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Enrico Fardella. “The Sino-American Normalization: A Reassessment.” 545-578.

Breck Walker. ““Friends, But Not Allies”—Cyrus Vance and the Normalization of Relations with China.” 579-594.

Brian Hilton. ““Maximum Flexibility for Peaceful Change”: Jimmy Carter, Taiwan, and the Recognition of the People’s Republic of China.” 595-614.

Mircea Munteanu. “Communication Breakdown? Romania and the Sino-American Rapprochement.” 615-631.

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Review by **Mao Lin**, University of Georgia

Relations between the People’s Republic of China and the United States have been one of the most important bilateral relations in and beyond the era of the Cold War. Today, debates over the so-called “rise of China” and its implications for America’s global strategy naturally invite investigations of the historical roots of U.S.-China relations. Although scholars agree that the 1970s were crucial in shaping today’s Sino-American relations, they disagree about why and how U.S.-China relations evolved over time. One reason for this situation is the lack of reliable primary sources. While access to the Nixon-Ford archives has been widened greatly in the past few years, most of the Carter archives still remain classified. On the other side of the Pacific, there is no sign that the Chinese archives will become available in the foreseeable future. Yet as the four articles reviewed here remind us, there are reasons to be optimistic: while now we cannot achieve a full picture of Sino-American relations during the 1970s, newly available archives can shed new light on old questions. In fact, the four articles first originated as papers at a conference held by the State Department Office of the Historian when the China volumes of the *Foreign Relations Series of the United States* of the Nixon-Ford

period were released in 2006.¹ All of the four authors integrate newly released documents into their works and propose new interpretations of U.S.-China relations from Nixon to Carter.

With respect to Munteanu's article, it is well known that before Henry Kissinger's 1971 visit and Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to China, initial contacts between America and China were made simultaneously through Romania and Pakistan. It is also well known that eventually Nixon and Kissinger decided to reach the Chinese through the Pakistanis. While usually scholars quickly move on to the later more substantive interactions between America and China, the question why and how the Romanian channel was abandoned remains unanswered. Munteanu, who draws insight from the newly declassified Romanian documents on Romanian-Chinese relations, provides a tentative answer to this question. According to him, by the end of 1970, the Chinese leadership decided to open discussions with the United States and was ready to send its message through any available channel. At the time, neither America nor China discounted Romania as a possible intermediary. When Nixon visited Bucharest in August 1969, he told the Romanians that Washington was ready to open discussions with Beijing, a message that Ion Gheorghe Maurer, the Romanian president of the Council of Ministers, delivered to the Chinese premier Zhou Enlai in October 1969 when both leaders attended Ho Chi Minh's funeral in Hanoi. Yet the Romanians, as Munteanu shows, failed to transmit to Washington Zhou's response that China was ready to resume talks with America at Warsaw. Indeed, such a failure was just the beginning of the abandonment of the Romanian channel. Munteanu examines in detail how, during the subsequent months, Bucharest, while still acting as an intermediary between Beijing and Washington, failed to deliver to the Nixon-Kissinger team the message of Chinese readiness to reopen dialogues with America before the same message was transmitted through Pakistan. As a result, America and China eventually decided to use the Pakistani channel and abandoned the Romanian channel. Why did the Romanian leadership neglect to transmit the Chinese message to America in a timely manner? Munteanu proposes that one possible explanation is that the Chinese requested that Bucharest hold back the messages for a while. But he is inclined to believe that the Romanians decided to delay transmission for their own reasons, for they might want to pass the messages based on their own schedule, thus maximizing their gains from serving as an intermediary.

Munteanu's article raises an interesting question that demands further research. As Munteanu admits, the currently available documents do not permit a final answer to the question as to why Bucharest failed to transmit the messages in a timely fashion. But if it is true that the Romanians decided to postpone the transmission of messages because they wanted to maximize their gains in dealing with America and China, which in return would strengthen their position in the ongoing Soviet-Romanian conflict, then by implication future studies based on still more new sources will definitely achieve a fuller

¹ For information on the conference, see <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/c24517.htm>

understanding of U.S.-China rapprochement by examining the role of previously neglected countries such as Romania in global Sino-Soviet-American diplomacy.

While Munteanu shows the complexity of U.S.-China rapprochement under Nixon, the other three authors reveal the turbulent road toward normalization of U.S.-China relations under Carter. Their articles share similar themes such as the importance of Taiwan in the normalization process, the bureaucratic infighting between Carter's Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and his National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, and the growing anti-Soviet rationale in Sino-American relations. Moreover, all authors use newly released sources, particularly those from the Jimmy Carter Library, to re-examine the normalization process.

Enrico Fardella argues in "The Sino-American Normalization: A Reassessment" that the U.S.-China normalization was probably the "greatest success" for the Carter administration (545). The reason is that the Carter administration was able to establish diplomatic relations with China without sacrificing Taiwan by continuing American arms sales to Taiwan and by forging the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). Like other scholars, Fardella recognizes the importance of the Taiwan issue in U.S.-China normalization. Yet while some scholars accuse the Carter administration of selling out Taiwan to achieve diplomatic relations with Beijing, Fardella insists that this was not the case. Moreover, he argues that the Carter administration actually corrected the early blows to Taiwan delivered by the Nixon-Kissinger team and created a more balanced compromise with Beijing regarding Taiwan. So why were Beijing and Washington able to achieve normalization despite their different stances on the Taiwan issue? And why did the Chinese decide not to blow up the normalization process in the face of continued American arms sales to Taiwan and later the passage of the TRA? One reason was that the strategic benefits of normalization clearly outweighed the issue of Taiwan, which both sides eventually decided to downplay in order to achieve a closer strategic alliance in the face of the perceived common threat from the Soviet Union. Another reason was that the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping wanted normalization very much because it would strengthen his hands in domestic politics and help his new "open and reform" policy by gaining Chinese access to Western technologies and managerial know-how. Fardella also attributes the achievement of normalization to the shrewd maneuvers of Brzezinski. He especially examines how Brzezinski successfully deciphered Deng's intentions and maneuvered the Chinese into establishing diplomatic relations with Washington while allowing America to continue arms sales to Taiwan. In conclusion, Fardella argues that the Carter administration was able to achieve the normalization of relations with China while protecting America's credibility with its old ally Taiwan.

While Fardella grants more credits to Brzezinski in achieving Sino-American normalization, Breck Walker argues that the influence of Cyrus Vance in the making of the Carter administration's China policy has been underestimated by most scholars. The conventional wisdom says that Brzezinski gradually wrested the making of China policy out of the hands of Vance and the State Department, as his proposed anti-Soviet alliance

between America and China increasingly gained support from President Carter. Walker, however, maintains that “Brzezinski’s achievements, while important, have unfairly overshadowed Vance’s equally significant contributions to the normalization process.” (593) Walker correctly notes the different strategies between Vance and Brzezinski regarding U.S.-China normalization and he admits that Brzezinski gradually controlled the policy-making process, yet he argues that Vance’s influence was more fundamental in terms of laying down the basics and tone of U.S.-China normalization. Under the direction of Vance, Walker concludes, “the preferred terms and timing of normalization from an American perspective had been set forth and internally agreed on by late June 1977 and represented, for the most part, the terms and timing subsequently achieved in negotiations with the Chinese.” (593) In addition, Walker argues that Vance’s vision of the long-term Sino-American relations proved to be more accurate, that is, the economic, cultural, and scientific interactions over time turned out to be more beneficial to both countries than the narrowly defined strategic gains.

While the debate over the role played by Brzezinski and Vance is unlikely to fade away anytime soon, Brian Hilton points out in his article that historians can no longer afford to sidestep Jimmy Carter and focus only on his subordinates in examining the administration’s China policy. After all, Carter was the final decision maker. And indeed Carter emerges from Hilton’s article not as an inexperienced president swayed by his top advisors, but as a strong leader with clearly defined principles of foreign policies. Hilton argues that “Carter’s acceptance of the doctrine of international cooperation and a moral foreign policy” reaffirmed his “belief in the righteousness of his decision to proceed with normalization.” (597) Moreover, he asserts that “to view normalization merely as playing the ‘China card’ ignores the genuine belief among Carter and certain of his advisers that a normalized relationship with China would reap significant long-term benefits.” (599) In other words, Carter viewed normalization not just as a move to forge an anti-Soviet alliance with China, but also as a tool to give America more leverage in terms of improving human rights within China, modernizing the Chinese economy, and making Beijing more cooperative in the future. Hilton further argues that Carter’s failure to obtain a firm commitment from Beijing that it would not attack Taiwan did not mean Carter abandoned Taiwan. Rather, the deliberate ambiguity on issues such as arms sales to Taiwan and the TRA represented the best opportunity for a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue that served the interests of regional stability. On the other hand, given his distaste of special interests, Taiwan’s lobbying efforts within America aimed at preventing the normalization only convinced Carter of the “implacability of the KMT [Kuomintang] and the inherent danger in allowing the United States to continue its security commitments to Taiwan when the KMT would likely continue to utilize such commitments to maintain a turbulent status quo.” (613) As a result, Carter decided not to insist on continued diplomatic recognition of Taiwan.

These articles help us to further understand the complicated process of Sino-American normalization under Carter. They also raise questions for future research. First, the authors agree that America’s China policy was deeply intertwined with domestic politics,

and they examine how the Carter team took possible responses from Congress into consideration while making its China policy. Yet it is not enough just to examine how the Carter administration anticipated congressional responses; a more systematic study of congressional initiatives is also needed. Furthermore, the issue of Taiwan was particularly embedded in the American domestic context. Here one issue needs to be further clarified by Fardella and Hilton. Did Carter and his advisers genuinely believe that they “saved” Taiwan by the continued arms sales and the passage of the TRA? Or did they use these strategies merely to satisfy domestic critics and to achieve a “decent interval period” before Taiwan was completely “abandoned” by America?

Second, these articles show that in order to fully understand Sino-American normalization, we have to go beyond the Cold War strategic dimensions of U.S.-China relations. Fardella’s analysis of the Carter administration’s concern about China’s modernization, Walker’s discussion of Vance’s long-term view about China’s future development, and Hilton’s focus on Carter’s moral principles all suggest that the anti-Soviet rationale is not sufficient in explaining the U.S.-China normalization. My own research also confirms that concerns about China’s modernization, that is, how America could gain more leverage in terms of influencing China’s future economic and political developments thus making China more cooperative in international affairs, constituted a much broader and deeper foundation upon which the range of possible strategic initiatives was based.

Finally, the authors, especially Fardella, point out that the Chinese domestic politics must also be examined. Although the lack of primary sources from the Chinese side does not allow us to conduct a systematic study of this issue, scholars are making steady progresses towards a better understanding of the internal dynamics of Chinese politics.² Fardella, for example, correctly points out that Deng Xiaoping decided to normalize relations with America because normalization could help China’s modernization programs. Yet I think the story is more complicated than Fardella presents. For one thing, Deng himself was worried about the so-called “peaceful evolution,” that is, he was concerned that expanded contact with the U.S. and the West in general after Sino-American normalization would weaken the Communist Party’s rule in China. How did Deng’s concern figure in the normalization process then? Future studies therefore have to pay more attention to the Chinese domestic politics.

In summary, the four articles show the value of combining new documentary sources with new research approaches. And I recommend them to students of international relations.

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Lin has published “China and the Escalation of the Vietnam War: The First Years

² For a recent example, see Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics During the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution, 1972-1976* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2007).

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of the Johnson Administration,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* (Spring 2009): Vol. 11:2, 35-69, and “Doing Business with China: Trade and Sino-American Relations, 1966-1974,” in *Crises, Changes and Continuities: The International System in the 1970s* (Saveria Mannelli, Italy: Rubbettino Publisher), forthcoming, 2010. Lin’s dissertation is on “Guns and Butter: Sino-American Relations and the Diplomacy of Modernization, 1966-1980.”

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