration. In his presentation of the Act, Representative Porter emphasized its purpose to "encourage the Administration, Congress, and the private sector to deepen existing relations and explore new ones with Hong Kong." As Hong Kong became an essential economic and financial center, concerns emerged in Washington about the potential loss of such a strategic asset, not only to China but also to key allies. Japan's growing economic presence in Hong Kong played a significant role in these considerations. While American businesses voiced concerns about Hong Kong's future,

[889] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *U.S. Policy Toward Hong Kong Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, International Economic Policy and Trade, and International Operations*, 102nd Congress, 2nd Session, April 9, May 7, July 22, and August 5, 1992, p.18.

Japanese investment in the region increased substantially, totaling $3 billion between 1989 and 1991. By this time, Japan's cumulative investment had reached approximately $8 billion, surpassing that of the United States. Representative Porter emphasized the need to strengthen U.S. business confidence, arguing that such measures would allow American companies to plan more effectively for the future and potentially reduce the ongoing brain drain in Hong Kong.[890]

Despite signing in to law the Act, President Bush and officials within his administration, as well as American China analysts, seemed to be willing to convey the idea that Beijing had no interests in disrupting Hong Kong economic, administrative, legal, and social systems after the transition. "This increasingly sophisticated understanding of the importance of Hong Kong to the rest of their country has led Chinese leaders to accept the general principle that Hong Kong must remain prosperous and stable when it returns to Chinese sovereignty in 1997," argued in Congress Harry Harding, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. From the Chinese leadership's perspective, Hong Kong held a strategic significance in three primary areas. First, Hong Kong served as a major commercial and financial hub, facilitating trade for the entire PRC. Disruption in its ability to function as an *entrepôt* would have adverse consequences for China's economic objectives. Second, Hong Kong's role in channeling foreign investment into southern China, particularly in the special economic zone of the Guangdong Province, was critical for sustaining the region's rapid economic growth. The influx of capital and expertise from Hong Kong played a pivotal role in the transformation of the Pearl River Delta into a thriving industrial zone. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the smooth transition of Hong Kong back to Chinese sovereignty was seen as a potential blueprint for future reunification with Taiwan. If Hong Kong were to experience economic decline or political instability, it would severely undermine Beijing's broader geopolitical goals. "Peking is proposing that the concept of one country, two systems, as it will govern Hong Kong after 1997, will apply with some variation to Taiwan as well," anticipated Harding.[891]

In a May 1991 letter to President George H. W. Bush, former Secretary of State John C. Whitehead, who served under President Reagan, expressed a similar perspective on the

[890] Ibid. *Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations, Asian and Pacific Affairs, International Economic Policy and Trade, and International Operations*, April 9, May 7, July 22, and August 5, 1992.
[891] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Hong Kong's Reversion to China and Implications for U.S. Policy *Hearing Before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs*, 102nd Congress, 2nd Session, April 2, 1992, p.28.

unlikeness that China may adopt restrictive measures against Hong Kong's capitalist model. Whitehead acknowledged that "no one can yet say what the answer to the crucial question of the future of Hong Kong will be," but emphasized that investors remained willing to risk substantial capital, confident in the region's stability. The former Secretary of State attributed this confidence to several factors. He noted that many believed China would not undermine such a critical economic asset, especially given its ongoing shift toward market-oriented reforms. "This feeling is partly based on the belief that China will not want to kill a golden egg producer," wrote Whitehead. Furthermore, similar to Harding, he argued that Beijing viewed Hong Kong as a potential model – "a laboratory" in the words of Whitehead – to demonstrate to Taiwan that regional autonomy could coexist with broader unification under Chinese sovereignty. Lastly, he pointed to an increasing consensus about Hong Kong's visible success that had the potential to deter Beijing from taking actions that could harm its own interests. "Hong Kong serves as China's economic window to the world, and as the world's gateway to China," concluded Whitehead.[892]

Similarly, William H. Overholt, representing the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, articulated a viewpoint distinct from that of John Kamm, who had departed from the AmCham by 1992. Overholt emphasized China's supportive approach toward Hong Kong, asserting that "China has been extremely supportive" and has "scrupulously honored the Joint Declaration." His remarks aligned with a more mainstream perspective within the business community regarding China's commitment to the region. He pointed to significant Chinese investments in Hong Kong, including the acquisition of 20% of the local telephone company and a substantial stake in Cathay Pacific Airlines, as evidence of Beijing's confidence in the region's future. He argued, "if they thought they could get it free or at a greatly reduced price 5 years from now, they would not be investing this kind of money now." He further noted that Hong Kong had already achieved a high level of economic integration with mainland China. The region accounted for two-thirds of China's total foreign investment, exceeding $17 billion, and provided 80% of all investment in Guangdong Province. This investment sustained between 2 to 3 million workers in Guangdong, whom Overholt described as "roughly half the total industrial workforce in a province the size of France." Additionally, he observed a significant shift in discourse from concerns about a "brain drain" to discussions of a "brain

[892] Letter to President Bush from Former Secretary of State John C. Whitehead, May 17, 1991, GHWBPR, WHORM Subject File General, Category Code: CO034, Document Range: 233865 to 278043, China.

gain." While media reports frequently highlighted an annual outflow of 60,000 individuals, he remarked, "I have never seen a single article that addresses the 80,000 annual inflow."[893]

Despite widespread support for the U.S.-Hong Kong Policy Act, some experts raised concerns about its potential risks. David Lampton, President of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, emphasized the importance of maintaining clear boundaries to avoid any perception of challenging the sovereignty of either Britain or China over Hong Kong. He cautioned that any ambiguity in this respect could provoke adverse reactions from Beijing. Lampton also highlighted apprehensions among Hong Kong residents, who feared that excessive U.S. involvement might lead to unintended negative consequences. As he noted, there was a widespread concern in Hong Kong that "the 'loving embrace of the United States might kill them.'" Lampton further cautioned against transforming the legislation into a platform for expressing broader U.S. grievances regarding China's human rights, trade, or arms proliferation policies. He argued that such an approach could destabilize Hong Kong by antagonizing Beijing at a critical juncture, thereby threatening the delicate equilibrium necessary for a successful transition. He remarked, "if legislation that is well crafted, as I would consider this to be, at the outset of the legislative process becomes a Christmas tree upon which are hung the ornaments of our legitimate frustration with China's policies on human rights, trade, and weapons proliferation, we will mightily contribute to Hong Kong's insecurity."[894] A cautious and focused approach was needed to safeguard not only Hong Kong's difficult transition but also U.S. interests in Asia.

4.4 Morality and Commerce. The Clinton Administration's Impossible Gamble

J. Stapleton Roy was appointed as U.S. Ambassador to the People's Republic of China in 1991. Similar to his predecessor, James Lilley, Roy, a fluent Mandarin-speaker, was born in China and possessed a distinguished career in Asian affairs. His expertise was shaped by his prior role as Deputy Chief of Mission in Beijing from 1978 to 1981, during the pivotal period of formal diplomatic recognition between the United States and China in January 1979.[895] "I'm

[893] Ibid. *Hearing Before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs*, April 2, 1992, pp.38-39.
[894] Ibid. *Hearing Before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs*, April 2, 1992, p.22.
[895] J. Stapleton Roy, born in Nanjing in 1935, was the son of Andrew Tod Roy, a Presbyterian missionary and educator who remained in China until being expelled by the new Communist government in 1951. Roy received his formal education in the United States, where he obtained a Bachelor's degree in History from Princeton University and subsequently pursued advanced studies in Mongolian language, history, and culture at the University of Washington. Before his appointment as U.S. Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, he served as Ambassador to Singapore from October 1984 to October 1986, bringing extensive experience in Asian diplomatic relations to his later posts. See Terry Lautz, "J. Stapleton Roy: The Art of Diplomacy," in Lautz,

the only American ambassador who was appointed by a Republican administration and kept in office by a Democrat administration," he would proudly highlight reflecting on his experience as high ranking official in China.[896] Roy's extended tenure as ambassador across two administrations can be attributed to three key factors. First, his career as a professional diplomat rendered him a non-partisan figure, uniquely suited to a position requiring neutrality and discretion. Second, the tense state of U.S.-China relations during this period discouraged political appointees from pursuing the ambassadorship, while Beijing exhibited a marked distrust toward political figures. Roy's extensive diplomatic expertise and professional qualifications thus positioned him as a logical and credible choice to maintain continuity in the role following the 1992 elections. Finally, his re-appointment was supported by Winston Lord, a prominent conservative often aligned with the Republican Party, who served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs under the newly elected Democratic administration. Respected by several Democratic figures for his strong criticism of the Bush Administration's handling of post-Tiananmen relations with Beijing, Lord extended his support to Roy as a reciprocal gesture. This endorsement acknowledged Roy's prior assistance to Lord when he was serving as U.S. Ambassador to China and Roy was working at the State Department in the late 1980s.

During his tenure in China, Roy faced two distinct but equally complex political transitions. The first one was occurring in Beijing. Upon his return as ambassador, he observed a pronounced political divide, or "two-line struggle" within the PRC leadership. This internal conflict was characterized by one faction advocating a reversion to traditional socialist authoritarianism and another pushing for the continuation of reform and openness policies (refer to Chapter Two). The struggle reached a critical moment in early 1992 with Deng Xiaoping embarking on a "Southern Tour," during which Deng visited special economic zones to explicitly signal his endorsement of market-oriented reforms.[897] This act openly contradicted the conservative stance dominant in Beijing at the time. Although formally retired, Deng wielded considerable influence, drawing support from regional officials and entrepreneurs who prioritized economic development over ideological constraints and were driving market reforms within state-owned enterprises. By then, Deng's influence had become a fixture of

Americans in China: Encounters with the People's Republic (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 112-134.

[896] Interview with J. Stapleton Roy, U.S. Ambassador to China from 1991 to 1995, May 6, 2022.

[897] See Jonathan Chatwin, *The Southern Tour: Deng Xiaoping and The Fight for China's Future* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic/Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2024).

both political discourse and public sentiment.[898] Notably, the central press in Beijing initially refrained from reporting on the tour, and news of it emerged primarily through Hong Kong media and southern Chinese outlets, which the U.S. Embassy interpreted as a sign of intensifying political discord within the Chinese government.[899] As *The New York Times* observed, "this is widely expected to be a decisive year in Chinese politics, in part because this fall a party congress is to convene for the first time in five years. But the power struggles and prospects are exceedingly murky."[900] The ideological struggle reached its apex at the 14th Party Congress in the fall of 1992, where reformist forces decisively consolidated power, sidelining conservative hardliners. In a landmark address, General Secretary Jiang Zemin, in his role as the CCP's party leader, called for an intensified pace of economic reform, further integration with global markets, and the continued development of socialism with Chinese characteristics.[901] This outcome marked a transformative shift, setting China on a trajectory of accelerated economic expansion and signaling a robust commitment to the reform policies initiated under Deng Xiaoping's leadership.



Figure 44. Deng's Southern Tour Propaganda Poster, December 1992.
Photo credit: BG E15/292 (chineseposters.net).[902]

[898] Nicholas D. Kristof, "As Deng Calls for Reform, China Waits," *The New York Times*, April 26, 1992.
[899] "Not until March 30 did CCTV, China's national broadcasting station, report on Mr. Deng's January visit in Shenzhen in a 10-minute lead segment," reported *The New York Times*. See -, "China's Octogenarian Deng Shows New Gainsm," *The New York Times*, April 4, 1992.
[900] Ibid. Kristof, *New York Times*, April 26, 1992.
[901] Jiang Zemin's Report at 14th Party Congress, "Accelerating the Reform, the Opening to the Outside World and the Drive for Modernization, so as to Achieve Greater Successes in Building Socialism With Chinese Characteristics," October 12, 1992, available at Beijing Review, online at http://www.bjreview.com.cn/document/txt/2011-03/29/content_363504.htm (last accessed November 2024).
[902] The photo is cited in Andrew Peaple, "Jonathan Chatwin on the Significance of Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour," *The Wire China*, June 16, 2024.

The second key transformation was occurring back in Washington. In the latter months of his term, as George H. W. Bush campaigned for re-election, the president's stance toward China became notably more assertive. A significant development was the September 1992 authorization of one hundred fifty F-16 aircraft sales to Taiwan – an advanced military model prominently used in the Gulf War. This decision generated alarm within the Chinese government. While the move clearly served a domestic, and arguably hawkish, electoral purpose – particularly given that the F-16s were manufactured at the General Dynamics in Fort Worth, Texas – it also reflected a diminished apprehension about the potential repercussions of antagonizing China. However, Bush concurrently affirmed his commitment to the One-China policy, reiterating that the U.S. recognized the PRC as China's sole legitimate government.[903] A couple of months earlier, in New York, the Democratic National Convention nominated Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton for the presidency. At the Madison Square Garden, Clinton called for "an America that will never coddle tyrants, from Baghdad to Beijing," directly challenging the Bush Administration's moderate stance following the Tiananmen crackdown.[904] The convention itself saw an unprecedented foreign presence from Taiwan, and with delegates from Tibet nearly matching the number of representatives from China.[905] Two prominent exiled dissidents, Li Lu and Chai Ling, were invited to address the audience as "heroes of the world, fighting to bring democracy and freedom to their homeland, China." Li Lu passionately recounted the events of Tiananmen Square: "Our song of freedom went out all around the world. It was heard by millions, including many of you here tonight who share our dream. The old men who rule China sent the army to silence us, but the roar of tanks and machine guns can never crush dreams of freedom. Our song will not die." Establishing a symbolic link between the democratic aspirations of Chinese citizens and Americans, Li Lu concluded their address by introducing Aretha Franklin, who performed the U.S. National Anthem. He described it as "a song that inspires people everywhere," emphasizing the anthem's universal appeal and the enduring resonance of democratic ideals across borders.[906]

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[903] Remarks by President Bush at General Dynamics Fort Worth Division, September 2, 1992, *GDFW This Week*, vol. 6, no. 34, online at https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth1092191/m1/1/?q=%22~1~1%22~1 (last accessed October 2024).

[904] William J. Clinton, Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/220260 (last accessed November 2024).

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[906] Appeal for Democracy in China & National Anthem, July 14, 1992, C-SPAN, online at https://www.c-span.org/video/?27095-1/appeal-democracy-china-natl-anthem (last accessed October 2024).



Figure 45. Chinese dissidents Chai Ling (L) and Li Lu (R) at the Democratic Convention At the Madison Square Garden, New York, July 14, 1992. Video frame credit: C-SPAN.

Chinese students had become a focal point of engagement for the Democratic presidential candidate as he sought to position himself on U.S.-China relations issue during the 1992 election campaign. James Mann reported of a significant meeting in the fall of 1991 between Clinton and Zhao Haiqing, spokesperson for the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars (IFCSS). At the time, Zhao was a graduate student at Harvard University, where Clinton was scheduled to speak at the Kennedy School of Government. Prior to his address, Clinton arranged a private meeting with Zhao to discuss the tense relationship between Washington and Beijing, particularly the annual renewal of MFN status for China. During their hour-long conversation, Zhao criticized President Bush's policy of granting the commercial status to China without conditions and urged Clinton to advocate for attaching stringent human rights requirements to the renewal. He emphasized that conditionality could serve as leverage to compel the Chinese government to implement tangible improvements in its human rights practices. Zhao later observed that while Clinton's knowledge of China appeared limited, he was attentive and demonstrated a genuine willingness to understand the complexities of U.S.-China policy. At the Kennedy School event later that evening, Clinton engaged in a contentious exchange with former U.S. Ambassador to the PRC James Lilley, who challenged Clinton's

critical stance on Beijing. To deflect the debate, Clinton pointed to Zhao, seated in the audience, referring to him as an expert on the matter. "Zhao was astonished. A leading Democratic presidential candidate seemed to be courting him and deferring to him on China policy."[907]

The Democratic candidate's assertive rhetoric toward Beijing during the 1992 presidential campaign drew significant media attention, prompting widespread scrutiny and speculation. Major outlets questioned the credibility of his uncompromising stance, posing inquiries such as, "Does Clinton really mean it? How would he and a new Democratic administration conduct business with China? How tough would they be?" These questions reverberated across Washington and Beijing, reflecting heightened uncertainty about the future of U.S.-China relations. Amid this backdrop, *The Los Angeles Times* reported allegations that, despite Clinton's sharp criticisms of China's leadership – referring to them as "tyrants" and "butchers" – he had allegedly dispatched Richard Holbrooke, one of his foreign policy advisors, to China as an unofficial envoy. Holbrooke, a former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs under President Carter and a key figure in the 1979 diplomatic recognition of China, was supposedly sent to reassure Beijing of policy continuity under a potential Democratic administration. These claims, reportedly confirmed by Chinese dissidents in the United States and officials within the Bush Administration, suggested that Clinton's campaign rhetoric might not eventually translate into substantial policy shifts. Holbrooke, however, categorically denied the allegations, describing them as "totally false" and clarifying that his visit to China was undertaken solely in his professional capacity with the investment banking firm Lehman Brothers.[908]

In a confidential letter to Anthony Lake and Sandy Berger – both of whom would later serve as Clinton's National Security Advisor – Richard Holbrooke reported on his meeting with top Chinese leaders during his trip. While he made it clear that he "was not authorized to speak for the campaign or the candidate," he assured them that he "felt confident Clinton attached importance to good relations between the United States and China, and that, as President, he would seek to strengthen them." Despite aligning himself with Clinton's broader electoral discourse on China, Holbrooke – who characterized himself as "passionately pro-human rights" – contended that leveraging economic and commercial sanctions to advance openness and human rights was ultimately counterproductive. "The Chinese are aware that I

[907] Ibid. Mann, *About Face*, pp.160-161.
[908] James Mann, "Clinton's Tough China Talk Keeps Diplomats Guessing: Candidate's Adviser Denies Promising a Softer Position in Visit to Beijing," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 1992.

have been a public supporter of extending MFN. They were particularly interested in my explanation of why, despite this difference, I have strongly supported Clinton. I told them I was convinced his election would be in the long-term interest of closer Sino-American friendship because of his ability to revitalize the American economy, which is vitally important to all of East Asia, and give vigorous new leadership to the United States," he wrote. Reflecting on his discussions in China, Holbrooke emphasized that he was "even more convinced than before my trip that MFN is an important part of the astonishing economic boom now going on in China, a long-term impetus to liberalization and reform, and critically important to Hong Kong." He also noted, "for the first time, incidentally, the Taiwan leadership also supports MFN; Taiwan is gaining too much from the mainland's boom." While reaffirming that he was "not suggesting any change in Bill's position on China and MFN during the campaign," he warned that a Clinton administration could face an immediate challenge in Sino-American relations if it appeared to give a "blank-check commitment to support Congressional actions on MFN toward China." Given that a Clinton veto of a congressional motion on MFN was "almost unthinkable," Holbrooke stressed the importance of finding ways to avoid a public confrontation with Beijing. "That old phrase, private diplomacy, still has merit and will be essential before Congress puts Clinton on the spot."[909]

The controversy surrounding Holbrooke's visit sparked widespread speculation regarding Bill Clinton's true intentions toward China. While the campaign's rhetoric signaled a potential departure from the Bush Administration's approach, the rumored reassurances implied a pragmatic inclination toward continuity.[910] As this research illustrates, Clinton's initial two years in office were marked by a realistic approach, with only limited deviations from existing policy despite the strong rhetoric employed during his campaign. Economic factors soon became central to his foreign policy, as the president recognized that the deepening interdependencies between the United States and China could not – and should not – be jeopardized. Holbrooke's letter foreshadowed the new administration's reliance on personal diplomacy – an instrument that President Bush had struggled to employ effectively and, when he had attempted to do so, had encountered strong criticism. By alternating between public condemnation and private reassurances, Clinton sought to navigate the competing pressures of congressional and public demands for punitive measures and the broader strategic imperative

[909] "Visit to China," Letter to Anthony Lake and Sandy Berger from Dick Holbrooke, July 26, 1992, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Anthony Lake Papers, Box 10, Folder 9, Campaign File – China – 1992.
[910] Nicholas D. Kristof, "China Worried by Clinton's Linking of Trade to Human Rights," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1992.

of maintaining economic and diplomatic engagement with China. During the campaign, Clinton was strategically portrayed as a leader capable of bridging the past and the future. As Holbrooke conveyed to European and Asian partners, while both Bush and Clinton operated "within the great tradition of American internationalism that has shaped American foreign policy since Pearl Harbor," their post-Cold War outlooks diverged significantly. Whereas Bush was "trapped by his own past" and, in confronting new challenges, tended to "fall back on old and outmoded policies," Clinton was framed as a forward-looking leader who understood that "the future will be filled with problems that require new thinking, new policies, and new governmental machinery."[911]

Bill Clinton secured a decisive victory in the 1992 presidential election.[912] Upon assuming office, Clinton faced the complex task of crafting a coherent China policy amidst divergent perspectives within the Democratic Party. Three principal factions shaped the party's stance on China. The first consisted of officials from the Carter Administration who prioritized maintaining stable and cooperative relations with Beijing. The second included legislators such as Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell (D-ME) and Representative Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), whose policy views were largely shaped by the Tiananmen Square crackdown and who supported a sanctions-oriented approach. The third faction was represented by labor leaders. Rooted in Cold War-era advocacy for assertive policies toward the Soviet Union, this group now sought to leverage U.S. influence to promote democratic reforms in China.[913] Eventually, Clinton's appointments to his foreign policy and national security team projected a preference for stability and continuity, reflecting an effort to reconcile these internal divisions while addressing the broader challenges of managing U.S.-China relations during a period of significant geopolitical and economic transition. As *The Los Angeles Times* noted, the new appointments mirrored "the outline of [the president's] emerging foreign policy: long on reassurance and continuity – and more cautious about innovation than candidate Clinton sometime seemed to be." Clinton himself – often described as having "no evident desire to devote more time and energy than necessary to international issues" – demonstrated a

[911] Letter to Anthony Lake, Sandy Berger, and Nancy Soderberg from Dick Holbrooke, July 30, 1992, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Anthony Lake Papers, Box 10, Folder 10, Congressional File – 1991, November – 1992, August.
[912] John Dumbrell, "Internationalism Challenged: Foreign Policy Issues in the 1992 Presidential Election," in Andrew Johnstone and Andrew Priest (eds.), *U.S. Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy. Candidates, Campaigns, and Global Politics from FDR to Bill Clinton* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2017).
[913] Ibid. Mann, *The Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 1992.

restrained approach, showing "little appetite for significant departures from prior policies."[914] Simultaneously, he exhibited a tendency to retain control over responsibilities, making delegation unlikely.[915]

The officials selected to manage U.S.-China policy in his administration were seasoned experts with extensive prior experience in the field. Warren Christopher, appointed Secretary of State, and Anthony Lake, named National Security Advisor, had both served in the Carter Administration's State Department, where they were actively involved in the normalization of diplomatic relations with China – a process shaped by a fundamentally different geopolitical context prior to the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Both were widely characterized as pragmatic rather than ideologically driven, and their history of collaboration suggested the potential to alleviate the traditional bureaucratic rivalries between the State Department and the National Security Council. Analyzing the composition of Clinton's cabinet, Thomas L. Friedman, columnist for *The New York Times*, noted that the president had prioritized appointing highly skilled "musicians" to key economic and foreign policy roles, while reserving for himself the roles of "composer and conductor." Clinton's approach emphasized the centralization of authority, with the president assuming a direct and active role as the principal strategist, spokesperson, and final arbiter in policy development and decision-making. While not without precedent, this leadership style diverged from that of his predecessor, George H. W. Bush, who had delegated significant responsibility for foreign policy formulation and execution to key advisors such as James Baker and Brent Scowcroft.[916] Although often described as the "China Desk officer" due to his tendency to retain control over key decisions related to China, Bush placed considerable value on the counsel of Scowcroft, Eagleburger, and Sununu (refer to Chapter Two).[917] For Ambassador Roy, adapting to the new Administration's style presented several challenges. "While I was familiar with the personnel in the Bush Administration, I lacked similar rapport with members of the Clinton team. Consequently, I had to exercise considerable caution in my interactions," Roy recalled. The

[914] Doyle McManus, "Security Team Reflects Emergence of Caution," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 1992.
[915] On the Clinton presidency, see, among others, Nigel Hamilton, *Bill Clinton: Mastering the Presidency* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007); Michael Nelson, Barbara A. Perry, and Russell L. Riley, *42: Inside the Presidency of Bill Clinton* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Michael Tomasky, *Bill Clinton. The American Presidents* (New York, NY: Times Books, 2017).
[916] As outlined in Chapter Two, the management of the China dossier remained primarily under the authority of President Bush; nevertheless, Scowcroft, Eagleburger, and Sununu were deeply engaged and exerted significant influence in shaping the president's direction.
[917] Thomas L. Friedman, "The Transition. Clinton's Cabinet Choices Put Him at Center, Balancing Competing Factions," *The New York Times*, December 27, 1992.

stylistic differences between the two administrations were pronounced. Whereas the Bush Sr.-Scowcroft team had maintained a steady, pragmatic approach to China, Roy characterized the early Clinton Administration as marked by ambivalence, inconsistency, and, at times, diplomatic missteps.[918]



Figure 46. President Bill Clinton and the National Security Council, May 1, 1993.
Photo credit: Jeffrey Markowitz/Sygma via Getty Images.

As had been the case for George H. W. Bush, by late spring President Bill Clinton would confront the critical decision of whether to renew China's trade privileges. Under the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, the president was required to issue an annual waiver to extend MFN status, subject to congressional veto. Before the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, these waivers had been largely routine. However, in the aftermath of the crackdown, Congress became increasingly assertive in shaping U.S. policy toward China. Under the Bush Administration, legislators passed measures conditioning MFN renewal on issues such as human rights, non-proliferation, and trade. While President Bush vetoed these bills, the House attempted to override the veto, though the Senate ultimately sustained it on two occasions (see Chapter Two). During his campaign, Clinton expressed support for legislation that would similarly condition MFN renewal on these same concerns. A month after the elections, Winston Lord

[918] Ibid. Interview with J. Stapleton Roy, May 2022.

outlined the strategic considerations shaping the president's decision. "The basic tradeoff is between Presidential flexibility and Congressional resistance," he observed. Against the backdrop of a political transition in Beijing, he identified the Clinton Administration's central challenge as striking a balance between "preserving the foundations for longer term ties while dealing soberly with an unsavory government." He argued for a policy framework that would navigate between what he described as the Bush Administration's "coddling and double-standards" and the "strawmen of isolation and insolence." Instead, he advocated for a more "nuanced, balanced policy" that would robustly promote American ideals without jeopardizing key economic, political, and security interests. In deliberating the conditions to be attached to MFN renewal in 1993 – whether by endorsing congressional legislation or preempting Capitol Hill with an executive order – Clinton was reminded that, as Lord put it, "the devil is in the details, [namely] timing and the nature of conditions." The administration was advised to adopt a "middle course of thorough conditional extension," justified by "the strong arguments against both extremes." More broadly, Clinton was urged to ensure that U.S.-China relations remained on stable footing while maintaining a measured approach toward what Lord characterized as an "unsavory government."[919]

In the initial weeks of its tenure, the Democratic Administration built communication channels with the Chinese leadership, articulating "a core list of U.S. demands" designed to secure improvements in critical areas of concern. Senior U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Christopher, Ambassador Roy, and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Lord, undertook diplomatic efforts to communicate these concerns to their Chinese counterparts, seeking tangible commitments to address U.S. priorities. However, in a memorandum dated May 21, 1993, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake characterized China's response to U.S. demands as "modest," acknowledging limited positive actions but emphasizing that these measures "fall short of the kind of significant, visible progress" necessary to meet the benchmarks articulated by President Clinton during his 1992 presidential campaign. The memorandum proposed that MFN status be extended for the current year, 1993, with its renewal in the subsequent year, 1994, contingent upon measurable advancements by China in key areas of human rights. Lake's memorandum also emphasized the necessity of balancing human rights concerns with the broader strategic and economic interests of the United States, noting that "pushing China to improve its human rights, non-proliferation, and

[919] "China – The MFN Issue," Paper prepared by Winston Lord, December 3, 1992, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Anthony Lake Papers, Box 10, Folder 9, Campaign File – China – 1992.

trade performance must be balanced with the adverse consequences of isolating China." Isolation, it warned, could "cut against political reform or unduly damage U.S. interests." The memorandum further highlighted China's growing economic significance, asserting that if reforms continued at their current pace, China's economy could "grow at a roughly 9% annual rate," positioning it to become "the third largest economy in the world by the year 2000" behind the U.S. and Japan. Additionally, China's cooperation on global issues, such as the North Korean nuclear program and its role in the United Nations Security Council, was seen as crucial to U.S. interests. The challenge ahead for the Clinton Administration, as outlined in the memorandum, was to craft an MFN policy that would press China to make "real progress" on human rights while acknowledging the country's "strategic and economic importance."[920]

In light of deliberations among key government agencies – the report mentioned the State Department, Department of Defense (DoD), Department of the Treasury, Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), and Department of Commerce (DoC) – the president was advised to extend MFN status through an Executive Order rather than allow Congress to pass binding legislation on the matter. "Pursuing conditions by Executive Order not only increases your flexibility but also takes this out of a legislative arena that tends to heighten differences between Congress and the White House and presents China with a divided U.S government they can exploit," the memorandum recommended. Paraphrasing, the recommendation was to employ the same strategy as Clinton's predecessor, President Bush, but to act preemptively. Vetoing legislation from a Democrat-led Congress would likely prove politically untenable, particularly given the eagerness of Republicans to undermine the new president. As for Capitol Hill, the memorandum outlined the legislative dynamics surrounding the renewal of China's MFN trading status, noting a general willingness among key congressional leaders to support President Clinton's balanced approach. It observed that "Senator Mitchell and Congresswoman Pelosi, who lead the Senate and House efforts, respectively, privately have indicated a willingness to accept executive versus legislative conditions, and to accept more moderate conditions than those contained in past Mitchell/Pelosi legislation." While the proposed Executive Order aligned largely with the human rights conditions acceptable to both leaders, the language was intentionally made more general to enhance its practicality: "We have made some of their language more general where specific actions they call are unlikely to be

[920] "China MFN," Memorandum for the President from Anthony Lake and Robert Rubin, May 21, 1993, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, National Security Council, AO/Box Number 3103, China [2].

achievable." The memorandum acknowledged that "Mitchell probably would accept the somewhat more general language," while Pelosi's agreement was less assured, necessitating further negotiation and dialogue. Moreover, the memorandum highlighted the broader congressional inclination to use MFN as a tool for leveraging reform rather than outright revocation. It noted that many lawmakers, who had supported MFN conditionality under the Bush Administration, were now looking to Clinton for leadership in crafting a more balanced policy. The document concluded with an optimistic assessment of the potential for bipartisan unity: "We believe there is the opportunity to unite a wide spectrum of Democratic factions, enunciating a balanced policy and overcoming the president's annual China MFN confrontation with Congress that characterized the Bush years. […] On balance, we think the package will present you as being tough, but responsible; as determined to achieve tangible results."[921]

In addition to Congress, the Clinton Administration faced the challenge of addressing the competing priorities of two key constituencies in its deliberations over China's MFN status. Since 1990, the business community had strongly opposed the revocation of MFN, cautioning that such an action would endanger "$7.5 billion in annual U.S. merchandise exports to China and the estimated 170,000 jobs associated with that." Moreover, they highlighted potential repercussions for Hong Kong, which facilitated approximately 70% of China's trade, as well as for South China's economically dynamic regions, considered pivotal advocates for liberalization within the country. In contrast, Chinese student organizations and human rights advocacy groups contended that robust conditions tied to MFN status were the only effective mechanism to pressure Beijing into substantive reform. These groups asserted that the U.S. market's economic significance to China would force the Chinese government to prioritize human rights improvements under the threat of market exclusion. While acknowledging the inherent tension between these constituencies, the NSC admitted that its proposed approach would likely fall short of fully satisfying either side. Nonetheless, the memorandum expressed confidence that both groups "may view it as an acceptable compromise." The Department of State concluded that, "if the Congressional consultations are successful, we recommend you announce your China MFN policy next week, flanked by Congressional supporters who had previously been on both sides of this issue. This would demonstrate that we now have a unified

[921] Ibid. "China MFN," Memorandum for the President from Lake and Rubin, May 21, 1993.

American policy toward China, not competing Congressional and Executive policies as has been the case since 1989."[922]

On May 27, 1993, President Clinton issued an Executive Order extending China's Most-Favored Nation status for an additional year, making future renewals contingent upon measurable progress in specific human rights areas. This marked the first instance in nearly fifteen years since MFN status was initially granted to the PRC that its extension was explicitly tied to improvements in human rights. The Executive Order mandated progress in two areas: freedom of emigration and compliance with a U.S.-China prison labor Memorandum of Understanding. The Order also required China to make "overall significant progress in five areas of human rights: begin adhering to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights; releasing/accounting for political and religious prisoners; humane treatment of prisoners/prison access; protecting the distinctive heritage and culture of Tibet; and permitting international radio and TV broadcasting.[923] Additionally, unlike various legislative proposals, the Executive Order "delinked" MFN from proliferation and market access issues. In his public address, President Clinton remarked the significance of the newly unified stance on China policy, which replaced the previous divisions between the Executive Branch and Congress. "Starting today," Clinton remarked, "the United States will speak with one voice on China policy. We no longer have an Executive Branch policy and a Congressional policy. We have an American policy." Despite the persistent concerns regarding China's political repression, arms proliferation, violations of religious freedoms, and unfair trade practices, Clinton recognized China's indispensable role in U.S. foreign policy. He described China as "the world's most populous state, the fastest-growing major economy, and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council," emphasizing its strategic significance and active involvement in the global community. Clinton further suggested that certain ongoing structural changes – such as technological advancements, the diffusion of information, and the rise of the middle class – could potentially foster greater political freedoms in China. Expressing cautious optimism regarding the consequential relationship between democracy and market reforms, Clinton remarked: "We are hopeful that China's process of development and economic reform will be accompanied by greater political freedom. In some ways, this process has begun. An emerging Chinese middle class points the antennae of new televisions towards Hong Kong to pick up

[922] Ibid. "China MFN," Memorandum for the President from Lake and Rubin, May 21, 1993.
[923] William J. Clinton, Executive Order 12850 – Conditions for Renewal of Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China in 1994. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/227761 (last accessed October 2024).

broadcasts of CNN. Cellular phones and fax machines carry implicit notions of freer communications."[924]

Winston Lord described the Executive Order as "a clear departure, a much firmer policy" than that of the previous administration under President George H. W. Bush. Having rejoined the State Department after a four-year absence in government roles, Lord emphasized the shift in approach. Despite these efforts, media skepticism persisted regarding the perceived assertiveness of the policy. First, the Executive Order allowed the Chinese leadership an additional year to demonstrate progress on the outlined conditions. Second, in contrast to the legislative initiatives reintroduced by Senator Mitchell and Representative Pelosi – whose bills the president successfully persuaded them to withdraw – the Executive Order lacked the binding legal authority that would have codified these conditions into law. Third, while the Executive Order required the secretary of state to report on China's "significant progress" toward meeting these conditions, it did not obligate the president to adhere to the secretary's recommendations. During a press conference, Lord attempted to clarify this point, asserting that the president "is bound by his judgment, and that of the secretary of state of whether [the conditions] have been met." A journalist, however, pressed further, noting that although he was "bound by his judgment," the president "is not bound by the conditions, or by the recommendations of the secretary." The media also questioned the alignment of the Executive Order with President Clinton's campaign rhetoric. In response, Lord articulated the Administration's rationale: "What we're trying to do is strike a balance between firm, credible goals, but ones we think the Chinese should, in good conscience, be able to achieve in the course of the next year. Our effort here is to make as much progress as possible." Lord further emphasized the consistency of the Administration's approach by pointing to the bipartisan support received: "This alignment is evident, for example, in the enthusiastic endorsement from Senator Mitchell and Congresswoman Pelosi, both of whom joined the president in supporting this policy direction during this morning's event."[925]

On May 28, 1993, President Clinton formalized an Executive Order on China's MFN status. The high-profile signing ceremony, attended by influential political figures such as Mitchell and Pelosi, as well as representatives from Chinese dissident groups, human rights

[924] Statement by the President on Most Favored Nation Status for China, May 28, 1993, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary.

[925] Press Briefing by Assistant Secretary Winston Lord, May 28, 1993, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary.

advocates like Asia Watch, and major business interests such as the U.S.-China Business Council, appeared to convey a unified front. As Lord commented, there was a "center of gravity, a sense coalescing around the president that this is a firm policy, it's realistic, it can be effective."[926] However, *The New York Times* observed that this appearance masked a "false consensus," with each faction interpreting the Executive Order through the lens of its distinct objectives. For liberal Democrats, the order signified a meaningful pressure mechanism on China's human rights practices, while the business sector saw the order's language as ambiguous enough to minimize actual trade repercussions. According to the *Times*, this marked a "downward spiral" in U.S.-China relations, prompting calls for a recalibrated approach – one that appeared firm yet retained interpretative flexibility.[927] *The Washington Post* analyses attributed to Clinton a nuanced balancing act on three critical fronts. First, the Executive Order allowed the president to recalibrate his position without fully abandoning his campaign commitments. By placing China "on probation," Clinton conveyed a strategic signal: while acknowledging China's economic role, he rejected the notion that economic growth alone would naturally lead to political liberalization.[928] Second, the Order's flexibility preempted further congressional intervention by reinforcing existing commitments rather than adding new demands, a strategy characterized as "pragmatic" given the complexities of Sino-American trade relations. Commentators noted that this approach might "keep congressional showboating out of the issue" and dilute the influence of protectionist forces within Congress.[929] Third, the Executive Order represented an effort to balance the competing demands of human rights advocates and the business community. Asia Watch, while recognizing the Administration's dedication to human rights, critiqued the vague language of the standards, noting that it could open "major loopholes." In contrast, the U.S.-China Business Council, although acknowledging the president's aim to secure economic ties, expressed reservations, contending that the order's conditional language introduced an "element of risk" that could complicate commercial relations.[930] *The Wall Street Journal* echoed these reservations, noting that "continued favorable trade treatment also depends – in practice more than law – on what kind of trading partner China proves to be, and here, too, the prospects are murky." The publication highlighted a persistent issue in the bilateral relationship: despite several major economic

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[927] -, "Clinton and China: How Promise Self-Destructed," *The New York Times*, May 29, 1994.

[928] Jim Hoagland, "To Bring Change to China," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1993.

[929] -, "U.S.-China: Best to Keep on Trading but Clinton also Asks for Real Reform by Beijing," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 1993.

[930] Robert S. Greenberger, "Rights Groups, Business Give Mild Praise to Clinton Decision on China MFN Status," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 1, 1993.

agreements with the United States, China had a track record of inconsistent enforcement of trade rules. This unpredictability in regulatory adherence raised concerns about the stability and reliability of future trade interactions, adding an additional layer of complexity to the U.S.-China economic relationship.[931]



Figure 47. U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitchell (D-ME), President Clinton, and Representative Pelosi (D-CA) on May 28, 1993, at the signing of the Executive Order concerning MFN to the PRC.
Photo credit: White House/Consolidated News Picture/*Getty Images.*

In anticipation of President Clinton's announcement regarding China's MFN status in May 1993, Ambassador Roy was tasked with communicating the Administration's decision to Chinese officials as a preemptive measure to mitigate potential diplomatic tensions. In his meeting with Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Qian Qichen, Roy articulated the revised conditions, framing them as a mechanism to provide Beijing with greater clarity regarding the Administration's policy priorities. While acknowledging that the linkage between MFN status and human rights could provoke a defensive response on the Chinese side, he emphasized that pursuing reforms transcended compliance with U.S. conditions and aligned with China's broader national interest. After a prolonged silence, Qian cautiously indicated a tentative understanding of the new diplomatic terms. As time passed, Roy, however, faced significant challenges due to the ambiguity in the formulation of the Executive Order. He noted that Chinese officials, who favored clarity, were uneasy with the undefined language. The

[931] Robert Keatley, "World Economy: Trade Rights, as Well as Civil Rights, Will Factor into China's MFN Status," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 4, 1993.

Administration's adoption of the ambiguous phrase "significant progress" was a strategic decision aimed at securing the benefit of the doubt and garnering support from a Democrat-led Congress, as well as from various third-party organizations involved in the policymaking process. Nevertheless, this vagueness created substantial complications for Roy's negotiation efforts, as it introduced uncertainty regarding the specific expectations and thresholds for compliance that could be effectively communicated during discussions with Chinese officials.

Ambassador Roy later remarked on the significant challenges posed by the lack of clear guidance from Washington, stating, "I could not get any guidance from Washington," as divisions within the Clinton Administration impeded the formulation of a cohesive negotiating strategy. "In order to negotiate with the Chinese, I had to be able to say, 'we will do this, we will do that,'" he explained, yet "the disagreements in Washington were so strong that they couldn't send me a coherent message on how to negotiate the accepted conditions."[932] Key factions within the Administration, particularly in the National Economic Council and the Defense Department, remained unconvinced of the merit of linking human rights conditions to trade, perceiving this approach as counterproductive and likely to provoke unnecessary antagonism from Beijing. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Roy voiced skepticism regarding the Administration's strategy. Asked whether China was likely to fulfill the conditions outlined in the Executive Order, he responded candidly and with characteristic straightforwardness: "I can't answer those questions, because the Administration is going to have to define what it views as significant progress."[933] Roy, a longstanding critic of congressional interference in the formulation of foreign policy – particularly regarding China, a country he understood deeply – was highly critical of the Administration's reliance on legislative pressure. He argued that linking favorable trade terms to human rights improvements was an "abnormal" approach, unlikely to yield substantive results. The ambassador emphasized the importance of diplomatic engagement as a more effective tool for encouraging reform in China. Reflecting on the country's trajectory, he observed, "you can't avoid the conclusion that the last fifteen years are the best fifteen years in China's modern history." For Roy, achieving further progress, including improvements in human rights,

[932] Ibid. Interview with J. Stapleton Roy, May 2022.
[933] Patrick E. Tyler, "Rights in China Improve, Envoy Says," *The New York Times*, January 1, 1994. The interview is cited in James Mann, *About Face*, p.296.

necessitated sustained and constructive diplomatic dialogue rather than the imposition of punitive trade measures.[934]

As estimated by Roy, the Executive Order did not achieve its objectives, and Sino-U.S. relations further deteriorated between mid-1993 and early 1994. Beyond the contentious debates over MFN status, China's transfer of M-11 missile technology to Pakistan, a clear violation of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), prompted the Administration to impose sanctions on satellite exports and related technologies.[935] This trajectory was anticipated in the May 1993 NSC memorandum, which warned: "A formal finding of violation would be significant, because it would subject China to severe retaliation. U.S. law provides sanctions which could prohibit as much as $2-3 billion in potential U.S. exports to China annually over the next two years." The memorandum put the accent on the interconnected nature of the MFN issue and the MTCR violation, advising that any MFN decision "should be made in the context of this evolving, parallel development." While advocating for robust U.S. action to address the violation, the memorandum also emphasized the importance of flexibility in designing retaliatory measures to "minimize harm to U.S. economic interests."[936] Although the sanctions were framed as a necessary response to safeguard national security, they intensified tensions between Beijing and Washington. Domestically, these measures provoked backlash, particularly from California's high-technology sector, which faced significant economic repercussions due to the export restrictions.[937]

For the first time since his election, Clinton faced substantial resistance from the American business lobby, illustrating the complexities of balancing a firm policy toward China with the competing demands of domestic economic and political interests. This industry, despite its

[934] Ibid. Tyler, *The New York Times*, January 1, 1994.
[935] Norman Kempster and Rone Tempest, "U.S. Imposes Sanctions on China, Pakistan Over Missile Deal: Arms Technology: Export of Satellite Gear to Beijing is Banned. Both Asian Nations Deny Violating Controls," *The Los Angeles Times*, August 26, 1993.
[936] Ibid. "China MFN," Memorandum for the President from Lake and Rubin, May 21, 1993.
[937] At the press conference in May 1993, where he announced the renewal of China's MFN status along with new human rights conditions, President Clinton emphasized that while trade and arms control issues were not directly addressed in the Executive Order, his administration would continue to enforce existing U.S. laws on these matters. As an example, he specifically referenced the issue of the M-11 missiles, stating: "The Administration is now examining reports that China has shipped M-11 ballistic missiles to Pakistan. If true, such action would violate China's commitment to observe the guidelines and parameters of the Missile Technology Control Regime. Existing U.S. law provides for strict sanctions against nations that violate these guidelines. We have made our concerns on the M-11 issue known to the Chinese on numerous occasions. They understand the serious consequences of missile transfers under U.S. sanctions law. If we determine that China has, in fact, transferred M-11 missiles or related equipment in violation of its commitments, my Administration will not hesitate to act." Ibid. Statement by the President on Most Favored Nation Status for China, May 28, 1993.

historical alignment with the Republican Party, had notably shifted its support to the Arkansas governor during the 1992 presidential campaign. This realignment was influenced by dissatisfaction with President Bush's economic policies and Clinton's consistent advocacy for pro-business centrism while serving as governor of Arkansas. *The New York Times* reported that in the months leading up to the 1992 election, prominent technology executives, including Apple Computer's Chairman John Sculley, voiced dissatisfaction with the Republican Administration's approach, particularly Bush's failure to enforce trade laws against foreign competitors and his reluctance to support domestic industries against foreign-subsidized rivals. At a dinner, "the executives expressed a general frustration with the economic policies of President Bush and […] ultimately discussed something most of these lifelong Republicans never thought they would: supporting a Democrat, Bill Clinton, in the Presidential election." Sculley, reflecting on his decision, remarked, "I am still a Republican, but I am voting for Bill Clinton because I don't believe America's industries can survive four more years of President Bush."[938]

During his campaign, Clinton actively engaged in private discussions with prominent business leaders to shape a national technology policy, demonstrating a strategic alignment with the priorities of this influential constituency. By emphasizing technological innovation as a cornerstone of America's economic revitalization, he signaled a commitment to fostering growth and competitiveness in a rapidly evolving global economy. As detailed by *The Washington Post*, his proposals included establishing a nationwide network of more than hundred fifty technology centers aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized manufacturers, increasing federal funding for research and development, introducing tax incentives for purchasing advanced production equipment, and reforming antitrust laws to permit greater collaboration among U.S. companies. Clinton's vision was partially informed "by a 1987 trip to northern Italy, where small manufacturers served by technology information centers produce a variety of high-quality goods for export."[939] His election was thus widely regarded as a pivotal moment for the federal innovation agenda, positioning the high-technology sector as integral to U.S. economic recovery and global competitiveness. "Arkansas may be better known for chicken processing than data processing, but there's no question that

[938] Calvin Sims, "Silicon Valley Takes a Partisan Leap of Faith," *The New York Times*, October 29, 1992. For a comprehensive account of the history of U.S. neoliberalism, see Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
[939] Daniel Southerland, "For Clinton's High-Tech Plan, Corporate Cheer," *The Washington Post*, September 16, 1992.

President-elect Bill Clinton [is expected] to set an agenda that swiftly reshapes the federal innovation infrastructure," remarked *The Los Angeles Times* with a touch of irony.[940] Nevertheless, the sanctions imposed on satellite exports to China appeared to conflict with the broader goals of Clinton's innovation-focused agenda.

Among the most vocal critics was Hughes Aircraft Company, a prominent satellite manufacturer based in Southern California. The company initiated a concerted lobbying effort directed at various U.S. government agencies, as well as the president, in an attempt to reverse or mitigate the impact of these sanctions. "A few weeks ago, President Clinton opened his mail to find what is described as a 'blistering' personal letter from one of his past supporters: C. Michael Armstrong, chairman and chief executive of Hughes Aircraft Co," reported *The Los Angeles Times*.[941] Hughes contended that the imposed sanctions adversely impacted its competitive position within the global satellite industry. The company warned that sanctions would "seriously affect the competitive posture of the U.S. satellite industry" and lead to layoffs, as it stood to lose both immediate and long-term contracts in China. In a letter addressed to, among other, Vice President Al Gore, Secretary of State Christopher, and the Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, Armstrong wrote that "it would be ironic, and unfortunate, if the sanctions worked to the detriment of the U.S. satellite industry and to benefit of its European and Japanese competition who are not similarly constrained. We respectfully request that you not let this happen."[942]

A White Paper issued by Hughes illustrated the adverse effects of U.S. sanctions on the company's global competitiveness, cautioning that European manufacturers, not subject to similar regulatory constraints, were well-positioned to seize market dominance. The Paper emphasized that Hughes had exported 70 satellites worth $5 billion in recent years and cautioned that sanctions would "force buyers, wishing to launch from China, to buy from European suppliers," potentially resulting in a permanent loss of market share. The document further noted that European competitors had reassured Chinese buyers of no licensing issues, while U.S. sanctions risked derailing Hughes' negotiations for three satellites valued at $250 million, forcing immediate layoffs. "If exports licenses are not granted, the impact on Hughes

[940] Michael Schrage, "Clinton to Tap Technology's Power," *The Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 1992.
[941] James Mann, "Executives Press Clinton to Smooth U.S.-China Ties," *The Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1993.
[942] Letter to Vice President Al Gore et. al. by Hughes Chief Executive Officer C. Michael Armstrong, September 22, 1993, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, Office of the Press Secretary, 2011-0587-F, China [MFN – Most Favored Nation] [2].

of the sanctions is immediate and severe," warned the Paper, as China was the "largest prospective foreign market" for the U.S. The company anticipated the broader consequences, asserting that such measures would "devastate the competitive posture of the U.S. satellite industry," harm the U.S. balance of payments, and exacerbate economic challenges in Southern California, which "already absorbed almost 30 percent of all U.S. jobs losses over the last two years!" The Paper finally argued that sanctions would not only harm California's economy but also disrupt its ability to foster positive engagement with China. It stated that its satellite systems were "transmitting western news and video programs and enhancing free communications" in China, contributing to the country's liberalization.[943] Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) echoed these concerns, warning Secretary Christopher that the sanctions jeopardized "more than 3,000 high-technology jobs" in California and highlighting the Department of State's failure to secure similar commitments from other countries. She concluded, "Chinese will simply purchase these same satellites elsewhere."[944]

Tensions reached a new high when American officials detained and inspected the Chinese merchant vessel *Yinhe* on suspicion that it was transporting chemical weapons to Iran – an allegation that was ultimately disproven.[945] Additionally, China's refusal to cancel a long-scheduled underground nuclear test despite appeals from the Clinton Administration added to the strained relationship. Simultaneously, in Congress, Representative Tom Lantos (D-CA), with the support of Senators Bill Bradley and Dennis DeConcini, introduced resolutions urging the U.S. representative to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to oppose Beijing's bid to host the 2000 Summer Olympics. Bradley argued that the Chinese leadership sought to use the Olympics to divert international attention from its human rights record, stating that "by associating itself with the positive symbols of the Olympic movement, the Chinese leadership seeks to erase the memories of Tiananmen Square and divert attention from its human rights record."[946] Richard Decker of Human Rights Watch echoed this sentiment, asserting that "the images of wanton killing and cruel imprisonment will be replaced by images of friendly athletic

[943] "China Sanctions and the Hughes Aircraft Company," September 1993, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, Office of the Press Secretary, 2011-0587-F, China [MFN – Most Favored Nation] [2].
[944] Letter to Secretary of State Warren M. Christopher by Senator Dianne Feinstein, September 16, 1993, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, Office of the Press Secretary, 2011-0587-F, China [MFN – Most Favored Nation] [2].
[945] See Allen S. Whiting, "Chinese Nationalism and Foreign Policy After Deng," *The China Quarterly*, vol.142 (1995): pp.295–316. See also Guangqiu Xu, "The Chinese Anti-American Nationalism in the 1990s," *Asian Perspective*, vol.22, no.2 (1998): pp.193-218.
[946] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Commerce, Sciences, and Transportation, *S. Res. 117 and S. Res. 124, Prohibition of the Olympic Games in Beijing Hearing before the Committee on Commerce, Sciences, and Transportation*, 103rd Congress, 1st Session, July 15, 1993, p.4.

competition" despite the lack of improvement in China's human rights practices. Decker emphasized that hosting the Olympics would bolster the Chinese government's international and domestic standing without prompting any substantive reform.[947] The controversy was further heightened by Beijing's nomination of Chen Xitong, former mayor of Beijing during the Tiananmen crackdown, to lead the Olympic bid. During a congressional hearing on Capitol Hill, Yalai Zhang, a visiting scholar at the University of Minnesota and former competitive swimmer, testified about losing his leg to gunfire from martial law troops during the Tiananmen crackdown. Zhang referenced other victims, such as Fang Zheng, a student at Beijing Athletic College whose legs were crushed by a tank while he attempted to flee the square. In response to the congressional debate, Chinese officials criticized the U.S. Congress involvement as an unjustified intrusion into IOC affairs, arguing that the Committee, as an independent body, should function impartially and be free from external political influence. In Beijing, the Chinese government expressed strong displeasure with the U.S. position, and when the 2000 Olympic Games were eventually awarded to Sydney, the leadership of the CCP placed the blame for this outcome on American interference.[948]

4.5 The Unescapable Engagement. Charting China's *Terra Incognita*

"Fundamentally, this is an era of change," remarked National Security Advisor Anthony Lake in a December 1993 speech at the Council on Foreign Relations think tank. He characterized the post-Cold War period as "an uncharted area, a terra incognita" that, despite its uncertainties, presented "opportunities for creativity that come with change." Lake observed a global shift, highlighting the rise of America's core principles – democracy and markets – following decades of Cold War confrontation. The Secretary of State identified two forces shaping the world: integration, marked by the rapid exchange of information and capital, and fragmentation, driven by resistance to globalization. While integration helped to foster economic and political openness, it also caused insecurity as it limited national control over economic concerns. To address these dynamics, the Clinton Administration's "strategy of enlargement" focused on four components: strengthening democratic alliances, consolidating democracy in key states, countering hostility to democratic values, and pursuing humanitarian and conflict-resolution efforts. Regarding China, Lake emphasized a strategy of conditional engagement: "A prosperous, stable China is clearly in our interest. That is why we have

[947] Ibid. *Hearing before the Committee on Commerce, Sciences, and Transportation*, July 15, 1993, p.21.
[948] Alan Riding, "2000 Olympics Go to Sydney in Surprise Setback for China," *The New York Times*, September 24, 1993.

launched a process of wider engagement with China as we pursue our continuing concerns over human rights, trade, and nonproliferation."[949] Engagement – whether constructive, collaborative, or cooperative and as a tool of enlargement, capitalism, and democracy – became a pivotal concept in U.S.-China relations, marking a shift from the confrontational approach that had yielded limited progress.[950] Under the Clinton Administration, bilateral ties with Beijing had largely faltered, with certain issues, such as arms proliferation, experiencing further deterioration. The election of Jiang Zemin as President of the PRC by the National People's Congress signaled a potential recommitment to reform after nearly five years of political and economic inertia. This development suggested the need for a recalibrated strategy to foster more constructive relations and avoid exacerbating tensions with the Chinese leadership.

President Clinton's meeting with Jiang Zemin at the APEC Summit in Seattle in November 1993 was the initial evident step toward this new engagement strategy, marking the first face-to-face encounter between U.S. and Chinese leaders since the Tiananmen Square crackdown. In his remarks, Clinton emphasized the necessity of a "more constructive path" in U.S.-China relations, highlighting China's importance as "home to one of every five people who live on this planet" and "the world's fastest growing major economy." This framing featured the geopolitical and economic imperatives for engagement between the two nations. "We have to work together on a wide range of issues of regional significance and of global significance," contended the president.[951] Despite the historic significance of the summit – U.S. and Chinese leaders had not held in-person talks since President Bush's February 1989 visit to China – the discussions yielded little substantive progress. At the press conference, Clinton acknowledged both areas of common interest and stark disagreement, particularly on human rights, trade practices, and nonproliferation. While he described the talks as "a good beginning," his expression – reportedly "stone-faced" during the photo session with Jiang – conveyed a more reserved sentiment.[952] Clinton remarked, "I always believe the best beginning in a challenging

[949] "Enlargement: Purpose and Practice," Speech by National Security Adviser Anthony Lake at the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, December 14, 1993, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, National Security Council, China.
[950] For a comprehensive analysis of what became known as the "Lake Doctrine," see Frank L. Jones, "Engaging the World: Anthony Lake and American Grand Strategy, 1993–1997," *The Historical Journal*, vol.59, no.3 (2016): pp.869–901.
[951] President Clinton's Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Following Discussions With President Jiang Zemin of China in Seattle, November 19, 1993, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary.
[952] James Mann, "Clinton Presses China on Rights," *The Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1993.

situation is to be as frank and forthright as possible," though the limited tangible results signaled the enduring complexities in the U.S.-China relationship.[953]



Figure 48. Jiang Zemin and Bill Clinton at the APEC Summit bilateral talk in Seattle, November 19, 1993. Photo credit: Luke Frazza/AFP via Getty Images.



Figure 49. Jiang Zemin visits the home of a Boeing production worker, November 1993. Photo credit: boeing.com quoted by chinadaily.com.

[953] R. W. Apple Jr., "The Pacific Summit. 'Dialogue' is Begun as Clinton Meets with China's Chief," *The New York Times*, November 20, 1993,

Jiang Zemin strategically tailored his narrative during his visit, addressing both domestic and international audiences with the aim of projecting a more favorable image of Chinese leadership. John Balzar, a political reporter for *The Los Angeles Times*, covered Jiang's trip to the United States, rhetorically asking, "Who welcomed Chinese President Jiang Zemin during his first stop here at the highest-level meeting with U.S. officials since China's human rights violations at Tiananmen Square soured relations in 1989?"[954] The answer was Frank Shrontz, Chairman of Boeing Co., accompanied by approximately one thousand Boeing employees. During his tour of the Everett plant in Washington State, Jiang highlighted the mutual benefits of reducing tensions with the Clinton Administration to enhance bilateral economic relations, remarking, "As long as all negative factors and artificially imposed obstacles are removed, our bilateral trade and economic cooperation will yield greater successes."[955] This visit carried substantial symbolic importance, as transportation equipment, particularly aircraft, represented one of the earliest and most significant U.S. export categories to China. The U.S. media highlighted a notable moment during Jiang Zemin's visit: his stop at the home of Cary Qualls, a Boeing assembly worker in Marysville, Washington. Departing from traditional diplomatic protocols, this visit was designed to humanize Jiang and present him as relatable to middle-class American life. Jiang offered symbolic gifts, including a stuffed panda for Qualls' son and Chinese silk for his wife, and engaged in discussions about mortgage payments – an unfamiliar concept in China – and Qualls' role at Boeing.[956] Reflecting on Qualls' position, *The Los Angeles Times* noted, "A high school graduate with a high-paying job who lives with his wife and two preschool children, Qualls knows his future will depend not just on how skillfully Boeing can produce airplanes but also on how successfully his country can navigate the shoals of Asian trade competition amid the lingering frictions related to human rights, environmental preservation and domestic protectionism."[957]

In his analysis for *The Los Angeles Times*, John Balzar critically examined the APEC meeting, emphasizing China's prominent role and the summit's shift toward an economically driven diplomatic framework. He characterized the event as emblematic of a new global order, remarking, "They promised history here, and they delivered: Behold the shape of the New World Order. It's rectangular and flat, and it folds into a wallet. Spell it C-A-S-H." Balzar

[954] John Balzar, "At Summit, Ideology Gives Way to Profits – Trade: Half a Century of Political Differences Dissolves in the Face of New Priorities, Namely Jobs," *The Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1993.
[955] Daniel Williams, "Chinese Leader Plays to Audience at Home," *The Washington Post*, November 21, 1993.
[956] David E. Sanger, "The Pacific Summit. Mending Images with Pandas and Taking Home 747's," *The New York Times*, November 20, 1993.
[957] Ibid. Balzar, *The Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1993.

highlighted how the summit redefined the language of international relations to focus on economic priorities. Nations were referred to as "economies," a deliberate choice to mitigate political sensitivities between the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Similarly, heads of state were labeled "leaders of economies," reflecting a shift in emphasis toward employment, economic growth, and profitability. The symbolic absence of national flags further underlined this transformation. Balzar noted the retreat of Cold War-era terminology like containment, which had been replaced by the pervasive emphasis on competition, described by Jiang Zemin as "fierce competition."[958]

While Jiang Zemin sought to reshape China's image in the United States, the American business community had already shifted its focus, recognizing the growing economic opportunities offered by the country. Ambassador Roy observed that by 1993 "the American business community representatives all of a sudden started flooding into China because they saw that business opportunities were opening up." This enthusiasm contrasted with the more measured, and at times critical, stance of the U.S. government, as demonstrated by President Clinton's initial rhetoric, which controversially equated China with Iraq – a comparison that Roy dismissed as "absurd." Roy was frustrated by the disconnect between perceptions of China in the U.S. and the reality on the ground. "In 1993, every American who came to China was stunned to find conditions so much better than the way it was reported in the United States," he recalled. He compared this discrepancy to Cold War-era Soviet media, which selectively highlighted negative aspects of the U.S. "They weren't telling lies. They were cherry-picking bad stories," the ambassador noted. Similarly, in China's case, American media often focused on negative developments while sidelining positive stories, leading to a distorted public understanding. Roy noted that "bad news would get publicity and the front page, while good news was either unpublished or relegated to the back pages." By the mid-1990s, however, the narrative began to shift as China's rapid economic growth and the debate over its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) gained prominence.[959] "We started to supporting China not because of the belief that it would turn into a liberal democracy. The business community

[958] Ibid. Balzar, *The Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1993.

[959] China formally joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) on December 11, 2001. For an in-depth analysis of the Chinese policy-making process that culminated in this milestone, see Hui Feng, *The Politics of China's Accession to the World Trade Organization* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006). For a positive reassessment of China's WTO accession, regarded as successful despite initial skepticism, see Luolin Wang, *China's WTO Accession Reassessed. Routledge Studies on the Chinese Economy* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015). For an examination of the role and influence of BRIC nations, including China, within the WTO, refer to Kristen Hopewell, *Breaking the WTO: How Emerging Powers Disrupted the Neoliberal Project. Emerging Frontiers in the Global Economy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016).

desperately wanted China to be put under international discipline," motivated by concerns over intellectual property protections and investment conditions. "But President Clinton justified Chinese entry with the liberal country card," commented Roy.[960]

By early 1994, he confronted one of the most challenging periods of his tenure as U.S. ambassador to the PRC. With President Clinton facing a second decision on the renewal of China's MFN trade status in less than six months, efforts to achieve substantial progress on human rights remained largely unfulfilled. After the president had lifted the ban on Cabinet-level meetings in effect since the Tiananmen massacre, two high-level diplomatic visits, scheduled for February and March, were designed to facilitate dialogue with Chinese officials on this issue in the attempt to obtain some guarantees from the Chinese counterpart, yet both resulted in notable diplomatic setbacks. The first visit, led by Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights John Shattuck, aimed to initiate preliminary discussions on human rights concerns that could influence the Administration's MFN decision. Shattuck's objectives included identifying specific measures Beijing might take to address human rights conditions linked to MFN renewal as well as setting a constructive foundation for Secretary of State Warren Christopher's subsequent visit. However, the visit yielded limited results. While Chinese officials suggested a potential re-evaluation of the "counterrevolution" crime designation and agreed to consider prison inspections, these minor concessions highlighted the entrenched diplomatic friction.[961] Complicating matters further, Shattuck met with prominent dissident Wei Jingsheng, "a former electrician at the Beijing Zoo, who by virtue of his unbending will during years in prison, has emerged as the potential leader of a new democracy movement in China."[962] This meeting – which was said to have been conducted without prior consultation with senior officials, including Secretary Christopher and Assistant Secretary Lord – provoked a strong reaction from the PRC government. In a critical statement issued by the *New China News Agency*, Chinese officials accused the U.S. of positioning itself as an international "moral arbiter" despite facing pressing domestic challenges related to crime, drug violence, and racial discrimination that, in their view, infringed upon the rights of American citizens.[963] Following the meeting, Wei, who had been released less than a year before in the attempt of the Chinese leadership to gain support for the Olympics bid, was arrested and

[960] Ibid. Interview with J. Stapleton Roy, May 2022.
[961] Daniel Southerland, "China Assails U.S. Human Rights Policies," *The Washington Post*, February 27, 1994.
[962] Patrick E. Tyler, "Highest U.S. Rights Official Meets With Leading Chinese Dissident," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1994; Tyler, "China May Ease Law on Dissent, U.S. Aide Says," *The New York Times*, March 3, 1994.
[963] Ibid. *The New York Times*, February 28, 1994.

subsequently sentenced to fourteen years in prison. He would ultimately be released in November 1997 on medical grounds under pressure from President Clinton, after which he was immediately flown to the United States, where he would remain indefinitely.

The situation deteriorated further upon Secretary of State Warren Christopher's arrival in China, coinciding with the second session of the 8th National People's Congress in Beijing. During this period, authorities detained or expelled several prominent dissidents from the capital, and two American journalists were briefly held while attempting to interview one of these dissidents. As reported by *The Los Angeles Times*, Christopher had arrived "to see if the human rights climate was improving," yet his visit unfolded amidst "some of the tightest security seen in the Chinese capital since the democracy movement of 1989."[964] Ambassador Roy observed that, once in China, Christopher appeared hesitant, even conflicted, regarding how best to approach the PRC leadership on the critical human rights issue. "When the Secretary arrived, he told me he hadn't made up his mind," Roy recalled. "I confronted him, pointing out that he couldn't meet with China's top leaders without the clarity and willingness to communicate that if they took certain actions on human rights, the U.S. would respond with reciprocal benefits." Christopher then requested Roy to revise his talking points accordingly. After reviewing Roy's suggested adjustments overnight, Christopher ultimately approved them, facilitating a more substantive dialogue with Chinese authorities the next days. Despite this preparation, the meetings proved tense. Li Peng asserted that human rights were a domestic matter and firmly opposed any notion of U.S. intervention. In what was described as a "40-minute lecture," the Chinese premier made clear that "China will never accept the United States' human rights concept" and warned that if Washington continued to link human rights with MFN status, the U.S. risked undermining its share in China's growing market.[965] Recalling the exchange, Christopher noted it was "one of the most difficult meetings I ever had, in which he basically said, he dared us, *Go ahead and deny us MFN and then we'll see who they say lost China*."[966] Meanwhile, as he received updates on the visit, President Clinton voiced evident frustration at the diplomatic deadlock. Reportedly asking, "What the hell is Chris doing there now?" The president's remark conveyed his disappointment not only with the visit's lack of

[964] James Mann and Rone Tempest, "U.S., China Trade Embittered Words on Human Rights," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1994.
[965] Ibid. Mann and Tempest, *The Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1994.
[966] Interview with Warren Christopher and Strobe Talbott, April 15-16, 2002, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia.

progress but also with a broader policy that, despite initial optimism, appeared to be devolving into a diplomatic impasse.[967]

Following a tense meeting with Premier Li Peng, which was preceded by a similarly confrontational exchange with Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, who criticized Assistant Secretary Shattuck's meeting with dissident Wei Jingsheng and accused the U.S. delegation of failing "to respect their hosts and adhere to Chinese law," Christopher's advisors recommended that he leave the country immediately, according to Roy's recollection.[968] The ambassador, however, was astonished by this advice, noting, "Having served in Moscow, I was accustomed to difficult meetings with the Russians; this is simply part of the diplomatic process." He counseled Christopher against departing, suggesting that the upcoming meeting with Jiang Zemin could still provide an opportunity for productive dialogue. Roy interpreted Li Peng's remarks as an official assertion of China's stance on non-interference, establishing a foundation for continued negotiation. After considering Roy's advice, Christopher opted to remain in China, thereby maintaining the potential for diplomatic engagement with Jiang.[969] The subsequent meeting with China' president began with a lighter tone, as Jiang made a humorous reference to the previous exchange with Li Peng. Despite the relatively cordial atmosphere, the meeting produced few concrete concessions from the Chinese government. As one observer noted, however, "the Chinese government did agree to steps that aligned with the president's agenda." These included: providing information on more than two hundred prisoners, with a commitment to provide data on an additional one hundred; reaching a new understanding on the inspection of prison factories; agreeing to begin discussions on the jamming of Voice of America broadcasts; pledging to continue talks with the International Committee of the Red Cross on prison visits; and permitting the travel of relatives of exiles abroad. While these steps marked some progress, they fell short of the substantial achievements expected by the Clinton Administration.[970]

Reflecting on the experience, Roy observed that Christopher's advisors appeared to lack an understanding of the subtleties required in high-stakes diplomatic settings: "It was indicative of a mindset in which individuals inexperienced in diplomacy were advising the secretary of state on navigating a critical and delicate engagement."[971] Henry Kissinger offered a parallel

[967] -, "Clinton and China: How Promise Self-Destructed," *The New York Times*, May 29, 1994.
[968] Ibid. Mann and Tempest, *The Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1994.
[969] Ibid. Interview with J. Stapleton Roy, May 2022.
[970] Lee H. Hamilton, "Give Christopher Credit," *The Washington Post*, March 29, 1994.
[971] Ibid. Interview with J. Stapleton Roy, May 2022.

critique in an op-ed for *The Washington Post*, where he analyzed the diplomatic setbacks of the visit. "What went awry with a visit that had reasonably been expected to culminate this progress?" the architect of the opening to the PRC inquired, reflecting on the Clinton Administration's handling of the China dossier. He noted that the Administration, under considerable domestic pressure, seemingly expected China to make human rights concessions as a precondition for renewed high-level engagement. By contrast, China's diplomatic framework emphasized reciprocity, and its leaders saw themselves as entitled to the same unconditioned engagement granted by other nations. For the Chinese leadership, the removal of U.S. threats concerning MFN status did not constitute a "concession" and was highly sensitive to any insinuation of interference in its internal affairs. "So long as human rights remains the principal subject of the Sino-American dialogue," Kissinger wrote, "deadlock is nearly inevitable." Kissinger concluded with a proposal that the Clinton Administration consider removing the human rights linkage from MFN renewal "once and for all," instead addressing human rights within a larger diplomatic context that included political and strategic dialogues. This shift, he argued, would "preserve the dignity of both sides," potentially fostering an environment for more sustainable progress in the U.S.-China relationship.[972]

Therefore, in the spring of 1994, President Clinton encountered significant challenges in redefining U.S.-China relations amidst Beijing's minimal progress on human rights. Despite the Administration's policy of constructive engagement, China had failed to demonstrate the "overall significant progress" stipulated in the prior year's Executive Order, which had conditionally extended MFN trading status. A mid-April Cabinet meeting acknowledged the Administration's predicament, noting unequivocally that "a consensus exists that China has not yet made the necessary progress."[973] Extensive discussions among the National Security Council (NSC), the National Economic Council (NEC), and deputies from various government agencies sought to outline a strategy for addressing this impasse ahead of the June deadline for MFN renewal. These deliberations highlighted the constraints on U.S. policy stemming from internal developments within China, particularly the ongoing leadership succession crisis. Deng Xiaoping's deteriorating health created a political vacuum, complicating efforts to engage with a unified counterpart in Beijing. While Deng would not pass away until February 1997, his diminishing influence left a fragmented power structure in which no clear successor

[972] Henry Kissinger, "China: The Deadlock Can Be Broken," *The Washington Post*, March 27, 1994.
[973] Meeting with Cabinet Members to Discuss China, April 13, 1994, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, National Security Council – Office of Press and Communications, China.

had yet emerged. As National Security Advisor Anthony Lake observed, "We had to deal with multiple players, without knowing exactly the interaction among them." This leadership ambiguity was exemplified by the roles of President Jiang Zemin, Premier Li Peng, and Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen. Each leader approached relations with the United States cautiously, reflecting their internal power dynamics. Lake emphasized this point, stating, "Each of them looks over his shoulder as he deals with us, making it harder to cut a deal." Simultaneously, Beijing's leadership displayed heightened sensitivity to domestic stability, a priority that shaped its approach to foreign relations. "During and subsequent to Secretary Christopher's trip, we have been struck by the extreme nervousness of the Chinese leadership about political stability in China." Lake noted that Beijing's actions reflected lessons learned from the Tiananmen Square crackdown: "Having allowed events to get out of control in 1989, they will not make the same mistake twice, even if it affects their relationship with us." The Administration anticipated a potential escalation in detentions as two politically sensitive dates approached: the anniversary of the May Fourth Movement on May 4 and the fifth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 3. Lake warned, "There is a very real chance that we will see more detentions prior to these specific dates. If dissident elements choose this period to seek a confrontation, the number of detentions could rise dramatically, which will obviously make it very difficult to certify overall significant progress."[974]

Faced with a deteriorating domestic environment in China, President Clinton encountered significant challenges in achieving tangible progress on human rights ahead of the critical decision on renewing China's MFN trade status. With fewer than two months remaining before the June deadline, the NSC proposed a comprehensive four-part strategy designed "to manage our current policy of engagement more aggressively in order to maximize the prospects for progress." The first element, *Internal Organization and Unity*, prioritized a cohesive approach within the Administration. Acknowledging a "range of views about the current policy," the NSC emphasized that all members understood the importance of the Executive Order as "a necessary resolution of a complex situation." However, it warned that "statements 'off message' undermine our efforts to persuade China that progress is essential before June." Consequently, the Administration sought to project a unified front, claiming that sustained emphasis on internal consistency was "beginning to pay off." The second pillar, *Approach to the Chinese*, focused on extracting meaningful concessions from Beijing. The NSC advised

[974] "China Strategy," Memorandum for the President from Anthony Lake and Robert Rubin, April 12, 1994, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, National Security Council, AO/Box Number 3103, China [2].

that "the approach to China must be clear and well-coordinated" and called for the Administration to define its "bottom line" regarding the two mandatory and five discretionary criteria for MFN renewal. To incentivize progress, the strategy proposed offering various "carrots," including "post-June 3 high-level contacts, possibly as high as a summit meeting," and the eventual "delinkage of MFN and human rights." Additional inducements included lifting specific Tiananmen-era sanctions, such as permitting Trade Development Assistance for U.S. firms in China, and opposing congressional amendments seen as provocative to Beijing, like those addressing Taiwan and Tibet. The third aspect, *Outreach/Public Posture*, aimed to manage public messaging while addressing competing domestic interests. In communications, the Administration should seek to "reemphasize the Executive Order, publicize progress made to date, and moderate expectations and rhetoric." This involved targeted outreach to key constituencies, including the business community and human rights advocates. "We believe it may be possible to mute some business community opposition to our current policy – and possibly to solicit constructive steps," the report assured, arguing that public dissent "only undermines our credibility with the Chinese." Simultaneously, efforts to placate human rights organizations included soliciting statements from prominent dissidents in favor of delinkage and emphasizing the Administration's "vigorous post-June 3 human rights strategy." This was the final component, *Human Rights Strategy Beyond June 3*, which framed the necessity of maintaining pressure on Beijing regardless of the MFN decision. The NSC acknowledged that in a scenario of minimal compliance with the Executive Order, it was "critically important" to present a robust post-June strategy that reaffirmed the Administration's commitment to human rights. The plan combined affirmative measures, such as supporting dissidents, with punitive steps to ensure that "renewal of MFN status does not constitute approval of China's human rights practices." The Administration also recognized the need to explain this approach to human rights advocates, emphasizing that any decision to delink MFN from human rights would not signal an abandonment of human rights concerns. "Should you decide to delink MFN status and human rights in a scenario of minimal compliance, it will be important to demonstrate that you have a strategy for pursuing human rights issues without using MFN," concluded the strategic plan.[975] Additionally, other global regions grappling with significant human rights crises – Bosnia being a prominent example – played a role in diverting attention

[975] Ibid. "China Strategy," Memorandum for the President from Lake and Rubin, April 12, 1994.

away from China. This shift in focus was evident in media coverage, which contributed to making the policy of delinkage more politically feasible and publicly acceptable.[976]

Additionally, the MFN debate exposed deep divisions within the Democratic Party, requiring the Administration to navigate competing priorities and reconcile divergent viewpoints. A briefing paper prepared by Anthony Lake for a meeting with congressional leaders illustrated the complex dynamics at play and the strategic considerations required to advance the Administration's objectives. "We need to achieve three goals in the near term," the national security advisors recommended: "(1) build a sense of unity between the Congress and White House (in large part, by getting both sides in Congress to lower the volume on this issue), (2) moderate expectations on both sides and (3) demonstrate to Congress, the Chinese and the public that you are leading the process." The memorandum delineated three key factions within Congress, each presenting distinct challenges. The "human rights caucus," comprising figures such as Senator George Mitchell, Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, and Congressman Richard Gephardt – a strong supporter of labor unions – remained staunch advocates for conditioning China's MFN status on tangible progress in human rights. Lake acknowledged that this group "has been the strongest supporter of conditioning China's MFN on human rights progress" and emphasized the need to temper their expectations while securing their eventual endorsement. As the briefing noted, "Our strategic goal with the human rights caucus is to earn their 'validation' of our policy at the end of the day." To achieve this, the Administration needed to engage in substantive consultations and identify specific Chinese actions that could be framed as progress. At the same time, the Administration confronted pressures from what the national security advisor referred as the "delinkage caucus," which included members like Senator Max Baucus and Senator John Danforth. These legislators advocated for separating the MFN decision from human rights concerns, focusing instead on the economic and strategic importance of U.S.-China trade. Lake highlighted the challenges posed by this group's growing dissatisfaction, noting that "they believe the Administration has ignored them to date." He further cautioned against the risk of this faction aligning with Senate

[976] On the U.S. interventionism in the humanitarian crisis of the 1990s see, among others, Samuel Moyn, *Humane: How the United States Abandoned Peace and Reinvented War* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, September 2021); James B. Steinberg, "History, Policymaking and the Balkans: Lessons Imported and Lessons Learned," in in Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri (eds.), *The Power of the Past. History and Statecraft* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016): pp.237-252; Rajan Menon, "Humanitarian Intervention and U.S. Power," in David C. Engerman, Max Paul Friedman, and Melani McAlister (eds.), *The Cambridge History of America and the World – Volume IV: 1945 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022): pp.632-661; Aldan Hehir, "The Impact of Analogical Reasoning on U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Kosovo," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol.43, no.1 (2006): pp.67-81.

Republicans, who were mounting a critical stance on China policy. To mitigate these risks, Lake recommended increasing consultations with this group to "channel their criticism" constructively, ensuring their focus remained on achieving compliance with the terms of the Executive Order before its June 3 deadline. Finally, the Administration sought to leverage the perspectives of the "foreign policy caucus," which prioritized broader strategic considerations such as regional stability and global cooperation. Lake argued that policy-makers within this third group, who had publicly endorsed the Administration's approach, could help to "broaden the context for decisions about China policy" by emphasizing issues beyond human rights, such as regional threats like the one represented by North Korea, trade, and environmental concerns. The briefing suggested leveraging this group's perspective to shift the debate to a more comprehensive approach "in a way that gives [the President] flexibility" in the China policy formulation.[977]

Despite various considerations ahead for the president, Clinton had already begun leaning toward what would ultimately become his final decision by early 1994. As Secretary of State Christopher recalled, "When I returned to the United States, I think the policy of conditioning MFN on human rights improvement no longer had any support. The business community had convinced the President that trade for America was a higher value, or perhaps, more charitably, that nothing would be accomplished in the field of human rights by denying trade, and so that became the basic policy."[978] Upon his return to Washington, Christopher encountered substantial criticism, particularly from within the Administration, with minimal public support from President Clinton, who had originally formulated the policy of engagement with the PRC leadership. When asked whether the United States was altering its position on human rights, Clinton expressed disappointment over the outcome of Christopher's discussions, but asserted that "the policy is the same" and that a decision on China's trade status would be made "at the appropriate time."[979] Reflecting on the negotiations, Secretary Christopher recalled the unusual sense of isolation he experienced: "The first day went very badly, the second day went a little better, and the third day was kind of neutral, but nevertheless, the Chinese portrayed the trip as a failure, that I had not accomplished much – because it was the purpose of the Chinese to

[977] Briefing Paper for President Clinton from Anthony Lake, Meeting with Members of Congress on China MFN, April 19, 1994, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, National Security Council – Office of Press and Communications, China.
[978] Interview with Warren Christopher and Strobe Talbott, April 15-16, 2002, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia.
[979] Elaine Sciolino, "Christopher is Drawing Fire in Washington on China Visit," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1994.

portray the trip in that way." Christopher believed he had forcefully communicated U.S. commitments and "effectively carried the American flag," especially with respect to human rights, in difficult meetings with Chinese officials, particularly the staunch Li Peng. However, he was met with a lack of expected White House support. The Administration's only public statement characterized the visit as a "disappointment," a remark that, absent further clarification, could have been interpreted as a critique of Christopher's diplomatic efforts rather than of China's obstinacy. "It was the failure of the White House to follow up with a supportive statement," Christopher observed, "which clearly said to me that I had been caught in a policy change."[980]

This shift in policy had developed incrementally, with Clinton actively seeking guidance from his advisors on the evolving trajectory of U.S.-China relations. Notably, Clinton consulted former President Jimmy Carter, the only Democratic president since the normalization of relations to have directly engaged with Beijing. Carter's approach, which combined a firm human rights stance – a central aspect of his foreign policy – with the pragmatic decision to grant formal diplomatic recognition to the PRC despite its well-documented human rights violations, provided Clinton with a distinct perspective on navigating this complex relationship. In a series of letters exchanged with President Clinton, former President Jimmy Carter recommended a strategic shift in policy regarding China's MFN status. While acknowledging the limited progress on human rights since Clinton's 1993 Executive Order, Carter advised renewing MFN status, proposing a clear separation between trade and human rights considerations. In communications dated March 10, May 20, and particularly May 31, he advised, "My strong recommendation is for you to bite the bullet, grant MFN, and permanently separate trade issues from those of human rights." Carter argued that maintaining MFN status could foster commercial and diplomatic benefits while providing more productive channels for influencing human rights issues in China, which might otherwise be "counterproductive" if U.S.-China relations deteriorated.[981]

In his May 31 letter, Carter outlined specific suggestions for Clinton's announcement. "I think your statement should be quite brief, with any scale press conference to be held after the dust settles," he wrote. He recommended that Clinton emphasize China's certain efforts toward

[980] Ibid. Interview with Warren Christopher, April 15-16, 2002, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project.
[981] Letter to President Clinton from former President Jimmy Carter, May 23, 1994, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, National Security Council, Office of the National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, Material Related to Telephone Call with President Clinton, OA/ID 1464.

U.S.-aligned human rights standards, thus supporting the decision to renew MFN status as it was important to distinguish trade from human rights issues. Additionally, Carter suggested reaffirming U.S. dedication to human rights by outlining priority areas, such as humane treatment of prisoners, cultural preservation in Tibet, compliance with the Jackson-Vanik amendment, and the elimination of prison labor exports. Carter further advised Clinton to sustain U.S. engagement through both private and public diplomacy, with particular attention to securing releases of political prisoners and advancing dialogue between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama. To reinforce congressional support, Carter offered to liaise directly with key members. "I will be glad to make any reasonable public statement along these lines or will communicate directly with a few key congressional leaders," promised the former president, adding, "Your staff might also orchestrate other supportive statements from those who have been involved in the global human rights effort." Additionally, Carter proposed seeking public endorsements from corporations known for strong human rights records, such as Reebok, to further legitimize the administration's position. He concluded by pledging to share any positive indications from Beijing, "If I receive any positive response from Beijing, I will share it with you immediately, and trust that you will keep me informed about further developments."[982] According to *The New York Times*, prior to announcing his decision, President Clinton reached out to Carter with a "last-minute offer": Carter would chair an "independent blue-ribbon human rights panel" – a strategy suggested by Secretary of State Christopher – to pressure China into further reforms. Carter reportedly declined, suggesting Clinton abandon the plan, as he believed it would lack legitimacy among human rights organizations.[983] If accurate, this account would add to the various factors underlying the Secretary of State's dissatisfaction.

"I have decided that the United States should renew Most Favored Nation trading status for China. This decision, I believe, offers us the most opportunity to lay the basis for long-term sustainable progress in human rights, and for the advancement of our other interests with China. Extending MFN will avoid isolating China and instead will permit us to engage the Chinese with not only economic contacts but with cultural, educational and other contacts, and with a continuing aggressive effort in human rights – an approach that I believe will make it more likely that China will play a responsible role, both at home and abroad."[984] While these remarks

[982] Ibid. Letter to President Clinton from former President Jimmy Carter, May 23, 1994.
[983] *The New York Times*, May 29, 1994.
[984] Press Conference of the President, May 26, 1994, William Clinton Presidential Records, Press Office, China, OA 8688.

closely mirrored statements made by President George H. W. Bush, they were delivered by President Bill Clinton on May 26, 1994, when he announced his decision to decouple human rights considerations from the annual renewal of China's MFN status. Clinton elaborated, stating, "I believe, based on our aggressive contacts with the Chinese in the past several months, that we have reached the end of the usefulness of that policy, and it is time to take a new path toward the achievement of our constant objectives. We need to place our relationship into a larger and more productive framework."[985] By late May 1994, in accordance with the 1993 Executive Order, Secretary Christopher had submitted his recommendations to President Clinton regarding the renewal of China's MFN status. He noted that China had met the two key conditions required for the extension of MFN status for an additional year. First, China had reportedly resolved all outstanding emigration cases, thereby meeting the Jackson-Vanik Amendment's criteria – a precondition that had been the sole requirement for MFN eligibility prior to the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Additionally, China had generally adhered to the 1992 bilateral Memorandum of Understanding concerning prison labor exports, though Christopher expressed concerns over reports suggesting that certain prison-made goods from China might still be entering the U.S. Despite these positive developments, Christopher acknowledged that China had not made the "overall, significant progress" in the broader human rights areas outlined in Clinton's Executive Order. Nonetheless, he recommended the renewal of MFN status, asserting that sustained engagement would likely foster incremental improvements in human rights within China, rather than pursuing a policy of isolation. As Christopher emphasized, "We have kept centrally in mind the importance of fostering, not stifling, progress in China toward universally accepted standards of human rights."[986]

In the Administration's recalibrated policy framework, human rights considerations, while still important, were strategically positioned within a broader set of national priorities. The evolving post-Cold War order highlighted the need for stable, cooperative relations with China, where isolation or antagonism could undermine U.S. interests. National security now encompassed a multifaceted understanding of defense, economic, and diplomatic imperatives. As President Clinton remarked, "China has an atomic arsenal and a vote and a veto in the U.N. Security Council," underscoring China's role as a key actor in regional and global stability. He further noted, "We share important interests, such as in nuclear-free Korean Peninsula and in

[985] Ibid. Press Conference of the President, May 26, 1994.
[986] China's MFN Status: Summary of the Report and Recommendations of the Secretary of State of Warren Christopher, May 26, 1994, William Clinton Presidential Records, Press Office, China, OA 8688.

sustaining the global environment," illustrating that diplomatic engagement with Beijing extended beyond human rights to encompass issues vital to global security. In addition, the Administration put the emphasis on the economic dimension of the relationship, emphasizing that China's rapid economic growth directly impacted U.S. economic interests and domestic employment. Clinton highlighted that "China is also the world's fastest growing economy. Over $8 billion of United States' exports to China last year supported over 150,000 American jobs."[987] This approach revealed a pragmatic shift: human rights concerns, while still relevant, were increasingly balanced within a policy framework prioritizing economic stability and cooperative security, reflecting the complex and interconnected challenges of the post-Cold War global landscape.

Ultimately, President Clinton's management of China's MFN status maintained strategic continuity with his predecessor, particularly in retaining executive authority over the decision and avoiding congressional control. However, in 1993, Clinton introduced a shift through an Executive Order that formally integrated human rights considerations into the renewal process for MFN status, which raised expectations among those who had been advocated for stronger sanctions against the Chinese government since the Tiananmen crackdown. Although symbolically important, the Order was criticized for its vague language and lack of concrete, enforceable criteria, thereby allowing the Administration to present a commitment to human rights while preserving flexibility in its broader China policy. This flexibility eventually facilitated Clinton's decision to move away from that approach. A critical assessment by *The New York Times* noted that, "in the end, Mr. Clinton would renew China's trade privileges and abandon an agonizing annual ritual of linking renewal of trade benefits to improvements in Beijing's human rights performance." The article framed Clinton's approach as emblematic of "broken campaign promises and fierce inter-agency battles, secret diplomacy and 11th-hour indecision," reflecting the tensions and uncertainties within the Administration as it navigated competing priorities.[988] Among those most disappointed by the president's decision was Representative Nancy Pelosi. Her Chief of Staff, Judy Lemons, recalled the sense of disillusionment within Pelosi's office: "we had high hopes for Bill Clinton and considered him a good president and a decent person. However, there was significant disappointment because, in those early days, he overpromised."[989]

[987] Ibid. Press Conference of the President, May 26, 1994.
[988] Ibid. *The New York Times*, May 29, 1994.
[989] Interview with Judy Lemons, Pelosi's Chief of Staff from 1987 to 2002, May 23, 2023.

"The War is Won: Moving Beyond MFN," titled the July-August 1994 issue of *The China Business Review* lauding President Clinton's renewal of China's MFN status and the de-linkage from human rights conditions. The decision was praised as stabilizing U.S.-China relations and ending the annual domestic political crises over MFN debates. Clinton's leadership was credited with averting a potential diplomatic "ice age" and providing a foundation for continued bilateral engagement. The editorial framed the MFN controversy as part of a historical pattern of U.S.-China relations marked by "mutual moralizing" and susceptibility to political manipulation. It critiqued the simplistic framing of "trade versus human rights" as a false dichotomy and urged more nuanced policy discussions. Similarly, it challenged stereotypes such as "business lobbyist" and "human rights activist," arguing that such labels obscured the complexities of the debate. Acknowledging the strategic efficacy of human rights organizations, the piece cautioned against the reliance on reductive rhetoric like "butchers of Beijing," which undermined substantive debate. It also highlighted the role of the U.S. business community in shaping the MFN decision by promoting the constructive impact of American firms in China, a contribution explicitly recognized in Clinton's May 26 policy statement. The editorial concluded by advocating for more balanced and informed discourse in U.S.-China policy discussions in the future.[990] Although the trajectory of bilateral relations remained unpredictable – shaped by the rapid and unforeseen developments since 1989 – on incontrovertible reality prevailed: the profound interdependence between Washington and Beijing, rendering disengagement an impractical prospect.

[990] Robert A. Kapp, "A New Chapter in U.S.-China Relations," *The China Business Review*, July-August 1994, pp.6-7.

Conclusion

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I. The End of the Cold War Discipline

Testifying before Congress just weeks before President Clinton announced his decision to grant Beijing MFN trade status and decouple its renewal from human rights conditions, Winston Lord, then Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, reflected on the intricate challenges of shaping U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War context. Clinton's pronouncement – aligned in many respects with President Bush's approach, yet even more assertive – marked the conclusion of nearly five years of contentious debates following the Tiananmen Square crackdown, involving intense negotiations between the administration, Congress, third-party advocacy groups, and competing interpretations of China's significance in U.S. strategic calculus. Lord emphasized the complexities of crafting policy in a time where the hierarchy of U.S. priorities had grown increasingly fluid and subject to a broad spectrum of competing interests, each exerting significant influence on policymaking processes. "How do you balance multiple objectives?" Lord rhetorically demanded while reflecting on the complex nature of U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. He acknowledged that the United States had long grappled with scenarios requiring decision-makers to pursue multiple objectives simultaneously. However, during the Cold War, there had been a shared, albeit occasionally tacit, understanding of a clear hierarchy in priorities: "security came first."[991]

The Cold War, conceived as a global system defined by ideological and geopolitical bipolarity, had informed and imposed a degree of structure and discipline at both the international level and within domestic affairs and parochial interests. The former ambassador to the PRC illustrated these dynamics by observing that during the Cold War, strategic alliances often took precedence over moral or economic considerations. "If we did not like a particular government," Lord contended offering an oversimplified perspective, "we sort of pulled our

[991] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy Toward China Hearing before the Subcommittees on East Asian and Pacific Affairs*, 103rd Congress, 2nd Session, May 4, 1994, p.25.

punches because we needed them as an ally against the Soviet Union. If economic ministers came to us with a trade or investment problem, we would say, get lost with your silly economic problems. We have got a Cold War." This hierarchical framework had enabled the United States to prioritize alliances and strategic objectives while sidelining what were conceived as secondary issues. "Those days are over. They should be over. Economics has risen. Security takes new forms. We are trying to promote our values without apology, but without arrogance," Lord remarked. With the vanishing of the Cold War and the consequential erosion of a stabilizing driver of order and discipline, this structured order disintegrated. The shift left policymakers navigating a more volatile and multifaceted global and domestic environment. Additionally, the emotional resonance of the televised Tiananmen Square crackdown had positioned Washington's China policy as a critical test case for these emerging dynamics, now exposed to growing parochial tensions. In this new context, moral imperatives and unprecedented economic interdependencies gained heightened prominence, no longer subordinated to the overarching strategic priorities that had defined the Cold War era. The challenge lay in reconciling the competing and increasingly interconnected dimensions – security, economic interests, and the promotion of democratic values – within a foreign policy framework that no longer benefited from the guiding discipline established by the strategic imperatives of the Cold War.

This dissertation has endeavored to provide a comprehensive analysis of the complex array of actors, interests, and considerations shaping Washington's China policy during a critical period marked by the abrupt unraveling of Cold War-era structures. By examining the interplay of domestic influences on foreign policymaking and situating these developments within the broader global context, it has sought to elucidate the transformative processes unfolding both within the United States and in China. This disruption was catalyzed by the repercussions of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, which contributed to the erosion of a once-widespread, idealized, and even romanticized perception of China that had gained prominence throughout the 1980s in the United States. During the latest stages of the Cold War, China had been viewed as a communist country that had strategically aligned itself with Washington by turning away from the Soviet Union while embracing market-oriented reforms. These reforms were widely believed to herald not only economic liberalization but also broader social and political transformation. However, the repressive measures targeting those same values – greater governance transparency, freedoms of speech, political participation and assembly, among others – advocated by citizens marching in the streets, coupled with the Chinese Communist

regime's resilience amidst the global collapse of similar systems, called these assumptions into question. It suggested a departure from the presumed inevitability of a linear progression toward a broader liberalization and introduced significant ambiguities into the U.S.-China relationship. As contended throughout this dissertation, the dilemmas inherent in the formulation of U.S. China policy mirrored larger tensions in America's evolving role within a new world order. These tensions were exacerbated by Beijing's consistent reluctance – evident both in the rhetoric of its leadership and in its selective adoption of internationally recognized norms and values, especially in the areas of human rights, nonproliferation, and trade – to fully acknowledge Washington's post-Cold War hegemony. Additionally, these interactions were further complicated by the growing intricacies of economic and strategic interdependencies. In the case of China, these dimensions often appeared in conflict rather than harmony, presenting acute challenges for both the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations. Central to their foreign policy calculus was the need to navigate the fragile equilibrium between engagement and critique, which came to define the bilateral relationship in the wake of the Tiananmen events.

To many in Washington, President Bush's approach to China, framed through an enduring Cold War mindset, appeared outdated and increasingly unacceptable. His reluctance to delegate foreign policy prerogatives or to fully engage in broader debates about the direction of U.S.-China relations fueled opposition to a style of diplomacy rooted in Cold War paradigms – characterized by secrecy, personal diplomacy, and moral considerations subordinated to security concerns. The president, however, consistently dismissed such critiques, both publicly and privately, arguing that Capitol Hill's push for more punitive measures against Beijing was strategically shortsighted. He constantly emphasized the importance of maintaining a strategic relationship with China. Despite the end of the Cold War and the diminished Soviet threat, Bush recognized that China was becoming a significant global player, one that the United States could not afford to alienate. By retaining control over his foreign policy prerogatives, the president aimed to ensure continuous communication and support for the most reformist factions within the PRC leadership, which he consistently regarded as his primary interlocutors in China. Additionally, he sought to continue promoting market-oriented reforms, particularly in those regions of China that were increasingly integrated into global market dynamics. Despite significant diplomatic and strategic accomplishments in the early post-Cold War period – exemplified by Beijing's pivotal cooperation with the international community led by Washington during the First Gulf War – members of Congress remained resolute in their pursuit of stringent sanctions against China. Consequently, the Bush Administration concluded

that efforts to reestablish cooperation with Capitol Hill would be futile. By the end of his presidency, Bush was unable to reestablish the bipartisan consensus that had historically characterized Washington's China policy since the rapprochement of the early 1970s. The era when Congress and American stakeholders consistently supported the White House agenda on China appeared to be irretrievably over. The protracted legislative debates surrounding the protection of Chinese students and scholars in the United States, as well as the renewal of MFN trade status, signaled that, regardless of the CCP government's brutal and repressive actions, the U.S. administration was inclined to adopt a conciliatory attitude toward Beijing. This approach was widely perceived by domestic stakeholders – including members of Congress, the media, and third-party organizations – as embodying outdated and indefensible double standards, as well as a style of foreign policy no longer accepted in Washington.

The Cold War had progressively come to an end, yet President Bush continued to adopt a cautious stance towards the events reshaping global dynamics. While members of Congress contended that the gerontocracy of the PRC would soon give way to the younger, reform-minded factions within Chinese society – those who, like the Chinese students in the U.S., were inspired and influenced by the democratic movements sweeping across the socialist world – the Administration did not fully picture this scenario. It acknowledged that a conservative leadership still presided over a vast, multifaceted nation, characterized by regions developing at markedly different paces. This leadership was committed to maintaining internal stability and resisting any form of external interference in its domestic affairs. Additionally, the geopolitical environment still included a potentially destabilizing Moscow, as well as allies such as European nations and Japan, who were eager to capitalize on the new opportunities arising from the Cold War's conclusion, with or without Washington's green light. Although human rights concerns regarding China were significant, the Bush Administration believed that these issues should not dominate U.S. policy toward Beijing. The Administration argued that allowing human rights to dictate foreign policy could jeopardize the substantial diplomatic efforts invested over two decades in fostering dialogue and building trust between the two nations. Finally, despite advocating for a rational approach that prioritized the long-term interests of the United States, President Bush's personal attachment to China profoundly influenced his policies. What he truly believed to be a solid friendship with Deng Xiaoping, as well as the strong desire to integrate China into the new world order significantly affected his diplomatic strategy. Above all, Bush was convinced that no one in Washington could truly

comprehend the distinctive character of China, its history, aspirations, and concerns, and thus, no one could manage Sino-American relations more effectively than he could.

"How much more credible our posture would be if the President and Congress could join together on the MFN issue? How much more effective our policy would be if the Chinese could no longer count on the President to shield them?" demanded Winston Lord testifying in Congress in May 1990.[992] The former ambassador to the PRC lamented that by acting on his own convictions, President Bush was responsible for the polarization of the debate over China in Washington, compromising the chance for the U.S. to build a unified front in its dialogue with Beijing. He stressed that the choice was not between the Administration policy and the likelihood of isolating China, or between protecting national interests and promoting human rights. Instead, according to Lord, it was between tolerating egregious human rights violations and adopting a principled approach consistent with America's global posture. Lord advocated for "a policy that blends condemnation and connection, features diverse approaches to various constituencies, suspends certain programs while preserving foundations for better times, and encourages China in the direction of greater economic reform and political pluralism."[993] While this perspective reflected an optimistic outlook, it arguably underestimated China's agency. Aligning with congressional members critical of the Administration's approach to Beijing, Winston Lord reiterated how misguided the Bush China policy had been since June 1989. The former ambassador, who had departed his post in Beijing discouraged by the Administration's perceived capitulation to Chinese leadership threats, had expressed profound disappointment with the president's approach, which he viewed as overly deferential rather than assertive and resolute. He condemned what he saw as "a disturbing pattern in Administration actions-waivers, vetoes, and unrequited conciliatory moves, and, above all, the double standard between China and support for democracy everywhere else, such as Eastern Europe, Latin America, and South Africa."[994]

Upon his return to government service under the Clinton administration as Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Lord, along with prominent congressional figures in the China debate such as Nancy Pelosi and George Mitchell, lauded President Clinton in 1993 for his ability to establish meaningful dialogue with Capitol Hill. By attaching human rights conditions to the renewal of MFN status – despite their vague and opaque criteria –

[992] Ibid. *Most Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China Hearing*, May 29, 1991, p.21.
[993] Ibid. *Hearing*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.11.
[994] Ibid. *Hearing*, May 16 and 24, 1990, p.11.

Clinton managed to foster a level of political cohesion in Washington that had been absent since the events of 1989. Within a year, the new administration demonstrated greater effectiveness than its predecessor in leveraging the increasingly evident economic and trade interdependencies between the United States and China. This approach implicitly aligned the administration with the business community, which, having recovered some of its influence after the initial fallout from the Tiananmen Square crackdown, strategically invoked human rights rhetoric to reinforce the narrative that sustained economic engagement would lead to the gradual liberalization of Chinese society and the eventual adoption of democratic principles. Conversely, human rights organizations, labor unions, and, to a lesser extent, student federations in the United States continued to highlight the Chinese government's systemic abuses and its resistance to aligning with the norms and values of the post-Cold War U.S.-led international order. However, these groups saw their influence wane over time. In contrast, the business lobby reinvigorated a messianic vision deeply rooted in the historical American approach to China. Drawing upon a paternalistic discourse, business leaders portrayed themselves as agents of progress, capable of fostering human rights advancements through sustained economic engagement and interaction. President Clinton's ultimate decision to delink MFN status from human rights considerations marked the conclusion of a pivotal period in U.S.-China relations. During this interval, Washington could have leveraged China's still-precarious political and economic situation, as well as the fluidity of the post-Cold War international order, in which the United States – despite fears of decline – remained the dominant global hegemon. By decoupling these issues, both the Bush and Clinton administration granted China the space and time to reinterpret and consolidate its political and economic model, a *sui generis* framework that allowed the CCP to navigate its challenges and endure on its own terms, ultimately defying expectations of convergence with Western liberal-democratic norms.

In Washington, the discourse on China evolved into a complex and contentious arena, marked by the growing involvement of diverse stakeholders, heightened bipartisan tensions with the administration, and the fragmentation of perspectives regarding China. Previously conceptualized in overly simplistic terms during the Cold War, China was increasingly perceived as a multifaceted entity, allowing various groups within Washington to formulate divergent interpretations. This diversification of views further exacerbated the challenges of formulating a coherent policy during a critical historical juncture. Simultaneously, this fragmentation undermined the United States' capacity to articulate a unified stance, enabling

Chinese leaders to interpret U.S. expectations for a return to "business as usual" in divergent ways. The viability of diplomatic engagement diminished, not only due to increasing domestic resistance to secrecy but also because directives from Washington frequently lacked clarity, obstructing the delivery of a consistent and coherent message to Beijing. As the domestic debate in Washington became more polarized, the human rights discourse itself became increasingly malleable, with different factions employing it to justify their positions. The renewed emphasis on market-oriented reforms by Deng Xiaoping in 1992, alongside mounting concerns regarding Hong Kong, shifted the focus toward economic priorities. Nonetheless, advocacy from human rights and labor organizations such as Asia Watch, HRIC, and the AFL-CIO's Frontlash succeeded in maintaining critical pressure on China, instilling a sense of caution that would intensify and reverberate in U.S.-China relations in the years that followed.

Those who eventually engaged in shaping Washington's China policy can be broadly categorized into two groups. The first group consisted of individuals who had acquired significant knowledge of China over the two decades following the normalization of relations. This included U.S. officials who had held positions in previous administrations during the 1970s and 1980s. Among them was President George H. W. Bush, who cultivated a close relationship with China during his tenure as Chief of the U.S. Liaison Office to the PRC in the mid-1970s. Also included were figures such as James Lilley and J. Stapleton Roy, both of whom would later serve as U.S. ambassadors to the PRC and whose perspectives were shaped by the unique circumstance of having been born and raised in China. Additionally, businesspeople who had increasingly sought opportunities in a country that, despite retaining its communist political system, had experienced consistent economic growth, were part of this group. These individuals had become familiar with China prior to the Tiananmen Square protests and crackdown, observing firsthand the rapid expansion and development, particularly in the coastal regions, which had progressively opened to the outside world. The narrative promoted by these actors contributed to the enduring myth of China, reinforcing the belief that the country was on a linear trajectory toward a "Western-style" modernization. Even in the aftermath of the violent suppression of the pro-democracy protests in June 1989, many continued to advocate for engagement rather than condemnation, viewing it as the optimal strategy to foster China's integration into the global U.S.-led order. While they condemned the PRC government's actions, these individuals tended to perceive the crackdown as a temporary interruption in a broader narrative of growth and liberalization.

The second group was comprised largely of individuals who, by their own admission, had limited familiarity with China prior to the summer of 1989. Many had never visited the country, and their understanding of China had been shaped primarily by the optimistic narrative that prevailed during the 1980s. Despite their initial lack of direct engagement with China, members of this group would eventually assume leadership roles within the faction advocating for sanctions and measures to condemn the Chinese government's actions, with human rights as the central motivating principle. For example, Nancy Pelosi had never prioritized China in her political agenda before the Tiananmen crackdown, and Sidney Jones, who had little prior interest in China, became involved in the issue after assuming the role of executive director at Asia Watch. Similarly, Charyl Graeve, with minimal prior knowledge of China, became active in the *Toycott* campaign. In the aftermath of the crackdown, this group relied significantly on Chinese individuals residing in the United States – most notably Chinese students and prominent dissidents – who served as key informants for members of Congress. Additionally, they utilized networks of contacts within China to obtain detailed accounts of the Chinese government's repressive practices, further shaping the discourse on human rights and policy responses. This faction typically viewed the Chinese leadership as a unified entity, often suggesting that only the emergence of new, reform-minded leaders could offer an opportunity for change and progress within the government.

Ambassador Stape Roy's perspective provides a significant, albeit potentially partial, lens through which to understand the mindset of key stakeholders shaping Washington's China policy. As Roy himself recounted, "I grew up thinking of Chinese as ordinary human beings, no glamour. They had all the virtues and vices of everybody else." His reflection on the complexities of engaging with China mirrors the duality inherent in many individuals' relationships with the country. Roy observed, "one of the dangers of becoming acquainted with China as an adult is that people tend to either fall in love with China and its culture, glamorizing it, or develop an aversion to China and hate it." This recognition of emotional polarization reflects the broader dichotomy that shaped the policy discourse, where one group of stakeholders viewed China with a pragmatic idealist belief in its potential for gradual liberalization, while others took a more critical stance, shaped by concerns over human rights and political repression. Roy's personal experience in China provided him with a level of detachment in his approach to the country, a perspective that differentiated him from many in Washington who either romanticized China or dismissed it outright. Reflecting on the advantages of his background, he noted, "The merit of growing up in China was that I've

always been unemotional in dealing with China. The second advantage is that I was very comfortable with Chinese culture. Chinese would behave the exact way I expected them to behave." Despite potential bias, Roy's insights point to a broader trend within the U.S. political establishment, where individuals tended to view China in sharply opposing ways. On the one hand, there were those who continued to believe in China's potential for liberalization and economic integration, despite the brutal crackdown of 1989. On the other hand, there were those who viewed the Chinese government's repression as an insurmountable obstacle to engagement. This tension between idealization and demonization complicated efforts to develop a cohesive and consistent policy toward China. As Roy's reflection suggests, the challenge was not just about political disagreements, but also about deeply rooted emotional and factional reactions to China – reactions that were often in direct opposition to one another. This discordance, in turn, made it difficult to find a "middle way" in Washington's approach to China during the post-Tiananmen years, with the competing perspectives further complicating the formulation of a unified policy.

II. Unexplored Sources: Expanding the Research Base

With additional time, this project could be expanded through the inclusion of sources that were inaccessible during its initial development. Given the contemporary nature of the subject matter, many archival materials remain classified, particularly within governmental repositories. While the George H. W. Bush Presidential Library has undertaken a declassification process that provided a satisfactory – though still incomplete – set of documents, the William J. Clinton Presidential Library has not yet offered a comparable level of access. Challenges in source availability also extend to non-governmental archives. For instance, the Columbia University Center for Human Rights houses extensive collections of Human Rights Watch documents pertaining to China, many of which remain inaccessible. Similarly, the AFL-CIO records, held at the University of Maryland, are not yet fully open to researchers. Two other key collections that could enrich this study, but were not accessible within the scope of this research, are the papers of Representative Nancy Pelosi, preserved at the Library of Congress, and those of Senator George Mitchell, housed at Bowdoin College Library. Additionally, the Rockefeller Archive Center offers potential for further exploration of the business dimensions integral to this research. Access to these archives can additionally enhance the basis of this project, allowing for a deeper and more comprehensive examination

of the intersection of domestic and international dynamics in shaping U.S.-China relations during this transformative period.

Similarly, the breadth of interviews can be expanded. The interviews conducted for this study have been instrumental in compensating for the limited availability of primary sources, particularly in exploring the role of third-party groups and contributing original insights to the research. Mapping the network of individuals occupying various roles within organizations or working within the staff of congressional offices is a complex and labor-intensive endeavor. A broader interview process would facilitate engagement with individuals who held diverse positions within the administrations, congressional offices, and advocacy organizations. This would offer valuable new perspectives on the decision-making processes in Washington, thereby deepening the understanding of the interactions between institutional actors, interest groups, and policymakers. Expanding the pool of interviews would significantly enhance the empirical richness of the study and provide a more nuanced analysis of the dynamics influencing U.S. foreign policy toward China.

III. Future Avenues for Inquiry and Research Directions

This research presents several opportunities for expansion into a broader project and monograph. One particularly promising avenue, which could be pursued within the time of a post-doctoral program, involves extending the geographical and analytical scope to explore the broader Western responses to the Tiananmen crackdown. It would aim at examining how the events in China, alongside the country's emerging potential within the global economic and strategic order, influenced, complicated, and even threatened the stability of post-Cold War Transatlantic relations. Such an expansion would focus on two principal objectives. Firstly, it would investigate the Bush Sr. and Clinton administration's efforts and anxieties in mobilizing its European allies to adopt a unified strategy toward China. This was crucial for preserving the strategic advantages meticulously cultivated over the previous two decades, following the landmark Sino-American normalization orchestrated by Nixon and Kissinger. Amid a contentious domestic debate over U.S. policy toward China – driven by an increasingly confrontational Congress and public outrage over the events in China – the administrations grew increasingly apprehensive about a possible divergence from a coordinated Western response. With covert diplomacy no longer a viable option, these concerns were further amplified by the broader need to maintain "Western unity" during this critical transitional phase, in which the shifting and fluid geopolitical landscape, particularly in Europe, was

regarded both as an opportunity and as a potential threat. This apprehension also extended to Japan, which, by the end of the 1980s, was viewed as a credible threat to U.S. post-Cold War global dominance, with the potential to surpass Washington economically and emerge as the world's leading power. Secondly, the project would seek to assess the extent to which the Western reaction to the events in China had the potential to undermine the stability of Transatlantic relations. It would explore how these responses heightened tensions that had been building over the last two decades of the Cold War – a period marked by the erosion of the automaticity of the alliance and the emergence of divergent strategic priorities. These tensions became particularly acute in the 1990s, as the relationship between Washington and its European allies evolved without adequate critical reflection on the strategic implications of the Soviet Union's collapse and the broader transition away from the Cold War order.

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Stefano CHESSA ALTIERI

« Une voie médiane pour l'Empire du Milieu »

Les efforts des États-Unis pour définir leur politique envers la Chine post-Tiananmen (juin 1989 - juin 1994)

Thèse dirigée par Mario DEL PERO, professeur des universités, IEP de Paris

Résumé

Object et résultats de la recherche

Cette recherche examine le moment clé où les dynamiques et les problématiques qui caractérisent aujourd'hui les relations entre Washington et Pékin ont pris forme de manière visible. Elle analyse comment divers intérêts, contradictions et limites de cette relation particulière, mais de plus en plus essentielle, ont animé un débat intérieur aux États-Unis sur la Chine et sur la signification de cette pays pour les Américains. La recherche soutient que la répression violente des manifestations menées par des étudiants et des ouvriers sur la place Tiananmen à Pékin et dans d'autres grandes villes chinoises a profondément remis en cause la capacité des États-Unis à justifier de manière cohérente le maintien de leur relation avec la Chine. Noués lors de l'ouverture diplomatique historique initiée par l'administration Nixon, ces liens s'étaient progressivement détachés des impératifs stratégiques de la guerre froide pour s'orienter, à la fin des années 1980, vers des interdépendances économiques et des intérêts commerciaux. Réconcilier ces priorités avec les valeurs fondamentales des États-Unis – en particulier la promotion des droits de l'homme, qui avait pris une place centrale dans la politique étrangère américaine depuis la fin des années 1970 – s'est révélé être une tâche particulièrement ardue. Les administrations Bush père et Clinton se sont ainsi trouvées confrontées à un double défi dans l'élaboration de leur politique à l'égard de la République populaire de Chine (RPC). D'une part, elles étaient contraintes par la crainte persistante de renouer avec une relation conflictuelle avec Pékin, ou plus encore, par les conséquences géopolitiques potentielles d'un « perte de la Chine ». Cette appréhension s'inscrivait dans un cadre historique profondément enraciné, remontant aux années 1950, lorsque la « perte de la Chine » au profit du communisme avait marqué le discours politique intérieur américain. D'autre part, ces administrations devaient concilier leur engagement diplomatique avec un

régime qui avait ouvertement violé des principes démocratiques fondamentaux et les droits humains. Cet équilibre délicat était encore compliqué par la nécessité de formuler une politique cohérente et défendable devant une opinion publique américaine de plus en plus sensible aux impératifs moraux dans la conduite des affaires étrangères.

Les images de la répression avaient fait irruption dans les foyers américains d'une manière inédite, marquant un tournant décisif dans la conscience publique du pays. La société américaine s'était alors retrouvée brusquement confrontée à la réalité immédiate de ses relations avec la Chine et son gouvernement, qui avaient jusque-là été en partie idéalisés et projetés dans une perspective d'avenir prometteur. La suppression violente des manifestations pro-démocratiques avait mis à mal l'image dominante de la Chine comme une forme unique et relativement modérée de régime communiste. À la suite du massacre de Tiananmen, la part d'Américains ayant une opinion défavorable de la Chine avait brusquement augmenté. Dès le milieu de l'année 1989, cette perception négative s'était imposée comme majoritaire, ne connaissant par la suite que de légères fluctuations, et ce jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Face à ce retournement de l'opinion publique, les décideurs américains s'étaient trouvés confrontés à un dilemme fondamental : comment dénoncer les violations des droits de l'homme commises par le Parti communiste chinois sans trahir les valeurs fondamentales des États-Unis, tout en évitant que la Chine ne retourne à une posture de confrontation semblable à celle de l'ère maoïste. Trouver cet équilibre – ou, comme l'avait formulé en 1990 le représentant de New York Stephen Solarz, « une voie médiane pour l'Empire du Milieu » – était devenu l'enjeu central de l'élaboration de la politique américaine envers la Chine dans l'après-Tiananmen.

Le sujet demeure essentiel pour les historiens s'intéressant aux relations sino-américaines au début de l'ère post-guerre froide. Cette recherche examine les répercussions de la répression de la place Tiananmen sur l'environnement de la politique étrangère à Washington, en mettant en lumière les complexités et les limites qui ont façonné l'élaboration de la politique américaine à l'égard de la RPC pendant cette période de transformation. Elle soutient que les événements de juin 1989 ont engendré des complications durables dans la formulation de la politique américaine, sous l'effet de trois facteurs clés. Premièrement, la répression est survenue à un moment où la guerre froide touchait à sa fin, rendant impossible pour Washington de justifier sa politique chinoise comme un contrepoids stratégique à la menace soviétique. La répression – combinée aux réponses problématiques des administrations de George H. W. Bush, jugée trop prudente, et de Bill Clinton, dont la rhétorique de campagne

promettait une rupture avec son prédécesseur, mais qui maintint finalement une approche privilégiant l'engagement aux sanctions – a provoqué un changement notable dans la manière dont la politique étrangère américaine envers Pékin était conçue et menée. Pendant près de deux décennies, l'exécutif avait dominé la formulation et la mise en œuvre de la politique chinoise, le contexte de la guerre froide justifiant une approche spécifique, où le secret et la diplomatie personnelle étaient perçus comme des instruments précieux et acceptables. Cependant, l'élaboration d'une politique post-guerre froide à l'égard de Pékin s'est avérée plus complexe, marquée par une négociation intérieure sans précédent entre de nouveaux acteurs influents, ce qui a mis fin à l'isolement de la politique chinoise par rapport aux enjeux de politique intérieure.

Toutefois, la redéfinition d'une politique post-guerre froide à l'égard de Pékin s'est avérée plus complexe en raison de l'émergence d'acteurs domestiques influents exigeant davantage de transparence et de responsabilité, réduisant ainsi la capacité de l'exécutif à soustraire cette politique aux dynamiques internes. Les efforts visant à préserver le statu quo des relations sino-américaines – en particulier sous Bush père, qui adopta une posture plus conflictuelle sur la scène intérieure, et dans une moindre mesure sous Clinton, qui privilégia une stratégie plus souple – furent critiqués comme un pari risqué sur l'avenir des relations bilatérales, renforçant l'importance de ce que beaucoup considéraient comme de simples gestes symboliques. Ce mécontentement au sein de Washington donna finalement naissance à une structure décisionnelle plus triangulaire, dans laquelle le Congrès et plusieurs parties prenantes américaines, autrefois reléguées à un rôle périphérique, affirmèrent de plus en plus leur influence dans l'élaboration de la politique américaine à l'égard de la Chine. Le massacre marqua le début d'une approche plus diversifiée et contestée de la politique chinoise, où une multitude d'acteurs jouèrent un rôle dans la définition de la position des États-Unis vis-à-vis de la RPC. Ce changement d'attitude eut des conséquences majeures sur la manière dont les États-Unis interagirent avec la RPC dans les années suivantes. Une large coalition – incluant des membres du Congrès, des défenseurs des droits de l'homme, des faucons conservateurs anticommunistes et divers groupes de pression opposés au renforcement des relations avec Pékin – dénonça les pratiques jugées « inhumaines » de la Chine.

Deuxièmement, le cadre diplomatique établi par le président Nixon et son conseiller à la sécurité nationale, Henry Kissinger, au début des années 1970, se désintégra rapidement, entraînant un bouleversement profond des dynamiques internes de la politique étrangère

américaine envers la Chine. La délégitimation des canaux diplomatiques traditionnels, combinée à une remise en question des mécanismes de hiérarchie, soumit les décisions de politique étrangère à un dialogue complexe – et parfois conflictuel – entre une pluralité d'acteurs. Un dialogue de plus en plus structuré par l'usage bipartisan du langage des droits de l'homme, lequel permit de doter la politique américaine envers la Chine de nouveaux codes universalistes et de conférer une légitimité morale accrue à l'implication des États-Unis dans les affaires intérieures chinoises. Bien que le Congrès ait réaffirmé ses prérogatives en matière de politique étrangère depuis le milieu des années 1970, les questions liées à la Chine – à l'exception notable des préoccupations des Américains concernant le Tibet – étaient largement restées en marge de l'agenda législatif. De manière paradoxale, la RPC n'avait pas non plus constitué un point focal des campagnes américaines de défense des droits de l'homme qui avaient marqué la fin de la guerre froide. Toutefois, le discours sur les droits humains en Chine acquit progressivement une résonance politique croissante, transcendant les clivages partisans. Les faucons républicains de la guerre froide l'utilisèrent pour raviver une rhétorique anticommuniste, tandis que les démocrates libéraux s'en saisirent pour critiquer l'engagement des États-Unis auprès des régimes autoritaires. Dans ce paysage politique en mutation, la Chine devint un instrument central du jeu politique intérieur, le discours sur les droits de l'homme étant stratégiquement invoqué, redéfini et parfois amplifié afin de servir des agendas politiques concurrents. Les commissions du Congrès s'impliquèrent activement dans les questions relatives à la Chine, tandis que les défenseurs des droits humains redirigèrent leur attention de Moscou vers Pékin. Dans cette perspective, cette étude entend contribuer au débat historiographique sur le rôle des droits de l'homme dans la politique étrangère américaine en réévaluant ses frontières temporelles et thématiques.

Troisièmement, le massacre de Pékin, sa représentation et sa réception aux États-Unis ont constitué un défi direct au récit triomphaliste qui présentait la fin de la guerre froide comme une victoire définitive pour la liberté, la démocratie et les droits de l'homme. Les événements de juin 1989 ont perturbé l'hypothèse largement partagée selon laquelle la RPC progressait inévitablement vers une modernisation de style occidental. Cette conviction reposait sur l'idée que les réformes orientées vers le marché, introduites au début des années 1980 par Deng Xiaoping, ouvriraient naturellement la voie à la libéralisation du système politique chinois. La répression violente des manifestations pro-démocratie a profondément sapé ce récit optimiste, déjà renforcé par l'expansion des échanges impliquant des étudiants, des hommes d'affaires et des touristes, qui semblaient signaler l'ouverture de la Chine au changement. Émergente

des dévastations de la Révolution culturelle, la Chine a connu une transformation profonde à partir des années 1970, s'imposant finalement comme une superpuissance mondiale. Cette transformation était le résultat d'une confluence exceptionnelle de facteurs internationaux et domestiques, produisant une trajectoire de développement qui, par sa rapidité et son ampleur, se distingue des cas historiques comparables. L'interaction de ces dimensions a été cruciale, car aucun facteur pris isolément n'aurait probablement suffi à impulser une transformation aussi rapide et d'une telle envergure.

À l'échelle internationale, l'effondrement du système de Bretton Woods, combiné à la dérégulation des transactions financières, des investissements et du commerce, avait ouvert de nouvelles opportunités pour des pays comme la Chine de s'intégrer à l'économie mondiale. L'alignement politique et stratégique tardif de Mao Zedong avec les États-Unis – largement motivé par les tensions sino-soviétiques – avait, malgré son scepticisme envers les réformes économiques, jeté les bases permettant à la Chine de tirer parti de ces opportunités après sa mort. Sous la direction post-maoïste, la Chine avait habilement mobilisé ses relations avec les puissances étrangères pour attirer des ressources essentielles, notamment des prêts, des investissements et un accès privilégié aux marchés, en particulier ceux des États-Unis, de l'Europe et de l'Asie de l'Est. Sur le plan intérieur, la mort de Mao en 1976 avait marqué un tournant décisif, mettant fin à l'ère révolutionnaire et ouvrant la voie à un réalignement politique qui avait mené à l'ascension de Deng Xiaoping. Ce dernier avait su exploiter les nouvelles dynamiques internationales pour promouvoir une série de réformes économiques qui avaient transformé l'économie chinoise, la faisant passer d'un modèle centralisé à une structure de plus en plus orientée vers les principes du marché. Ces réformes avaient d'abord pris la forme d'initiatives expérimentales et souvent discrètes, avant d'être étendues lorsque Deng avait érigé la modernisation économique en pilier central de la stabilité et de la légitimité du régime. Toutefois, cette libéralisation économique ne s'était pas accompagnée d'une démocratisation politique. Le caractère autoritaire du régime avait été réaffirmé de manière brutale par la répression des mouvements pro-démocratie, illustrant la conviction de Deng selon laquelle la croissance économique et le maintien du régime à parti unique étaient non seulement compatibles, mais également « mutuellement renforçants » – un modèle de gouvernance demeuré intact jusqu'à aujourd'hui. La perception occidentale – particulièrement répandue aux États-Unis – selon laquelle l'intégration de la Chine aux marchés mondiaux favoriserait des bénéfices réciproques et conduirait, à terme, à une démocratisation politique,

avait paradoxalement contribué à légitimer encore davantage la trajectoire choisie par le régime chinois.

À la lumière de ces considérations initiales, cette recherche vise à contribuer à l'ensemble croissant de travaux sur les relations contemporaines entre les États-Unis et la Chine, en se concentrant sur une période courte mais décisive entre juin 1989 et juin 1994, une époque où la guerre froide touchait à sa fin, mais dont l'issue restait incertaine. Bien que les dynamiques stratégiques du système mondial bipolaire continuent d'influencer les relations internationales, les premières étapes de la mondialisation ont commencé à révéler des trajectoires potentielles pour le système international post-guerre froide. Dans ce contexte d'incertitude, cette recherche soutient que la contestation sans précédent des mécanismes de décision politique à Washington, qui n'avait pas eu lieu depuis deux décennies depuis la normalisation des relations avec la Chine sous Nixon, a exacerbé les tensions entre une politique étrangère centrée sur les droits de l'homme, des interdépendances économiques croissantes et l'objectif plus large d'intégrer la Chine dans l'ordre international post-guerre froide dirigé par les États-Unis. Le débat interne et contesté aux États-Unis sur sa politique envers la Chine, associé à l'impossibilité d'identifier « une voie médiane pour l'Empire du Milieu », a eu des effets durables sur la nature de la relation.

Historiographie et contributions de la recherche

Cette étude examine l'interaction entre dynamiques politiques domestiques, intérêts particuliers et stratégies électorales locales, et souligne leur impact profond sur la posture internationale des États-Unis. Elle explore comment la contestation prolongée entre l'exécutif et le législatif – amplifiée par un réseau croissant d'acteurs influents – a retardé l'élaboration d'une réponse cohérente aux événements en Chine. Elle soutient que cette dynamique a non seulement façonné la nature des relations sino-américaines, mais a également compromis, du moins à court terme, la capacité des États-Unis à intégrer efficacement Pékin dans la communauté internationale post-guerre froide. En plaçant les dynamiques internes américaines au centre d'un projet d'histoire globale, cette recherche s'inscrit dans la réflexion des historiens et politologues sur la nécessité de repenser méthodologiquement l'histoire des États-Unis après 1945. Elle défend l'idée que la fin de la guerre froide a marqué un glissement du modèle élitiste et descendant de la politique chinoise américaine vers un modèle plus

pluraliste, où l'opinion publique et les groupes de pression ont acquis une influence déterminante sur les membres du Congrès, bouleversant ainsi les relations sino-américaines.

De plus, cette recherche s'inscrit dans la vaste littérature sur les droits de l'homme pour illustrer comment les États-Unis ont connu un crescendo d'inquiétude, de condamnation et de plaidoyer en réponse à la répression violente par le gouvernement chinois des manifestations pacifiques en faveur de la démocratie. Le cas de la Chine et la réaction américaine à la répression de Tiananmen permettent de déplacer l'analyse de la percée des droits de l'homme – que les historiens ont largement et de manière convaincante située dans les années 1970 – vers les années 1990, lorsque, dans le cadre spécifique des relations sino-américaines, les principes des droits de l'homme sont finalement devenus pleinement évidents. Cette recherche tente également de fusionner l'historiographie des droits humains avec celle des relations sino-américaines, en soutenant que la fascination américaine pour la Chine et les projections messianiques dirigées vers Pékin dans les années 1970 et 1980 – cette croyance largement répandue selon laquelle la Chine « pouvait être sauvée » – ont considérablement amplifié l'écho de la répression des manifestants pro-démocratie. Ces derniers avaient recours à des slogans et des cadres rhétoriques résonnant avec les valeurs américaines, provoquant ainsi un choc profond chez ceux qui avaient investi une foi considérable dans le récit idéalisé de la Chine, façonné par le discours public américain à la suite du rapprochement initié par Nixon. Cette narration romantique, autrefois dominante, est soudainement apparue dépassée, révélant que l'imaginaire partagé par de nombreux Américains n'était guère plus qu'une illusion qui devait désormais être reconstruite et repensée à la lumière des transformations mondiales en cours.

Le vocabulaire des droits humains était alors devenu un mécanisme central pour faire face à cette désillusion et pour formuler une réponse à la fois morale et crédible aux actions du gouvernement chinois. Il avait été largement adopté par une pluralité d'acteurs, notamment les décideurs politiques, les dissidents et étudiants chinois, ainsi que par des groupes de plaidoyer influents. Toutefois, l'appropriation de la rhétorique des droits humains ne s'était pas opérée sans contradictions ni limites. Cette recherche montre comment le débat américain sur l'engagement avec Pékin, articulé autour des préoccupations relatives aux droits de l'homme, avait souvent occulté la complexité d'un pays aussi multiforme que la Chine. Le discours intérieur américain avait tendance à adopter une grille de lecture binaire, notamment en raison des efforts de l'administration pour centraliser la prise de décision en matière de

politique chinoise, marginalisant de ce fait les acteurs désireux de jouer un rôle plus actif. Des groupes tiers avaient su tirer parti des prises de position de certains membres du Congrès, dont les attitudes vis-à-vis de la Chine étaient façonnées par les demandes de leurs électeurs et par les préoccupations spécifiques à leurs circonscriptions. Après l'échec du projet de loi Pelosi visant à protéger les étudiants chinois aux États-Unis, et alors que le débat sur la conditionnalité du renouvellement annuel du statut commercial de la nation la plus favorisée (MFN) s'était intensifié entre 1990 et 1994, la question des droits humains avait acquis une place croissante dans les discussions de politique étrangère américaine. Dans ce contexte d'interdépendances économiques croissantes entre les États-Unis et la Chine, l'évolution de la position du monde des affaires américain s'était révélée particulièrement significative. D'abord réticentes et promptes à percevoir les défenseurs des droits humains comme excessivement idéalistes, de nombreuses entreprises avaient progressivement intégré cette rhétorique à leur propre argumentaire. Elles soutenaient désormais que leur présence économique en Chine contribuait à la promotion des droits économiques et sociaux, en facilitant notamment l'amélioration des conditions de vie sur place.

Recherche archivistique et sources

La recherche archivistique liée à ce projet a débuté à l'été 2022 dans les bibliothèques présidentielles George H. W. Bush et William J. Clinton, situées respectivement au Texas et en Arkansas, qui conservent des sources essentielles pour analyser l'approche et les priorités de ces deux administrations à l'égard de la Chine. Afin d'examiner le rôle croissant du Congrès dans la formulation de la politique chinoise et l'appropriation bipartisane du langage des droits de l'homme, cette recherche s'est appuyée sur les auditions parlementaires et les archives du Congrès entre 1989 et 1994, ainsi que sur les documents privés de plusieurs membres du Congrès ayant joué un rôle déterminant, en particulier les archives de Tom Lantos conservées à la Bancroft Library de l'université de Californie à Berkeley. D'autres fonds d'archives se sont révélés particulièrement précieux, notamment ceux de la Bibliothèque du Congrès, qui conserve les papiers du conseiller à la sécurité nationale Anthony Lake ; de la bibliothèque de l'université de Princeton, où se trouvent les archives du secrétaire d'État de l'administration Bush, James Baker ; des Hoover Institution Archives de l'université Stanford, qui renferment les documents du secrétaire d'État de l'administration Clinton, Warren Christopher ; ainsi que les archives de Stanford conservant les papiers de l'ambassadeur en Chine, James Lilley. L'étude du rôle des acteurs non gouvernementaux a bénéficié de recherches menées au Center

for the Study of Human Rights de l'université Columbia, où sont conservées les archives des deux principales ONG engagées dans la défense des droits humains : Human Rights Watch et Amnesty International. De même, les archives de l'AFL-CIO à l'université du Maryland se sont avérées d'une grande utilité. Enfin, l'un des principaux atouts d'un travail portant sur le début des années 1990 réside dans la possibilité d'interroger directement certaines figures de premier plan ayant joué un rôle actif dans les événements analysés.