

U.S.-China Relations: A Brief Historical Perspective

A Report by the U.S.-China Policy Foundation

RELATIONS BEGIN

*1784
Empress of
China
arrives in
Guangzhou*

Contact between the U.S. and China began in August 1784 when *The Empress of China* sailed to Guangzhou, a province in southern China. According to the U.S. Department of State's [Office of the Historian](#), in the 18th century, all trade with Western nations was conducted through Guangzhou. 1784 "marked the new nation's entrance into the lucrative China trade in tea, porcelain, and silk."

Other Americans arrived in China, but not until nearly fifty years later. The first American missionaries to arrive landed in Guangzhou in February 1830. On the ship were two protestant ministers, the Reverends Elijah Bridgman and David Abeel, sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Before arriving, Bridgman had extensively studied Chinese culture and history. The first medical missionary was Dr. Peter Parker, who arrived in 1834 in, once again, Guangzhou. He established a small clinic in the foreign quarter, but with the large number of patients, he soon expanded in what would become the Guangzhou hospital.

Chinese travelers arrived in the U.S. around the same time Americans arrived in China. In 1785, three Chinese sailors arrived in Baltimore, Maryland, stranded on shore by a trading ship. They arrived from Guangzhou, but there is no record of what happened to them after landing. Chinese culture and history first reached the U.S. in 1839 when a merchant from Philadelphia, who had spent 12 years trading with China, brought over a huge collection of art, artifacts, botanical samples, and more. The merchant, Nathan Dunn set up a museum for his collection in Philadelphia, allowing visitors a glimpse into life in China.

THE OPIUM WAR AND TREATIES

*1839-1949
"Century of
Humiliation"*

In order to better understand the relationship between the U.S. and China, we must also look into China's history and interactions with other nations--even those not directly involving the United States. China's "Century of Humiliation," the period from 1839-1949 when China lost large portions of land to foreign powers, forms the framework through which many Chinese view China's place in the international community even today. The "Century of Humiliation" began with the Opium War in 1839.

Great Britain fell in love with Chinese tea, silks, and other goods, and attempted to expand trade relations to gain more of these commodities. The Chinese rejected these efforts until the British offered something the Chinese couldn't refuse--opium. Great Britain began exporting opium to China and the Chinese soon became addicted. In 1838, the emperor of China sent Commissioner Lin Zexu to Guangzhou to put a stop to the

*1839-1842
Opium War*

opium trade. Lin demanded that the British hand over their opium supply to be destroyed, and the British eventually consented. The British then departed Guangzhou for Macao, but the dispute over these events eventually incited war the following year. The Opium War between Great Britain and China began.

*1842
Treaty of
Nanking*

The Treaty of Nanking--the first of what the Chinese refer to as the unequal treaties--ended the Opium War in 1842 with the British emerging victorious. The treaty heavily favored the British and expanded international trade, opening up four new ports. According to the [Office of the Historian](#), the treaty “provided the basis for the expansion of trade” and “served as the model for subsequent treaties between China and other Western nations.”

*1844
Treaty of
Wangxia*

The Treaty of Wangxia was then signed in 1844 by the U.S. and China, marking the beginning of official relations between the two countries. In 1843, Secretary of State Daniel Webster sent Congressman Caleb Cushing to China to negotiate a treaty with the Qing (the dynasty in power since 1644). Cushing was refused entry into Beijing, and began to give up hope on negotiations while waiting in Macao. Just as Cushing was about to leave and return to the U.S., Qi Ying, the Qing negotiator, agreed to all terms proposed by the U.S. The treaty gave the U.S. most favored nation status with China and granted Americans various privileges in China.

*1858
Treaties of
Tianjin*

The U.S. gained more privileges in China after the treaties of Tianjin were signed between China and several foreign powers. The new treaties signed in 1858 opened up more ports for foreign trade and settlement and increased trading privileges for foreigners. The Qing court also allowed permanent diplomatic offices to be established in Beijing.

[China Analyst Alison Kaufman](#) places the losses during the “Century of Humiliation” into three categories: “a loss of territory; a loss of control over its internal and external environment; and a loss of international standing and dignity.” Today, many Chinese see these losses as injustices that need to be corrected. They blame these past humiliations on Western imperialism, which they often associate with the U.S. today, despite its roots in the British imperialism of the 1800s.

ANTI-CHINESE SENTIMENTS

*1849
California
Gold Rush
attracts
Chinese
immigrants*

In 1847, Chinese laborers, known as “coolies,” first arrived in Cuba to work on sugar plantations. Soon after, “coolies” began arriving in the U.S. After the California Gold Rush began in 1849, an increasing number of Chinese laborers arrived in the U.S. to work in mines and on railroads, as well as other positions for unskilled labor. Over 100,000 Chinese came to the United States within the first 20 years after the start of the gold rush.

With the arrival of Chinese in large numbers, perceptions of a people and culture previously largely unknown to 19th century Americans began to take shape. U.S. citizens, including government officials, perceived the Chinese as inferior to the majority Caucasian population. As a result, the government began placing restrictions on Chinese

*1875
Page Act*

immigration to the United States. In 1875, Congress passed the Page Act prohibiting the entrance of coolie laborers and Chinese women brought over for prostitution. In 1882, Congress took these measures a step further and passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, suspending all immigration from China to the U.S. for ten years. Meanwhile, the Chinese population in the U.S. faced considerable prejudice. Chinese people were viewed as being of a lower class, uneducated, and even dangerous. Chinese encountered harassment across the country.

*1882
Chinese
Exclusion
Act*

*1888
Bayard-Zhang
Treaty*

In 1888, the U.S. and China signed the Bayard-Zhang Treaty prohibiting Chinese migration to the U.S. for another 20 years, despite public opinion in China. The Scott Act further extended exclusionary measures by prohibiting the return of any Chinese resident who had left the U.S. The Greary Act of 1892, once again, prohibited Chinese immigration for another decade. This act also required all Chinese immigrants and U.S. citizens of Chinese descent to carry residence permits at all time, and went further to strip Chinese in the U.S. of additional legal rights. After 1902, when the Greary Act lost effect, Congress continued to pass legislation preventing the arrival of more Chinese immigrants and established guidelines for removal of the existing Chinese population from the U.S. The Chinese population in America became increasingly concentrated into segregated groups usually located in urban areas across the country, which later became known as "China towns."

*1892
Greary Act*

THE FIRST SINO-JAPANESE WAR AND THE OPEN DOOR NOTES

*1894-1895
First Sino-
Japanese War*

From August of 1894 to April of 1895, emerging power Japan clashed with the Qing Dynasty over dominance in Korea in what later became known as the first Sino-Japanese War. The war ended in a clear Japanese victory with the Treaty of Shimonoseki -- a major blow to the Qing Dynasty's reputation and regional power. Japan gained additional rights within China, such as the right to build factories. The U.S. also obtained these rights through the most favored nation principle while simultaneously becoming a competitor with Japan in Southeast China. The topic of Taiwan came under discussion as part of the treaty, but Qing officials resisted ceding the island to Japan, instead declaring it the Republic of Formosa in May of 1895. In response, Japan invaded Taiwan and took control of the island through military force city by city. This marked the beginning of a half century of Japanese occupation in Taiwan.

*1899
Open Door
Notes*

With multiple powers claiming dominance in China, Secretary of State John Hay introduced the idea of an "Open Door" to China through notes dispatched to European powers in 1899. The idea behind the Open Door Notes was first introduced by British and American experts on China, Alfred Hoppisley and William Rockhill, with the intent of protecting both countries' trade interests in China. The notes promoted equal trade opportunities in China for foreign powers with no country having complete control over China. Secretary Hay sent the notes to influential powers in China including Great Britain, Germany, France, Russia, and Japan. Although the notes themselves had very little legal standing, they marked the beginning of the U.S.'s policy towards East Asia as one of an open door.

RISING TENSIONS AND THE FALL OF THE QING DYNASTY

*1900
Boxer
Rebellion*

In the late 1890s, anti-foreign sentiment was rising among the Chinese despite the Americans' hopeful open door attitude. [The Boxer Rebellion](#), named after the martial artists who started the group, gained momentum in China for its anti-foreigner and anti-Christian sentiments. A [common slogan](#) of the Boxers was, "support the Qing, destroy the foreigner." The Boxers targeted all foreigners, including missionaries and embassy staff, many of whom went into hiding, barricading themselves in their legations. In 1900, the Boxer Rebellion was crushed by the combined military strength of multiple nations, including the U.S. The U.S. Marines played a large role in defending the legations and overpowering the Boxers. In 1901, foreign powers forced the Qing to sign a settlement called the Boxer Protocol in which the Qing court was required to pay [more than \\$330 million to foreign nations](#) in reparations, significantly weakening the already troubled Qing Dynasty. The U.S. later used their share of the reparations to fund scholarships for Chinese students to study in the U.S.

*1901
Boxer Protocol*

*1905-1906
Anti-American
Boycotts*

Anti-foreign sentiment continued to rise. Soon anti-foreign sentiment transformed into anti-American sentiment. From 1905-1906, Shanghai, Beijing, and other major cities in China began boycotting U.S. businesses and products, reflecting the growing nationalism in China.

*1911
Fall of the Qing
Dynasty*

The Qing Dynasty, in an effort to strengthen their weakening legitimacy, enacted a series of reforms and changes to the constitution. At the same time, in order to fund the expansion of railroads in China, the government took out a string of loans from foreign governments. Despite--or perhaps because of--these changes, discontent with the government surged and rebellions took place all over China. In fall of 1911, the Qing Dynasty fell.

WWI, THE SECOND SINO-JAPANESE WAR, AND THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR

*1911
Establishment
of the Republic
of China (ROC)*

Following the Wuchang Uprising against the Qing in October of 1911, the Qing Dynasty fell and the Republic of China (ROC) was officially established. The founding party of the Republic was the National People's Party, also known as the Kuomintang, or KMT. While the Republic's leadership changed hands a few times in its early years, the established leadership still showcased its military strength. Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) became leader of the KMT in 1925 and is by far the most well-known leader of the Nationalist party.

*1917
China declares
war against
Japan (WWI)*

The 1900s were a time of great transition in China. Although previously only a tentative participant in international affairs, China was thrust into international conflict in World War I. China successfully maintained its neutrality for the first four years of the war before declaring war against Japan in August of 1917. China sought to reassert its claim to the Shantung Peninsula, which was part of the German concession at the time. However, Japan also claimed governance and seized the peninsula. They issued a document to the Chinese government which became known as the 21 Demands--articulating claims to territorial and trade privileges in China. The U.S., under the

*1915
21 Demands*

presidency of Woodrow Wilson, objected to this document as it conflicted with the open door policy, but China accepted the terms of the demands.

*1919
May Fourth
Movement*

The Treaty of Versailles, ending WWI, gave Japan ownership of Shantung Peninsula, outraging many Chinese citizens. In a surge of Chinese nationalism, student demonstrations began on May 4th, 1919, protesting Japanese imperialism, Japan's 21 demands, the overtake of Shantung Peninsula, and the Treaty of Versailles. The May Fourth Movement inspired many China, including Mao Zedong. Soon ideologies of anarchy and communism gained traction. In 1921, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded by a group of Chinese leftists, based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism, forming a united front against the Kuomintang. Both the KMT and the CCP claimed to be the true government of China and, before long, the Chinese Civil War began in August of 1927. The KMT gained control over most of southern China, claiming Nanjing as its capital. The U.S. recognized the KMT as the legitimate government of China, becoming the first nation to do so.

*1921
Chinese
Communist
Party (CCP)
Founded*

*1927
Chinese Civil
War Begins*

*1937
Second Sino-
Japanese War
Begins*

Japan continued to expand--invading Manchuria and attacking the Great Wall in 1933. While Japanese and Chinese forces engaged in skirmishes, the Chinese largely practiced appeasement. However, tensions continued to rise until full-on war erupted between the two nations in 1937 in what became known as the second Sino-Japanese War. The Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party took a hiatus in their ideological and physical battles and formed a united front against the invading Japanese. The Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) captured Beijing, the nearby port city Tianjin, and the KMT capital city of Nanjing (Nanking). When Nanjing fell to Japanese forces, Japanese General Matsui Iwane launched a campaign to destroy the city entirely in order "to break the spirit of Chinese resistance." Japanese troops raped, mutilated, tortured, and killed civilians. This became known around the world as the "[Rape of Nanking](#)" or the "Nanjing Massacre."

*1937
Nanjing
Massacre*

*1941-1942
"Flying Tigers"
U.S. provides
war aid*

The atrocities committed in Nanjing drew outrage from Western nations. The U.S., U.K., France, and Australia extended financial support to the Republic of China and limited their trade with Japan. The first American Volunteer Group (AVG) of the Chinese Air Force, nicknamed the Flying Tigers, assisted in defending China against Japan from 1941-1942. They included pilots from the U.S. Marine Corps, Navy, and Army Air Corps and were credited with destroying nearly 300 enemy aircraft. Additionally, the U.S. began an oil embargo on Japan, depriving Japan of much needed natural resources. Under President Roosevelt's regime, the U.S. [extended \\$25 million credit](#) to the Nationalist regime for purchasing war supplies. The credit was expanded to \$100 million in 1940. With this aid, relations looked to be improving and China and the U.S. formally signed a treaty ending 60 years of immigration exclusion. Chinese were now allowed to immigrate to the U.S., but the quota was still very low. On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declared war against Japan the following day. With the U.S. and other Western powers involved, the second Sino-Japanese War merged with WWII.

*1941
U.S. enters
WWII*

The Chinese Civil War was not altogether forgotten by the U.S., and in 1944, with the approval of KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek, the U.S. sent an army observation group to

*1945
Taiwan
returned to
China*

Yan'an to study and learn about the Communists' forces. The group was impressed with the structure and discipline of the Communist party, and desired to provide aid to their war efforts. This, of course, was adamantly denied by Chiang Kai-shek. The U.S. maintained their presence in China when Vice President Henry Wallace visited Chongqing in 1944. Wallace was the highest ranking U.S. official to visit China up until that point. After the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, Japan surrendered, the allies emerged victorious, and the war was over. Upon Japan's defeat, they were forced to cede control of Taiwan back to China.

*1946
Civil War
resumes*

The Civil War resumed in 1946, a year after the end of the war with Japan. Although the U.S. government under the Truman administration attempted negotiations between the Nationalists and the Communists in 1945, war erupted once again in early 1946. President Truman signed off on providing aid to Chiang Kai-shek's regime, but otherwise the U.S. largely stayed out of the Chinese Civil War. In 1949, the Communist Party under the leadership of Mao Zedong, won the Civil War and established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in mainland China. The Nationalists, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, were forced to retreat to Taiwan. Despite the KMT's loss, the U.S. continued to recognize the Republic of China as the legitimate government of China. This limited relations between the U.S. and the new PRC government for many years to come.

*1949
People's
Republic of
China (PRC)
established,
Nationalists
retreat to
Taiwan*

THE RED SCARE AND THE KOREAN WAR

*1950s
Red Scare*

After WWII, the Soviet Union and the United States became involved in the Cold War, consisting of "[largely political and economic clashes.](#)" With this rivalry causing tension throughout the U.S., many citizens grew concerned that communists or communist sympathizers were infiltrating their government and society as spies for the USSR, posing a threat to the nation's security. Anti-communist hysteria spread across the U.S., and the loyalty of government officials, Hollywood film stars, and workers in many other industries, was put under scrutiny. This became known as the Red Scare (communists were referred to as "reds" for their allegiance to the Soviet Union). [U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy](#) of Wisconsin spearheaded the effort, using tactics of fear and intimidation to expose any potential espionage efforts. Anticommunist hysteria was later known as "McCarthyism." Those with any relation to China—including journalists, scholars, students—were all under suspicion.

*1950-1953
Korean War*

Anticommunist hysteria was only heightened by international events. On June 25, 1950, the North Korean People's Army invaded South Korea. The United Nations and the United States came to the aid of South Korea. When U.S., UN, and South Korean troops approached the North Korean border with China, Chinese troops intervened and began aiding North Korea. The Soviet Union also backed the North Korean forces, fueling the Americans' growing fear of communism. The war ended in a stalemate and the parties involved signed an armistice agreement in 1953. Senator McCarthy was censured by the Senate in December 1954 after a series of trials earlier that year, though it was not until the late 1950s that the climate of fear in the U.S. began to ease. Despite the red scare ending, this fear of communism has left a mark and, to some degree, still influences U.S. sentiment today.

THE TAIWAN STRAIT CRISES

In 1950, President Truman declared that the U.S. would no longer get involved in conflicts between the PRC and the ROC. However, after the outbreak of the Korean War, President Truman felt that the neutralization of the Taiwan Strait, the body of water separating Taiwan from mainland China, would be in the United States' best interests. Truman ordered the U.S. Navy Seventh Fleet to protect Taiwan from an attack from the PRC. In 1953, after the armistice agreement was signed officially ending the Korean War, President Dwight D. Eisenhower lifted the navy blockade from the Taiwan Strait. Chiang Kai-shek immediately deployed thousands of troops to China's off-shore islands of Jinmen (Quemoy) and Mazu (Matsu). The People's Liberation Army (PLA) of mainland China responded by shelling the islands. The U.S. threatened a nuclear attack on China, and with the power of the U.S. behind Taiwan, China agreed to negotiate. In January 1955, Congress passed the [Formosa Resolution](#) giving President Eisenhower authority to defend Taiwan and other islands just off the shore of mainland China. In 1958, the PRC once again shelled the two islands, and the U.S. threatened nuclear force. This was an effective threat at the time as the PRC did not have nuclear power, but this was soon to change. The PRC tested its first successful atomic bomb in October 1964 and joined the nuclear club.

SINO-SOVIET SPLIT

In the late 1950s, relations between the PRC and the USSR began to deteriorate. Where the two communist powers aligned before, they now began to diverge. The USSR did not offer military support during the first and second Taiwan Strait Crises, as Mao Zedong would not agree to Khrushchev's condition that the USSR be allowed to establish a Soviet naval communications center in China and assume full operation control of their navy. Mao Zedong and Nikita Khrushchev differed in terms of ideology as well. Mao believed the success of the communist revolution should depend on a country's specific social characteristics. While focusing on heavy industry may be the goal of the USSR in establishing communism, Mao decided to turn his attention to strengthening agriculture in order to mobilize China's dominant demographic--peasants. Khrushchev's 1956 "Secret Speech" criticizing the ideology of the late Premier Joseph Stalin went against Mao Zedong's views of communism and contributed greatly to the Sino-Soviet split. Prior to the Sino-Soviet split, there was an impression in the U.S. that communism in the USSR and communism in China was one in the same. The split allowed the U.S. and China to move towards rapprochement.

RAPPROCHEMENT

In 1965, Congress passed the [Immigration and Naturalization Act](#) allowing more migrants from Asia. Chinese immigration increased dramatically. In the same year, the U.S. halted economic aid to Taiwan as Taiwan's economy was growing at a rapid pace on its own.

*1950-1953
U.S. Navy
Seventh Fleet
protects Taiwan*

*1955
Formosa
Resolution*

*1950s
Sino-Soviet Split*

*1965
Immigration and
Naturalization
Act*

*1971
Ping Pong
Diplomacy*

Relations improved further as a result of what later became known as Ping Pong Diplomacy. In April 1971, both the U.S. and China sent ping pong teams to compete in Japan in the World Table Tennis Championship. The Chinese government then invited the U.S. ping pong team to come to China, and they accepted. The invitation signaled that China wanted to open friendly relations with the U.S. The same day the U.S. team was given a reception for their arrival in Beijing, President Nixon eased the trade embargo on China. In turn, China relaxed its trade embargo on the U.S. less than a week later.

*1972
President Nixon
Visits China*

A monumental turning point in the U.S.-China relationship was President Nixon's 1972 visit to China. In July 1971, President Nixon's National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger secretly visited Beijing to prepare for the president's visit the following year, meeting with senior officials including Premier Zhou Enlai. Nixon's visit ended 25 years of separation between the two nations. The trip served a dual purpose--to improve relations and open up dialogue between the U.S. and China, and to gain leverage against the Soviet Union. During the eight-day visit, Nixon met with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, traveling to Beijing, Hangzhou, and Shanghai. At the end of the trip, the U.S. government and the PRC issued the Shanghai Communiqué in which both countries agreed that it would be in everyone's best interest to move towards normalizing diplomatic relations.

*1973
U.S. Liaison
Office
established*

In May 1973, the United States Liaison Office was established in Beijing and a PRC counterpart office was established in Washington, DC. In 1975, President Gerald Ford visited the PRC, reaffirming the U.S.'s intent of moving relations towards normalization.

*1976
Mao dies, Deng
Xiaping comes
into power*

China's leadership experienced its first turnover since the founding of the PRC in 1949. Premier Zhou Enlai passed away in January 1976 due to illness, and Chairman Mao died after suffering a heart attack that September. Deng Xiaoping quickly rose to power following Mao's death, becoming Deputy Premier. While Hua Guafeng replaced Mao as chairman, Deng held a leading position in the Politburo as head of the Military Affairs Commission. Meanwhile, President Jimmy Carter came into office in January 1977. With so many changes in leadership, normalization of relations between China and the U.S. was making slow progress.

*1978
U.S. and China
establish full
diplomatic
relations*

Shortly after taking office in 1977, President Carter reinforced the aims of the Shanghai Communiqué. In December 1978, the PRC and the U.S. government issued a joint communiqué establishing full diplomatic relations. President Carter agreed to the terms of the PRC's proposed ["One-China" policy](#) and the U.S. severed official diplomatic relations with Taiwan. The One-China policy states that there is only one China, despite claims from two competing governments, the PRC and the ROC. This means that in order for the U.S. or any other nation to have diplomatic relations with the PRC, they must break off ties with the ROC. (Later in 1979, however, Congress approved the Taiwan Relations Act allowing continued relations between the U.S. and Taiwan without directly violating the One-China policy.) On January 1, 1979, both nations announced the [official establishment of diplomatic relations](#).

*1979
Taiwan
Relations Act*

*1980
Reform and
Opening Up*

In 1980, Deng Xiaoping launched a series of economic and social reforms meant to improve the lives of Chinese citizens, including opening up China to foreign investment, decollectivizing agriculture, and allowing citizens to own businesses. International companies flooded into China to take advantage of new market opportunities. From here, the two nations had more and more contact: President Ronald Reagan became the third U.S. president to visit China in 1984 (after Presidents Nixon and Ford); in the 1970s and 1980s, China joined a number of international organizations including the IMF, World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank. China was finally engaging more with the international community.

HIATUS IN RELATIONS

*1989
Tiananmen
Square Incident*

On June 4, 1989, the People's Liberation Army cracked down on the thousands of students demonstrating in Tiananmen Square, Beijing. The students were protesting for a number of different causes, including government accountability and transparency, freedom of speech and the press, and democracy. The PLA open fired, killing what is estimated to range from hundreds to a few thousand students. This caused an uproar in the international community. The U.S. responded by imposing economic sanctions on China and suspending military sales. Although the Tiananmen Square Incident caused a hiatus in relations, Sino-U.S. relations began to gradually improve after a few years. In 1997, Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited the U.S.--the first visit of a Chinese leader in over a decade. In turn, President Clinton visited China the following year to discuss Taiwan. The visits were signs relations were improving once more, but they took another hit in 1999.

*1999
U.S. bombing of
Chinese embassy
in Belgrade*

On May 7, 1999, U.S. bombs accidentally [struck the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade](#) during a NATO intervention in Yugoslavia, killing three and injuring twenty. The bombing was meant to target a warehouse storing ammunition, but the maps given to NATO were obsolete. Although President Bill Clinton immediately apologized and stated the bombing was an accident, Chinese media delayed reporting the apology and anti-American protests erupted across China as Chinese citizens attacked U.S. property--in particular, the U.S. embassy in Beijing.

TENSIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

*2001
U.S.-China
Aircraft
Collision*

On April 1, 2001, a U.S. Navy spy plane [collided with a Chinese jet](#) off the coast of China during routine surveillance. The U.S. plane made an emergency landing in Hainan, China. All 24 American crewmembers survived, but the PRC pilot was killed in the incident. The U.S. aircraft and crewmembers were detained and interrogated until April 11. It is unclear which nation, if any, was at fault for the incident and the situation diffused quickly.

*2001
China joins
WTO*

Concerns over potential economic imbalances increased as China's economy grew. In October 2000, President Clinton signed the U.S.-China Act of 2000 granting Beijing permanent normal trade relations with the U.S. In September 2001, China was finally

*2008
China becomes
largest holder of
U.S. debt*

[permitted entry into the World Trade Organization](#) after agreeing to follow a number of trade standards. By 2006, China became the U.S.'s second biggest trading partner after Canada. In September 2008, China surpassed Japan to become the largest holder of U.S. debt. As of July 2013, China held \$1.3 trillion of [U.S. debt](#). In 2010, China became the world's second largest economy after the U.S., and is [expected to surpass](#) the U.S. by 2027.

Besides economic concerns, the U.S. and China have had several political conflicts. For example, in 2012 Chen Guangcheng, a Chinese political dissident who was under house arrest for his outspoken human rights activism, escaped and found asylum at the U.S. embassy in Beijing. U.S. diplomats negotiated with Chinese officials and Chen came to the U.S. as a student studying law at New York University, where he currently resides. The situation was solved by allowing Chen Guangcheng to come to the U.S. as a student rather than as a political dissident.

*2011
U.S. pivots to
Asia*

In 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced the U.S. "pivot" from the Middle East to Asia. This referred to investing U.S. attention on military, political, and economic affairs in the Asia Pacific region. China has risen to become a powerful nation that commands the world's attention and it is more important than ever before to establish regular dialogue. At the [Sunnylands Summit](#) in June 2013, President Xi Jinping and President Barack Obama met for the first time. Sunnylands, a large estate in Rancho Mirage, California, provided a relaxed setting for the two leaders to converse about important topics like climate change, cyber security, and North Korea.

*2013
Sunnylands
Summit*

Despite positive overtures and discussions of a "new-type great power relationship," a phrase coined by the Chinese leadership, there are several huge factors still causing conflict between the U.S. and China. For example, if the territorial disputes involving Japan and China in the East and South China Seas were to erupt into conflict, the U.S. would be forced to defend Japan, severely damaging relations with China. The fragile China-Taiwan relationship is also cause for U.S.-China tension, as well as China's human rights violations.

Many look at U.S. relations with China as mutually beneficial, while others feel relations are deteriorating with increased competition and interdependency. China is taking a more active role in regional and international activities and this could harm or help U.S.-China relations in unpredictable ways. Either way, the history of U.S.-China relations plays a major role in influencing the status of relations today. With China's growing power and influence in the international community, U.S.-China relations have become more important than ever before in ensuring the prosperity and security of both nations.

ADDITIONAL READING

Books

Following the Leader: Ruling China, David Lampton (University of California Press: 2014).

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The U.S.-China Policy Foundation is a sol (c) 3 non-profit organization founded in 1995 to encourage greater understanding and policy dialogue between the United States and China.

Compiled and written by Erin Monroe