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John H. Holdridge. *Crossing the Divide: An Insider's Account of Normalization of U.S.-China Relations.* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997. xv + 307 pp. $36.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8476-8505-9; $95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-8504-2.

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Students of diplomatic history are already endowed with a long list of insiders' accounts detailing the eventful trajectory of U.S.-China relations throughout the twentieth century. Presidents (with the exception of Ronald Reagan and George Bush so far), secretaries of state, and national security advisors (Henry Kissinger and Zbignew Brzezinski being the most notable) have produced volumes of personal accounts of the high dramas, behind-the-scene anecdotes, and reflections of how the U.S. and Chinese governments (including the Chinese Nationalist government before and since 1949) interacted with each other dating back to the Chinese civil war in the 1930s. What does another memoir, written by a retired career diplomat but nonetheless covering the same era, have to contribute?

John Holdridge's China profile includes positions overseeing operations of U.S. diplomacy towards China in both Washington (Department of State and National Security Council) and Beijing (the U.S. Liasion Office) for nearly thirty years (1969 to 1983). In contrast to memoirs by the more visible figures, Holdridge's presents a relatively rare account of U.S. policy making and negotiations between Washington and Beijing from the vantage point of a lower-ranking operator (up to assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific 1981-83). There are no significant differences between Holdrige's account of events and those written by his superiors and peers. As a matter of fact, Holdrige makes an effort to avoid repetition by providing bibliographical documentation of other diplomatic memoirs for the reader's cross-reference.

Like most other diplomats' memoirs, *Crossing the Divide* is chronologically organized. Events covered in the book span from Kissinger's secret trips to Beijing (1970) to the signing of the third U.S.-China joint communique (in 1983, on the issue of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan). While most of the major developments during this period have been recorded and more comprehensively analyzed elsewhere, Holdridge's account highlights the diplomatic wrangling between Beijing and Washington over the thorny issue of the status of Taiwan in U.S.-China relations. Out of reading *Crossing the Divide*, one cannot help but think that at the operational level, the single most stubborn divide between Washington and Beijing is over the issue of Taiwan, both before and after the 1979 U.S. switch of diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing.

A significant contribution *Crossing the Divide* makes is Holdridge's descriptions (pp. 111-64) of the operations of the U.S. Liaison Offices (USLO) in Beijing (where he served as assistant to head of the mission from 1973 to 1975), its relations with the Chinese foreign ministry and other departments of the Chinese bureaucracy and the Chinese society at large. On these pages we learn that the waning years of Mao Zedong's personal reign did not at all translate to lesser politicization of public life in Beijing. The influence of ideology on Chinese bureaucrats' interactions with foreign diplomats remained very strong. One manifestation of this was a Chinese printing company's initial refusal to print the Chinese-language version of visa application forms, which prompted a summon by the Chinese Foreign Ministry (pp. 119-20). Another interesting story Holdridge tells is the intrusiveness of how foreign diplomats should entertain themselves (pp. 135-36).

Another significant contribution to the literature *Crossing the Divide* makes is its descriptions of working level Chinese diplomats as well as the rapport that emerged out of their interactions with American counterparts. In presenting his Chinese counterparts, Holdridge is careful not to categorize them in terms such as "(un)friendly" to America. Rather, he simply treats them as individuals operating in a system imposed on them. *Crossing the Divide* teaches us that the resilience of the working level diplomats working in both Washington and Beijing has in no small part contributed to

the eventual establishment and maintenance of a normal diplomatic relationship between the two countries.

Holdrige concludes that "the effort to cross the divide between the United States and the People's Republic of China was at best tedious, time-consuming, frustrating, and fraught with difficulties" (p. 243). While similar words can be used to categorize the diplomatic history between the United States and a number of the major powers in the world, *Crossing the Divide* would have been a lot more helpful to interested readers if it had provided an understanding of Chinese diplomatic negotiation patterns, if there were any. Given Holdridge's career, his insights on the predictability of how Chinese leaders as a group engage in diplomatic negotiations would have been a welcome addition to the literature on U.S.-China relations indeed.

Overall, *Crossing the Divide* is a valuable addition to the body of history on U.S.-China relations and, though to a much lesser degree, on U.S.-China relations in the East Asian regional context. The book is a smooth read. Students have a lot to learn from not only Holdridge's descriptions of history but also his attention to details in recording history.

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