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. Liaison 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 Holdridge's account of events and those written by his superiors and peers. As a matter of fact, Holdridge 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 stub-
born 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 depart-
ments of the Chinese bureaucracy and the Chi-
inese 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 manifesta-
tion of this was a Chinese printing company's ini-
tial refusal to print the Chinese-language version
of visa application forms, which prompted a sum-
mon by the Chinese Foreign Ministry (pp. 119-20).
Another interesting story Holdridge tells is the in-
trusiveness of how foreign diplomats should en-
tertain themselves (pp. 135-36).

Another significant contribution to the litera-
ture 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 individ-
uals operating in a system imposed on them. Cross-
ing the Divide teaches us that the resilience
of the working level diplomats working in both
Washington and Beijing has in no small part con-
tributed to the eventual establishment and main-
tenance of a normal diplomatic relationship be-
tween the two countries.

Holdridge concludes that "the effort to cross
the divide between the United States and the Peo-
ple's Republic of China was at best tedious, time-
consuming, frustrating, and fraught with difficul-
ties" (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 predictabil-
ity of how Chinese leaders as a group engage in
diplomatic negotiations would have been a wel-
come addition to the literature on U.S.-China rela-
tions indeed.

Overall, Crossing the Divide is a valuable ad-
dition to the body of history on U.S.-China rela-
tions 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 record-
ing history.

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