

## Contents

<i>Prologue</i>	xi
<i>Notes on Sources</i>	xv
1 Choosing Diplomacy	1
2 Choosing China	11
3 Learning the Chinese	19
4 Watching China	31
5 The Cultural Revolution	43
6 Signs and Signals	53
7 Office Manager for the Secretary of State	63
8 Preparing for China	71
9 China at Last: Nixon in Beijing	85
10 Trouble in the U.S. Delegation	95
11 Birth of the Bruce Mission	105
12 The Liaison Office Starts Work	115
13 Shepherd of Sports	127
14 Family Liaison	147
15 Collecting China	159
<i>Photo Gallery #1</i>	171
16 Waiting, Watching, and Welcoming	177
17 The Politics of Music	187
18 Kissinger Comes	197
19 Death and Departure	207
20 Renewal in Japan	219

21	Becoming an Asia Hand	233
22	The Pentagon Meets the PLA	249
23	America Greet the PLA	263
24	The Perry Mission	275
	Photo Gallery #2	285
25	Change and Move On: Fast Forward	293
26	The “Best Embassy on Park Avenue”	303
27	China Boy Redux	311
28	Safe in a Clinch	329
	<i>Notes</i>	345
	<i>Index</i>	350

## 9

# China at Last: Nixon in Beijing

### **A Quiet Arrival**

The approach to Shanghai under overcast February skies took us over stretches of snow-dusted paddies and villages interlaced with canals, up which floated junks with tall flat sails. The airport was empty except for a smattering of officials, tiny against the vast expanses of concrete. At the foot of the ramp stood Zhang Wenjin, the courtly head of the American Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Deputy Chief of Protocol Wang Hairong, an awkward young woman reputed to be Mao’s niece. Both had been important figures in Kissinger’s trips and were to prove key operatives during the early years of the new relationship between the United States and China. Holdridge and Jenkins knew both and made the introductions. From the cavernous terminal building, tea and pastries in hand, we watched Air Force One land, the history of the occasion marked by total silence.

After a brief interval, we returned to our plane across the wide tarmac with the PRC navigators, who were the real reason for the Shanghai stop. The distinctive Chinese field

smell with the hint of night soil so familiar from our time in Taiwan wafted from the surrounding farms, conclusive evidence that I had arrived in China at last. Not a reason to fall and kiss the ground, perhaps, but a significant sensory jolt nonetheless.

The Beijing airport was sunny and cold. Again, the place was empty except for two long lines of exceptionally tall, disciplined, and magnificently dressed soldiers, forming the honor guard of the People's Liberation Army, and a small knot of civilian officials. The people on our plane were not permitted to join them and mar the photo opportunity. Instead, we were herded into an area just behind the left wing of President Nixon's aircraft after it rolled to a stop. From a worm's-eye vantage point framed by the engines of the Boeing 707, I took my own films of Nixon's historic, and some felt endless, handshake with Premier Zhou Enlai.

The president knew what he was doing. John Foster Dulles had refused Zhou's hand in a famous slight at a Geneva conference years before, and Nixon wanted the world, as well as the Chinese, to know that that he was determined to put this right. He even kept everyone except his wife, Pat, penned up on his plane until he got the job done, coming down the ramp alone in the dead quiet, a dramatic entrance he felt the occasion demanded.

After a brief ceremony, we raced for the motorcade, a long line of small, green Shanghai-brand cars behind several big black Red Flag limousines, the Chinese handmade equivalents of stretch Cadillacs or Mercedes. I rode into the capital with John Thomas across flat, brown-white farmland, with occasional small factories and rows of young trees planted along the roadside. Driving through the city and into Tiananmen Square, where Chairman Mao's huge portrait stared stolidly above the gate to the Forbidden City, I wondered where all the Chinese were. Not one was to be seen, unless one peeked quickly down the side streets whipping by, where Public Security Police had cordoned off crowds of curious onlookers half a block away.

We arrived at the Diaoyutai (the word means "fishing platform"), the official guesthouse compound, a large complex of Russian-style villas with high ceilings and rooms full of stuffed chairs, with antimacassar doilies draped over the backs. I unpacked and got my bearings. Our State Department contingent, including the secretary of state, was segregated in a separate villa of our own. The White House and the NSC were in other buildings close by. So much for the "unified delegation." I checked for messages at the communications room and ate lunch with our group. It was the best food and service of any Chinese restaurant anywhere in the world. This visit was going to be fattening.

## **Not Meeting Mao**

After lunch we were scheduled to gather for a plenary session to kick off the proposed counterpart discussions. It was abruptly postponed, and we waited—and waited—and waited. What had intervened was the crucial meeting between Mao and Nixon, called without warning during a bright period in the uncertain daily forecast of the chairman's health. Henry Kissinger and Winston Lord (as note taker) accompanied Nixon. The secretary of state was not included and, to my knowledge, not even aware of the meeting.

The press made much of this deliberate omission, yet another humiliation in the long rivalry between Kissinger and Rogers, and none of us could explain it. Kissinger's memoirs insisted that the Chinese wanted the meeting small and that Nixon never intended for Rogers to participate anyway, but he apologized in his book *The White House Years* for not insisting that the secretary be included. Rogers, always the grownup, did not complain or even raise the issue around us. Later, he admitted it had bothered him.

Participant list aside, the Nixon-Mao meeting was the key to the success of the entire visit. In contrast to past presidential visits to other countries, there had been no specific time slotted for a meeting with the leader of the country. Nixon went to China without knowing exactly when he might meet with Mao. That the chairman's blessing came so soon and so emphatically relaxed the Chinese and assured a smooth path in the days ahead.

The long-delayed plenary took place at the end of the afternoon, a pro forma ceremony at which the decisions already made about who would talk about what and where were endorsed. We then left for Tiananmen Square and the opening banquet at the Great Hall of the People.

## **Dinner with the Elders**

No one who attended that opening dinner will ever forget it. The sheer size of the Great Hall of the People made one feel like an ant in a movie set. Everyone in the president's party was invited, including aircrews and baggage handlers, flowing in an excited crowd up the wide staircase. As the official party was photographed on a grandstand at the top of the stairs, we could hear music wafting from the giant banquet hall. Just inside the hall's entrance on a raised platform sat the People's Liberation Army band in baggy,

rankless uniforms, playing a sublime and authentic rendition of “Turkey in the Straw.” The hall was lit dramatically, the focus on the Chinese and American flags hanging side by side.

I moved in something of a trance through a receiving line of Chinese leaders I had read and written about for years, headed by Premier Zhou Enlai, Marshall Ye Jianying, and Vice Premier Li Xiannian. Gathering my wits, I noted from a swift scan of the tables in the cavernous room that many of the Chinese guests were extremely old, some in wheelchairs with oxygen tubes attached to their noses. Two of these were at my table—a famous historian named Tang and an old politician from Sichuan Province named Liu. They were museum pieces produced periodically to maintain an image of democratic unity. Mr. Liu could not eat, drink, hear, or speak more than a few words and had to be lifted bodily by attendants for the historic friendly toasts by Zhou and Nixon.

Others at the table were younger and better able to communicate—a pair of revolutionary opera stars, she very stiff, he a heavy drinker with jowls; the director of consular affairs at the Foreign Ministry; and, on my right, Qian Dayong, deputy director of the American and Australasian Section at the ministry. Qian was the closest thing to a direct counterpart for me (and became an important colleague when I returned to live in Beijing fourteen months later). We chatted amiably, basking in the incongruity of the situation.

The Chinese returned to the question of age, commenting on how young the American delegation was. They were not talking about me, but about Nixon and our top leaders. They were right. The Chinese leaders were the same people who had taken power in 1949, twenty-three years before. To be a match, our delegation would have had to be led by Harry Truman and George Marshall. China, I now understood, was caught in a generational logjam. It would be six more years before Deng Xiaoping—under house arrest and nowhere in sight that evening—would break it.

Geriatric observations aside, nothing could take away from the excitement and magic of the event. In the stampede for the doors that traditionally marks the end of Chinese banquets, I ran into several journalist friends from China-watching days in Hong Kong. Bob Keatley of the Wall Street Journal sidled up. “History, I’m here,” he muttered, smiling. Stanley Karnow of the Washington Post, preceded by his paunch, was also on the prowl, the circles under his eyes making him look like a joyful, inquisitive Panda.

The next morning (February 22), I was itching to get out of our guesthouse cocoon. So, after delivering the overnight telegrams to Secretary Rogers, I took advantage of a free moment and headed for Wangfujing, then as now Beijing’s top shopping street.

Huge, subdued, curious crowds were gathered around the sidewalk bulletin boards displaying the morning's *People's Daily*. Front-page pictures of Chairman Mao meeting with President Nixon and Premier Zhou at the banquet drew top attention. The function of Chinese media is less to report news than to tell the masses what to think. Today it did both, a resounding plus for U.S.-China relations.

Feeling strange, I went up the street to the biggest department store, the Bai Huo Da Lou, to check out what was for sale. The sturdy, drab, limited output of the Cultural Revolution economy was all that was on offer: padded coats, Mao suits, PLA hats, cloth shoes, leather boots, and the like. I bought Ping-Pong paddles for my boys and covered teacups for Sheila.

### **Phoning Washington from the Great Hall of the People**

The first session of the counterpart talks between Secretary Rogers and Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei took place that afternoon in the Xinjiang Room of the Great Hall of the People, with me at the end of the table taking notes for the United States. On the Chinese side others included Xiong Xianghui, Premier Zhou's foreign policy adviser; Qian Dayong, the deputy director of the American Department who had sat next to me at the welcome banquet; and underlings from his office. Others on the U.S. side were Marshall Green, Al Jenkins, interpreter Chas Freeman, John Scali and Ron Ziegler from the White House Press Office, and Commander Jonathan Howe from the NSC staff. I noted that everyone had observers at our talks, but that State was not represented at the discussions involving the president and Dr. Kissinger.

The major topics covered during the three-hour session were:

1. The U.S. desire for better contacts between the governments, including channels of communication and some kind of presence in each other's country. The Chinese promised to get back to us on these issues, but took pains to point out the obstacles presented by the presence in America of representatives from the Nationalist government on Taiwan that we continued to recognize.

2. The Chinese desire for more people-to-people programs and exchanges to be facilitated by both governments.

3. U.S.-China trade. The Chinese believed that we were under considerable pressure from the business community to start trade relations. Rogers responded that we were not being pressed but wanted trade, particularly as evidence of an improved political relationship. Foreign Minister Ji undertook to invite American businessmen to the annual Canton Trade Fair.

During the course of the conversation, the Chinese asked why the United States continued to require fingerprints of Chinese visitors. Members of our delegation believed that this regulation was no longer valid, but no one was sure. Rogers asked me to check. I left the room in search of the Secret Service Command Post in the Great Hall. Wherever the president goes, a White House phone can never be far away. Sure enough, discreetly placed behind a huge pillar was a telephone with a picture of the White House on the dial. I picked it up.

Click. "White House switch" (clear as a bell).

Me. "State Department Operations Center, please."

Click. "State Department Operations Watch Officer. How can I help?"

"This is Nick Platt in Beijing. We are in talks with the Chinese and need to know right away whether we still require fingerprints for Chinese visitors. Please wake up whoever knows the answer. I'll hold." (This was fun.)

The Watch Officer roused the head of the Visa Office (it was around 4 AM there), who sleepily confirmed that no fingerprints were required for PRC visitors. I was back in the meeting within fifteen minutes. Rogers, on my prompting, told the Chinese that our swift response showed how instant communications could quickly clear up misunderstandings.

### **Madame Mao Entertains**

That evening, the president and most of his party attended a performance of *The Red Detachment of Women*, a revolutionary ballet developed under the patronage of Madame Mao and one of the few cultural works authorized for public consumption. Imagine a mix of modern ballet choreography and stereotypical Chinese opera movements, supported by a traditional Chinese orchestra and shrill voices, presenting a heavy propaganda libretto. Uniformed ballerinas in puttees pirouetted, vigorously pointing their Mauser automatic pistols, uttering piercing denunciations of the Japanese invaders and paeans of praise for Communist heroes, all to the loud accompaniment of gongs, drum, and cymbals.

The political event of the evening was the appearance of Madame Mao herself, looking sharp, dignified, and self-contained in a well-tailored blue Mao suit. She shook hands at the end, with a firm, polite, schoolmarm grip. I had now met the top leadership of China with the exception of Mao himself; but, strangely, I had not met Richard Nixon.

### **Media Makes the Message**

The visit took on a carefully choreographed rhythm with a telegenic event each morning and evening and substantive talks, interrupted by superb meals, taking up the time between. The White House advance men had taken smart advantage of the twelve-hour time difference between China and the east coast of the United States, assuring live TV coverage of the visit in American homes at the breakfast and prime evening hours. The Chinese cooperated in every way, seizing the opportunity to present their country in the most favorable light to a huge and growing audience, not just in America but worldwide.

Thus on the morning of February the 23, Mrs. Nixon visited a People's Commune while the president closeted himself with Washington work. I wrote up the meetings of the day before. In the afternoon, Secretary Rogers's talks centered on Taiwan, a standard exchange of positions. The evening event was a spectacular display of gymnastics, Ping-Pong, badminton, and other similar activities, set against a crowd of 18,000, all dressed in new sweaters of different colors. I sat a few rows behind Premier Zhou, watching with fascination how he operated. The leadership dais where he sat featured a long table for teacups and snacks. In addition to keeping several conversations going with President Nixon and others, he was approached by an aide, who placed in front of him the layout for the next day's *People's Daily*. He proceeded to move pictures and text around until they met his approval, then dismissed the assistant. Zhou's attention to detail was legendary, but this struck me as a vivid testimony of the new height and importance he attached to the media impact of the Nixon visit.

The Great Wall was the happening of the next morning, February 24. We left early, soon after breakfast. A beautiful day was in the making. The Western Hills were shrouded in a delicate mist, which had frozen in the trees. An incredible scene awaited us as we approached the old barrier, begun thousands of years before to keep the barbarians out. Poking out of the first battlement we saw not a cannon but an NBC color TV camera. No soldiers were in sight, but the turrets were fully manned by American correspondents and anchormen: Walter Cronkite, Eric Sevareid, Bob Keatley, and Jerrold Schecter, to name a few, wearing bushy fur hats. Parked right up against the Great Wall was a long mobile TV satellite trailer, cables sprouting in all directions.

For me, the vision of the Great Wall wired for worldwide communications was *the* symbol of the visit, dwarfing even the appearance of the President of the United States on China's most famous landmark. Everyone was drunk with the excitement of the moment, resulting in some famous inanities. When asked to comment on the scene, all that President Nixon could manage was, "It's a great wall!"



We also toured the Ming Tombs, a mob scene resembling Sunday afternoon at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Returning to Beijing, our session of the counterpart talks featured a strong exchange between Secretary Rogers and Ji Pengfei on the world situation and America's place in it. The Chinese foreign minister led off with a diatribe against U.S. foreign policy since World War II, which sounded like an old *People's Daily* editorial. Rogers presented our position vigorously in his own words, straight from the shoulder, following to the letter the advice Kissinger had given him in Hawaii. Once both sides had placed on the record their positions on "matters of principle," we moved directly to the room where President Nixon and Premier Zhou had been conducting their talks. They had finished, and members of the three teams who had engaged in substantive discussions stood around chatting, drinking tea, and waiting for an informal, unscheduled Peking duck dinner that Zhou had arranged in Nixon's honor.

### **Chatting with Zhou Enlai**

I was introduced to Premier Zhou as a speaker of Chinese. We stood face-to-face, and the premier began to talk, quoting in his thick Zhejiang accent a famous Mao poem with the line that one could not be considered a real man until he had been to the Great Wall. Did I think the quote would be appropriate in a toast to President Nixon on the day he had visited the Wall? I was having some difficulty understanding but nodded sagely and uttered a few grunts of comprehension.

"Of course it would be appropriate, Premier Zhou," I blurted, stunned that he had thought it worthwhile to seek out and address the most junior person in the room. As we talked, who should come barging rapidly between us but Henry Kissinger, on his way to the side of President Nixon, who stood about five yards away. That broke up the conversation.

Standing nearby, Ron Ziegler laughed and asked Kissinger if he knew he had just interrupted the premier talking with a member of the U.S. delegation.

Henry muttered in reply that when the president called, he came. "And anyway," he added, looking at me, "who cares?" Kissinger was famously uncomfortable when Americans on his delegations spoke to foreign leaders in languages he did not understand, so I shrugged off his clumsy intervention. In subsequent years he helped me in many ways and showed a kindness that more than made up for this flash of insecurity. The dinner was a small, cozy affair, with everyone seated next to his counterpart. I drew Qian Dayong again, who seemed to have become mine.

Our final day in Beijing, February 25, began with a tour of the Forbidden City, magnificent in the snow, with the grand scale of the public spaces in striking contrast to

the intimate dimensions of the Imperial living quarters. There was more shopping, desultory consultations, and an American return banquet at the Great Hall, which was subdued in comparison to the unearthly euphoria of the welcoming affair. Clearly, we had just about run out of things to say and do in the capital of China.