Concluding Thoughts

As the twentieth century experiences of imperialism, victimization, revolution, war and chaos recede into a past millennium, relations between the United States and China, as well as between these two and Taiwan, are uncertain and unsteady. In the twenty-first century, China is more likely to play an important international role than it did in the five decades examined here by the veterans of America's China service. Barring a catastrophe, China will be stronger, more unified, and more prosperous than at any time in its post-imperial history. At the same time, the United States will be, at least in the early years of the new millennium, the dominant global power, with responsibilities and influence that have a worldwide reach. Whether the rising state of China and the status quo politicians in Washington will be able to handle their conflicting priorities and goals so as to avoid direct conflict must be one of the most crucial questions for international relations practitioners and analysts in the years ahead. The U.S. and China will have to deal with continuing disputes over trade imbalances, human rights, and military modernization. And they will be forced somehow to manage the incendiary problem of Taiwan, which threatens not only their ability to sustain constructive ties, but also the peace of the region and the world.

Among the diplomats who have spoken in these pages about their experiences dealing with Chinese affairs are those who look ahead to a new era in Asia with anticipation but also a measure of alarm. John Holdridge, for instance, worries that "The Chinese are very much in the mood that Japan was prior to World War II. The Japanese had this terrible chip on their shoulder. They felt that they were being looked down on by others. They were in a very bellicose and belligerent mood. If [the Chinese] were confident of themselves and of their own system and situation, they wouldn't be so difficult to deal with." This is a feeling shared by Winston Lord, who

points to China's "combination of arrogance, xenophobia, and nationalism." Part of this grew out of the "bad century or, say, 150 years when [the Chinese] were humiliated by foreigners," followed by the difficulties of adjusting to a new status. It is not entirely surprising, he contends, that:

> This gives the Chinese a certain desire to flex their muscles and also to be treated as equals. On top of that the Chinese have a certain smugness vis-à-vis the Soviet experience. They figure that Gorbachev and other Russian leaders allowed too much political freedom without making economic progress. So the Soviets lost their empire, and the Communist Party lost control of the country. They think that they're not going to make the same mistake.

Internal change—economic and political—inevitably will remain at the top of the agenda for both the critics and defenders of the Chinese system in the early years of the twenty-first century. China's communist leaders recognize the inevitability and appreciate the benefits of economic reforms. Since 1978, the new economic order has made China's prosperity and growing influence possible. But the political effects have not been nearly as welcome.

Anxiety about the political future touches officials, intellectuals, and businessmen. The government opposes democratization, but tolerates a degree of liberalization, particularly in such venues as village elections. Ordinary life in China became much freer in the 1990s, with increased mobility and a considerable scope for free expression. The impenetrable barrier continues to be political organization and direct opposition to the Chinese Communist Party, all of which the leadership considers intolerable. But, Chas. Freeman asserts, reservations about political change exist even among those not vested with power. "No Chinese that I have met seems to want to emulate either the U.S. federal system or the constitutional democratic presidential system that we have." Much of this sentiment, he believes, has stemmed from the mixture of

> admiration for the intellectual freedom that the U.S. provides, but at the same time, a great distaste for what many of the Chinese see as the inevitable results of excessive acquisitive individualism and First Amendment rights. The Chinese tend to tie social disorder in the United States—high rates of teenage pregnancy, drug use, the extraor-

> dinary crime rate, the lack of personal security on the streets, some of the things that we Americans also find least admirable about our society to our political system. The dominant sentiment for the Chinese, and the reason they react the way they do to some of the untidy aspects of American life—pornography and crime and addictions—has to do with the searing experience of Chinese history. Disorder in China can have catastrophic consequences, and you don't have to be very old, if you're Chinese, to have actually experienced some of those. So that, while people would like to see human liberty expand, they're very cautious about how authoritarianism is to be relaxed.

Although the degree of discomfort with political freedoms might be less than Freeman contends, it does seem likely that political change will come slowly. Freeman speculates that "the Chinese [will] look [to Taiwan and South Korea] for models that get on with the business of economic reconstruction, building prosperity first, and then deal with some of the political problems of the system later, in a gradual way." Meanwhile, dissidents will continue to be repressed and imprisoned.

Of course, the challenge will not only be China's internal development and its place in Asia, but also the nature of future Sino-American relations: cooperative or contentious? constructive or destructive? wary or warm? Again, American diplomats who continue to worry about the interaction, even though they have left their official posts, think about issues that will certainly complicate the ability of their successors in Washington to adopt a clear and productive China policy. Among these "were Chinese suspicions of the United States," which Winston Lord encountered and which are not likely to dissipate easily:

> Some of these were allegedly for tactical reasons to put us on the defensive. Some of the Chinese leaders genuinely felt this. The most extreme Chinese view of the United States is that we're keeping them down, and we don't want another superpower around. So in this view, we are trying to restrain, contain, and isolate them. This is allegedly proved by our maintaining our military presence in the Pacific Ocean area and by our strengthening our relations with Japan. Allegedly, the U.S. is trying to control China's exports of military materials and military sales. Another allegation is that we are trying to keep China out of the WTO [World Trade Organization].[1] Then we are allegedly trying to divide up

> China's territory, with pressures on Hong Kong, Tibet, and Taiwan. On top of that we are allegedly trying to subvert China politically by pushing human rights and democracy, so that the PRC Government will lose political control of the country. If you put all of these allegations together, I would argue that that's a fairly difficult mood to deal with.

One crucial element will clearly continue to be the triangular relationship among the United States, China, and Taiwan. Creative solutions for that difficult conundrum remain few and far between. David Dean has proposed an approach that has had some currency among scholars, if not the leadership, in all three places:

> A close friend of mine, the publisher of the *China Times* in Taiwan, wrote an article just about exactly the same time I did, about the prospects or possibilities of a confederation or a commonwealth. Subsequently even the former chairman of the oppositionist party, the DPP advocated a situation for Taiwan and the mainland like the British Commonwealth of Nations. It's an idea that probably would be accepted by [the United States] and other countries and, in the final analysis, by Taiwan, since it would give them their independence in everything but name. The only objections probably would come from China. They have touted their "one country two systems," which they are using for Hong Kong.

As Dean notes, however, the "one country two systems" proposal Beijing has made to Taiwan "is much broader than the Hong Kong model and its not impossible for me to see in some future period, 10, 20 years from now that their definition of 'one country two systems' is suspiciously like the definition for a commonwealth or confederation." After all, Dean adds, and others emphasize, the leaders in Beijing "don't want to be forced into confrontation over Taiwan."

On the other hand, so long as Taiwan remains a symbol of political legitimacy, no government in Beijing can easily let Taiwan make its own decisions. And an obstinate Beijing faces an increasingly apprehensive Taipei. To date the population on the island has been cautious, consistently favoring preservation of the status quo over either reunification or independence. So long as Beijing can live with that situation, time may bring the two Chinese entities closer together as their economies are integrated and

political change on the mainland renders its institutions more palatable to people in Taiwan. But whether Chinese leaders have the political latitude to be patient is unclear. Furthermore, there are those who would argue that time may not work in Beijing's interests as a younger generation in Taiwan thinks of itself less and less as Chinese and more and more as Taiwanese. As Winston Lord notes, "The Chinese military are demanding more of a role. In the South China Sea and the Taiwan missile crisis, they showed that they can be more aggressive." The future could well be very dangerous, a reality that bodes ill for a United States, which will be hard pressed to avoid involvement.[2]

There are, of course, a series of other issues that destabilize Sino-American relations. These may be less likely to lead to war than confrontation in the Taiwan Straits, but they demand enormous energy and attention from diplomats. The mounting trade deficit that the United States has been running with China, second only to that with Japan, disturbs Congress and fuels the conviction in the business community that China has not done enough to open its market to American goods and services. Because businessmen have been China's most fulsome supporters and lobbyists, their disenchantment with the China market would be devastating to the relationship. Of course, China, confronting the dual imperatives of reforming its banking sector and its state owned enterprises, has resisted dramatic change in its policies on foreign trade, investment, and licensing for service industries. The result was prolonged and difficult negotiations for its entry into the World Trade Organization. With the extensive concessions finally made by Beijing in the autumn of 1999, accession seemed certain, but implementation still appeared likely to produce friction.

There have also been problems surrounding China's determination to modernize its military. Great powers, the leadership is convinced, have great military forces. Furthermore, the Chinese endured a humiliating lesson about inadequate training, defective equipment, and inferior logistics when they invaded Vietnam in 1979. As Jim Lilley observed, they were aware that eventually they must embark upon reform, Deng Xiaoping having concluded that the Chinese military was "backward and stupid." However, China has only had the resources for serious improvements in recent years. Although the United States actually encouraged "the Europeans to sell weapons systems to the Chinese because we ourselves couldn't" in the 1970s, recalls Lilley, the eagerness with which elements of the military have today sought to make up for lost time has worried the United States. The

issues have involved proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, acquisition of high-tech weapons systems from the former Soviet Union, and possibly through espionage in the United States, and the deployment of military assets in or against areas important to Washington. China's attitudes toward the maintenance of American forces in the Pacific have also been in flux. Questions have been raised regarding the need and appropriateness of such a large contingent of U.S. troops in the region (100,000). Beijing has further opposed the introduction of Theater Missile Defenses into Japan and Taiwan, which could imperil its own missile capabilities, and protested aspects of the U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines negotiated in the late 1990s.

Among the most troublesome areas of contention in Sino-American relations, human rights will remain at the top of the agenda in the twenty-first century. Although it has become a central element, it has actually been a relatively recent component of diplomatic discourse with the Chinese. Winston Lord was quick to concede that when normalization first occurred, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger put far more emphasis on strategic concerns than on human rights abuses. But with the Carter administration, human rights became more prominent. Frank Burnet recalls that "at either the ambassador's or Washington's suggestion, to make an impression on the staff (to get us thinking in that direction), they had us set up a seminar on human rights in general. I organized it, and held it at my home, wives were invited. It was really a good exercise." The inauguration of regular human rights reports to Congress meant that, for the first time, Foreign Service officers had deliberately and routinely to collect relevant data for the annual exercise, assessing behavior in areas such as religious observance, political dissent, and prison labor. Then, with the massacre at Tiananmen Square in 1989, human rights temporarily crowded out all other considerations. That high tide receded in the late 1990s, but human rights issues continued to command much attention from policy makers, members of Congress, and the public. China, of course, gives that preoccupation impetus by persisting in the arrest and incarceration of political and religious figures whose offenses appear inconsequential or non-existent to the outside world.

Hope for progress is possible in part because China no longer is the "pariah" that Richard Nixon warned would endanger American security when he began in the 1960s to justify his desire to reach out to Beijing. John Holdridge notes that, "Starting with normalization and now more recently,

the Chinese began to function as normal members of the world community. They joined the IAEA, the World Bank, IMF, [and] have applied for the GATT [now the WTO]." So long as Beijing wants to be part of an advanced, industrial international society that subscribes to universal values, adheres to trade regulating organizations, and observes arms control agreements, the People's Republic must be less defiant and more willing to compromise than it was in its early revolutionary days.

Nevertheless, the actual remedies for the difficult disputes between the United States and China remain elusive, making it all the more obvious that all sides will have to take responsibility for provocative actions and work harder to avoid incitement. Secret assurances such as those in 1982 to Taiwan's leaders by Ronald Reagan that agreements with Beijing will be evaded are no more constructive than the firing of missiles across the Taiwan Strait by Beijing in 1996. There will have to be more sober efforts at maintaining smooth and productive ties.

For this the China service of the new millennium will be critical. The American diplomats who work in China or deal with Chinese affairs in Washington have been the fulcrum of the relationship in decades past. Today, because contacts between the societies have multiplied and diversified, the Foreign Service no longer plays as central a role and much diplomacy occurs through private channels whether business, cultural, or scholarly. The Department of State has also increasingly been forced to share its power and initiative with other government agencies such as the National Security Council, the CIA, the Defense Department, and the Department of Commerce, as well as the U.S. Congress.

The participation of groups and individuals who become competitors in crafting a viable China policy complicates the job of State Department officials. It has often been a point of contention for diplomats who, as Arthur Hummel complained, can loose control of their embassies abroad or, as Marshall Green bitterly comments, can be circumvented through secrecy and deception, or as Winston Lord notes, must expend considerable time and energy mediating among conflicting interests at home. When, as in the cases of Presidents Bill Clinton and Richard Nixon, the White House does not stand solidly with the State Department, the effort can be arduous indeed.

Gaston Sigur recalled that problems would also arise when legislators questioned the executive branch's grasp of or motives in making policy toward China. On the August 1982 communiqué, for instance,

> there were efforts on the part of certain members of Congress to say, even to [President Reagan], that "we wonder if you fully understand the import of what you have done, that perhaps elements in the State Department or the National Security Council have talked you into something that you don't. . . . " And at that, the president would get furious. He would say, "What are you talking about? This is mine. This is my document. This is what I want to do." So he took the full responsibility for it, which was essential.

To ameliorate tensions, Sigur tried to build bridges between the executive and legislative branches of government. He would

> have leading senators and congressmen come over to the State Department for breakfast with me and the deputy assistant secretaries. Then we'd go to a staff meeting in EAP, where I'd bring in the country directors, and we'd sit around and everybody would talk about what was happening in their area. This was something that the Congress loved. It was just terrific. Then, as a consequence, before resolutions would be written up on the Hill or presented to the Senate or to the House, we would always be checked with, and asked about it, and what did we think about this and how did this fit in.

Sigur may have exaggerated the effectiveness of courting Congress, but there is no doubt that the State Department lavishes considerable attention on the members in hopes of moderating their demands and interference.

Despite all these rivals, the diplomatic corps will remain at the center of the relationship. The individuals who have testified here to their role in shaping the history of Sino-American relations are but a small portion of the corps who participated in and witnessed the great events of the last five decades. They and their successors have much to teach the rest of us about the realities of international affairs. Those lessons are not always easy, but they are well worth learning.