

**Ramon H. Myers, Michel C. Oksenberg, David Shambaugh.** *Making China Policy: Lessons from the Bush and Clinton Administrations.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001. vii + 314 pp. \$105.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7425-0963-4.



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## The Success of U.S.-China Relations

The purpose of *Making China Policy* is to examine how the American governmental process helped shape U.S.-Chinese relations in the late 1980s and 1990s. To accomplish this end, editors Ramon H. Myers, Michel C. Oksenberg, and David Shambaugh have brought together a collection of writers--historians, political scientists, research fellows, as well as one journalist--who approach this goal from a number of different angles. While the text is formally divided into four parts, these experts develop three distinct areas. The first two chapters present an overview of the Bush and Clinton years and the efforts of these presidents to pursue what the authors call a policy of "engagement." A middle portion of the book focuses on domestic institutions that influence decision making, such as Congress and NGOs, marking the power struggle between the executive and legislative branches of government when determining policy. A final segment attempts to look at how the United States responded to pressures from Europe and from countries in Asia. Altogether *Making China Policy* represents an ambitious undertaking

that does a good job of highlighting some arguments as well as identifying key players and issues that scholars no doubt will visit in more depth in the future once classified information becomes available. Judged on this basis the book is successful and any shortcomings spark debate rather than signify error.

For President Bush, a successful policy of engagement meant blunting the desire of Congress to deal harshly with China after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. Had those on the Hill had their way, more friction than cooperation would have grown out of the incident (p. 21). When Bush left office, this experienced leader yielded to a successor uninterested in and poorly prepared to wrestle with foreign affairs. For this reason, the Clinton presidency witnessed continued engagement with China largely due to the efforts of Congress. But herein lies the problem. Over time, "increasingly complex agreements" between the two branches of government increased the "transaction costs" of shaping policy. This reality helped foster "institutional gridlock" between the executive and legislature. Although Bush had

overcome this problem and brought stability to U.S.-China relations, the inexperienced Clinton had failed in this regard as he stumbled in the face of familiar competing interests: American business courting the mainland, organizations supporting human rights, and think tanks stressing national security concerns. A useful appendix in chapter 4 lists many of these NGOs.

At the center of this executive-legislative nexus lay a body with an old name, the China Lobby. James Mann's essay, "Congress and Taiwan: Understanding the Bond," notes the long history of this special interest group and his analysis assumes the continued influence of the lobby. Editorial comment in the introduction of the book generalizes that this organization presented the U.S. government with "complex information and competing perceptions and opinions about how to make U.S.-China policy" (p. 11). Mann makes it clear that more was at stake than this. If the threat of communism no longer remained a tool for this lobby, that of comparative democracy did and Taiwan, where the lobby is centered, touted its own democratic reforms as sharply contrasting with the lack of reform on the mainland (p. 211). For Mann, the new plurality on Taiwan spelled the end of the old China Lobby. Yet, Mann's point suggests a change of tactics on the part of the Taiwanese. The new lobby's appeal to democracy signified a clever reading of the American public, something the old lobby was very adept at as well. Such results could be just as fruitful as the democratic forces on Taiwan pressured Congress to push the Clinton administration for increased U.S. defense commitments to the island. Given the predictable reaction of the People's Republic of China, an active and effective China Lobby certainly did more than fuel an exchange of information.

Far from an introverted experience, the forces shaping U.S.-China policy came from abroad as well. These remained weak though not unimportant. In the case of Europe, the authors make the point that the European Union and the

United States shared the same economic incentive of protecting the trade they enjoyed with China. Michael Yahuda's essay suggests that a lack of coordination between the EU and America over China signified Europe's inability to influence U.S.-China policy. He views this as unfortunate because Europe and the United States would have benefited from mutually supporting trade agreements with the PRC. Additionally, these western powers could have worked together to ensure that China adhered to arms control treaties. There was little commonality of purpose in these areas, however, because the United States largely ignored Europe. In Asia, Japan's reluctance to impose economic sanctions or to harshly criticize Beijing following the Tiananmen Square massacre helped the Bush administration's push for continued engagement. Still, there was no coordination here either. In chapter 8, Seiichiro Takagi argues that Japan's caution grew out of sensitivity to its own past aggression on the mainland and because it did not want to foster a movement that might destabilize China (pp. 243-44). Takagi downplayed Japan's economic ties to the PRC, an obvious factor and one that explains this country's mitigated response to Tiananmen in less altruistic terms. While the same factor helped stay the hand of the United States, Japan exerted very little influence on U.S. policy. Rather, its decision to show reserve merely reinforced America's pre-existing position (p. 245). For Takagi, this "general lack of leverage" is regrettable but hardly surprising (p. 262).

A concluding chapter argues that from China's viewpoint, a willful United States set its own policy regarding U.S.-Chinese relations and that America's chief interest was containing the emerging power of this Asian country. For this reason, any "low political" issues where the two countries did agree, such as trade, educational exchanges, the environment, immigration controls, and crime, gave way to this "high political" issue of China trying to free itself from American interference. This dichotomy means that increasing ties have enabled both countries to overcome a

"learning curve" in order to better understand "each side's domestic processes" (p. 289). In this sense, the two powers influence one another's policies for the better as they strive for cooperation. There are limits, however, because this contact also revolves around the Cold War reality of China seeking to deter American hegemonic tendencies, a complaint validated by the open disdain U.S. leaders show for China's political system (p. 292).

Should this be an accurate picture of how China and the United States perceive each other, one has to wonder if the "transaction costs" that helped produce "institutional gridlock" in the American political system exemplify the virtue of democracy more than they retard the development of an effective policy. Competing groups and legal restrictions certainly make for a slowly changing policy, and one largely independent of outside influence, as these authors point out, but perhaps this is the best kind of policy to respond to the violent fissures that surface periodically in China's system of government. In general, this book suggests that U.S.-China relations developed just as they should have in the late 1980s and 1990s, since America kept its own counsel and did not make hasty decisions in a volatile environment.

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