CHAPTER THREE

China and Southeast Asia after the Cold War*

BRANTLY WOMACK

MR. SHAO-CHUAN LENG: Our speaker, Professor Brantly Womack, teaches Chinese politics at the University of Virginia and is associated with the Miller Center. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and has taught at both Northern Illinois University and the University of London. He has published widely on Chinese foreign policy and Southeast Asia, including Vietnam. He has recently returned from a two-week stay in Vietnam, so he is definitely an authority in this field.

MR. WOMACK: My analysis of China and Southeast Asia will be general. This is unfortunate, because the details of China's relations with Southeast Asia are endlessly fascinating. I could easily concentrate on China's relations with Singapore or Burma. I could assess the complex relationship between China, the ethnic Chinese of Southeast Asia, and the indigenous economies of Southeast Asia—all of which are autonomous actors. I could spend the next semester appraising the relationship between Vietnam and China and the complexities that have defined Vietnam as a political entity over the last 2,000 years. A discussion of the Sino-

Vietnamese relation is especially tempting, because it will certainly be an important area—perhaps the key area—for problems at least in the relationship between China and Southeast Asia in the 1990s and beyond.

In this discussion, I shall deal in generalities. The generalities that I will describe are, first, the overall pattern of development of relations between China and Southeast Asia and second, the relative positions of China and Southeast Asia—how China looks to Southeast Asia and how Southeast Asia looks to China. Finally, I will explore possible problems in their relationship and the implications for U.S. foreign policy.

I

Regarding the general pattern of development, the 1950s pattern was very different from the current one. In the 1950s, Vietnam was China's socialist ally in the region. Burma, Indonesia, and eventually Cambodia under Sihanouk were China's neutral friends in the region. The other countries were not necessarily personal enemies of China, but their alliances or relations with foreign powers in the Cold War meant that their relations were hostile. In the 1960s, the relationships of China to Southeast Asia polarized, and Vietnam became China's wartime ally, grudgingly shared with the Soviet Union.

China's Cultural Revolution increased Chinese support for insurrectionary movements in other countries, and greater demands on countries of the region weakened neutralist ties and friendships. Most importantly in 1965, the coup and counter-coup in Indonesia led to a breaking of the Sino-Indonesian relationship. By 1967 China and Indonesia had downgraded their relationship from the ambassadorial level. Relations between China and Indonesia were not restored until the end of 1990, as a result of the polarizing pattern set in the 1960s.

In China's relations with Vietnam, the 1970s saw a change in the Cold War pattern. As Sino-American relations improved and permitted normalization of relations in the 1970s, most of the Southeast Asian countries, with the exception of Singapore and Indonesia, normalized their relations with China. The relationships, however, did not develop into friendships, and these countries were still worried about the continuing Chinese support for Communist parties in their countries. The most interesting development was what happened to Sino-Vietnamese relations after the Vietnamese victory and reunification. Contrary to expectations that the Vietnamese victory would build up the Communist bloc and add to the domino momentum, which had been the core of U.S. strategic policy and involvement in the war, hostility developed between China and Vietnam.

The origins of that hostility are complicated, and include three major components. First, both Vietnam and China had unrealistic expectations of what victory would mean for them. Second, after the war, Vietnam was put in a position of having to choose between its alliance with the Soviet Union and its alliance with China. Because it was richer and more distant, the Soviet Union was the more attractive choice. Incidentally, China was closely involved in forcing Vietnam's choice in that situation, compounded by Vietnam's willingness to choose due to its fear of China.

Lastly, the alliance that developed in the late 1970s between the Khmer Rouge and the Chinese, in which the Chinese in 1978 were supplying military equipment to the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia as fast as they could, led to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979, and the definition of a hostile relationship between the two countries that persisted for most of the 1980s. The 1980s, therefore, were redefined by the unexpected and late development of this hostile relationship between China and Vietnam. The hostility between China and Vietnam allowed China to transform its relations with Southeast Asia by forming an alliance between ASEAN and the United States against Vietnam to isolate Vietnam for its policies in Cambodia.

China's alliance with most of the countries of Southeast Asia provided an umbrella for a vast expansion of economic and diplomatic links between China and Southeast Asia and eventually even military links between Burma, Thailand, and China. Basically, China was able to redefine its economic and diplomatic ties in the context of a shared enemy. By the end of the 1980s, however,
Southeast Asian countries were no longer treating Vietnam as a threat, but as a market, and China's continued hostility in support for the Khmer Rouge was eroding China's capacity to keep up with the new situation in Southeast Asia. With the development of a different policy on Vietnam's part, especially the unilateral withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in 1989, the stage was set for a new phase in the relationship.

As for the 1990s, the end of the Cold War and the end of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia have meant that there is no Soviet threat in Southeast Asia—no Soviet threat for China on which to found its own anti-Vietnamese policy. This situation combined with the simultaneous withdrawal of the United States from the Philippines has created a situation that might be described as Asia for Asians. The primary actors in Asia are now the Asian countries themselves, and this is particularly true for Southeast Asia.

This region continues to experience economic growth and bases its foreign relations primarily on economics rather than military alliances or strategic thinking. This characteristic of Southeast Asia as a region is responsible for its rather low profile in world news. It is not a crisis situation; it is a situation of economic progress.

Continued economic growth, however, shifts relationships. Uneven development creates new opportunities. No country is growing faster than China, and no region is growing faster than Southeast Asia. Because of the region's growth, its prospects for the 1990s must be looked at carefully, even in a noncrisis situation.

II

What do these two places mean for each other? What does Southeast Asia mean for China in the 1990s, and what does China mean to Southeast Asia?

For China, Southeast Asia in the 1990s has a new importance. First of all, the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, followed by world reaction to this crisis and the end of the Cold War, required China to reassess its relationship with the rest of Asia. Even though Asia was important for China before, China viewed itself as a global actor. Now in the 1990s, China is recognizing its role and capacity as a regional actor. Its global mentality has been shaken. China appreciated the relative support from Asian countries that it received after the Tiananmen Square incident, especially in comparison to the reaction from Europe and the United States. In addition, the changes in Vietnam's policies toward Cambodia and the declining popularity of China's support for the Khmer Rouge meant that the continuing basis of China's alliances in Southeast Asia was deteriorating and that it had to rethink its particular policies in that region.

China's new policy will be created on the basis of the economic importance of Southeast Asia. Here is a region with a population equal to all of Latin America. China's trade with Southeast Asia, as a percentage of Japanese trade, was 37 percent in 1989 and 42 percent in 1990. Its exports to Southeast Asia are 44 percent of its exports to Japan. Economically, Southeast Asia in the 1990s is moving from a position of being one-third as important as Japan is to China, to being half as important as Japan is to China—and Japan is the single most important economic factor for China. Southeast Asia, therefore, is a significant region, even though China does not consider its regional relation with Southeast Asia as a dominant concern.

From a domestic perspective, China's trade with Southeast Asia was 56 percent of its trade with the United States in 1989 and 59 percent of its trade with the United States in 1990, and its exports to Southeast Asia in 1990 were 76 percent of its exports to the United States. What this means is that in the course of the 1990s, probably by 1995, China's exports to Southeast Asia may be at the same level as its exports to the United States, especially if the United States acts to control its imbalance of trade with China. Also, China's exports to Southeast Asia are far more solidly based than its exports to the United States. Thus, when the presidential candidates in the first debate in 1992 talked about the dangers of isolating China, it was somewhat similar to the old headline in the London Times about fog in the Channel isolating the continent. The question is whether the United States will isolate itself by making moves that no longer correspond to the capacity of the United States in economic terms.
Besides Southeast Asia's given economic importance to China, it is also significant as a frontier for China's expanding influence. As China redefines and asserts itself, it will see Southeast Asia as an area of ambiguity and apparent opportunity. This outlook will present both opportunities and threats for Southeast Asia.

What does China look like to Southeast Asia? In contrast to how the United States views China, Southeast Asia sees China as very close and very big. In general, Americans do not have much sense of the magnitude of the Chinese economy. We think of it as a poor country that exports potholders and various things that we find at discount stores. We do not think of the magnitude of the economy itself.

Let's consider the world ranking in productivity for some of China's major industrial goods. The 1991 Chinese Statistical Abstract lists China as fourth in steel production, first in coal, sixth in petroleum production, fourth in electricity, first in cement, third in sulfuric acid, third in chemical fertilizer, sixth in synthetic rubber, and tenth in automobiles. Figures for 1989 show that China was eighth in shipbuilding, fourth in chemical synthetic fibers, first in cotton, fourth in woven goods, sixth in sugar, and first in the production of television sets. The last number mentioned is probably helped by the fact that China may be the only country still producing black and white television sets.

The Southeast Asian perspective is very different from an American perspective. Of the above categories, Indonesia ranks tenth in chemical fertilizer, and Thailand ranks eighth in sugar production. Those are the only two Southeast Asian countries on any of these lists. For Southeast Asia, therefore, China is a major economic mass that creates a strong gravitational pull on the region, and this mass is increasing by 6 to 14 percent a year. Regardless of trade availability, this is a gravitational fact, and while China's economic growth creates vast opportunities for Southeast Asian countries, it also creates concerns about being too close to such a large country.

If we look at this issue in military terms, China's strategic nuclear forces in 1991 included only eight intercontinental ballistic missiles, 60 regional ballistic missiles, only one missile submarine (and it is always in port with problems), and 44 tactical submarines, including only five nuclear submarines. China's military expenses are estimated at $11-$22 billion, which by U.S. standards is fairly trivial. The United States has a total of about 1,500 intercontinental ballistic missiles, including Navy supplies. It has approximately 110 submarines, including 25 strategic submarines, 87 tactical submarines, and a defense budget in 1991 of $287 billion.

By U.S. standards and those of the Cold War, China, while not trivial, is not in the same league as the United States and the former Soviet Union, now Russia. By Southeast Asian standards, however, these statistics look very different. Taking Indonesia for the purpose of comparison, Indonesia has no missiles, two submarines, and a defense expenditure of $1.6 billion—which is one-tenth of China's—and Indonesia, with a relatively developed military, is the largest of the countries in Southeast Asia.

The Southeast Asian countries have no hope of military parity with China; whatever level of threat posed by China is a level of threat that is well beyond the capacity of any Southeast Asian country acting individually. Furthermore, there is no tradition and no effective institutions of regional action vis-à-vis China. China, however, is not the only Asian country in the Pacific. Consider Japan, for example. Though Japan has no nuclear arsenal, it does have 17 submarines and a larger navy than China's. Japan's military budget is $34 billion, meaning it is half again the largest estimate of Chinese defense expenditures and perhaps three times China's actual level. Clearly, Japan is still a major actor, but do Indonesia, Vietnam, or the Philippines breathe easier because Japan is there? That is a good question.

If China and Japan compete in military terms, Southeast Asian countries would still be out of the league, and there would remain the question of how they relate as weak powers to stronger regional powers. The problem here is, Asia may be for Asians now, but for which Asians? If you are in a country that is approximately the size of a Chinese province, that question is quite disturbing.
What possible problems could emerge in this noncrisis situation based on economics? One problem is that of Chinese nationalism. This is best illustrated by the Spratly Islands and the controversy between China on the one hand and Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, and Taiwan on the other hand. I do not know on which side Taiwan would fall or if it would fall somewhere in the middle, since China and Taiwan both claim Chinese sovereignty. In any case, China is on one side of the Spratly Island controversy and almost all of contiguous Southeast Asia is on the other.

Why is this controversy so important? From a geographic standpoint, the Spratly Islands are very important to Southeast Asia. If you include the Spratly Islands on a map with China, you also include most of Southeast Asia, because the Spratly Islands are so far south of the rest of China and at the bottom of the South China Sea. This is the problem that Southeast Asians have with the Spratly Islands claim. These islands are at low tide and have a combined area of less than five square kilometers. It is not so much that their claims to these miserable little islands are superior to China’s claims, but if China asserts and maintains control over the national sovereignty of the Spratly Islands, China would have power over 80 percent of the South China Sea surface, including the major trade routes that go through the Straits of Malacca up to Northeast Asia.

China’s claim worries Southeast Asians in a number of respects. One concern is that in order for China to enforce that claim, it will need a long-range air force and a blue-water navy. Southeast Asia’s concern stems from the observation that anything able to defend the Spratlys is able to attack Malaysia or the Philippines, which are the same distance from mainland China.

Perhaps more deeply important for the 1990s are the nationalist implications behind China’s claim to the Spratlys. The military’s support of China’s claim suggests that the military might be in an expansive mood. Even more disturbing is the National Congress’s recent reassertion of Chinese sovereignty over the Spratly Islands.

China’s actions seem contrary to expectations of what reformers think, and most of the members of the National People’s Congress would see themselves as reformers. It was assumed that China would not reassert its claim over the Spratlys because international openness was a major part of China’s reform movement in the 1980s, and the Chinese generally touted cosmopolitan over nationalistic aims. I am not sure that this is the case. From new, emerging forces in China, there have been a number of nationalistic moves vis-à-vis Japan and Southeast Asia with the Spratly claims. In any case, why couldn’t the forces of China see themselves as part of a young, emergent, and assertive China, a China that more explicitly demands its national interests from countries with which it deals?

With regard to Guangdong province, will its growing international connections and importance make it more understanding of its trade partners, or will it be a reason to assert itself more? Nothing has been decided yet. There will be different forces in the reform movements and the new political dynamics of China in the 1990s, but nationalism is not to be ruled out. Nationalism is not so much a characteristic of Chinese communism as it is a characteristic of where China is in the world and where it sees itself going.

The second possible problem is tied to competition between China and Japan. To a great extent, Sino-Japanese competition has been controlled in the past by the isolation and poverty of China and by the fact that the Japanese economy blossomed beneath an unquestioned American umbrella of military superiority in a bipolar world. Both of these conditions changed massively in the 1980s.

What do these changes imply? For a country like Vietnam, these changes suggest that Hanoi wants the United States back in the region to balance China. Interestingly enough, those in southern Vietnam want the same, but they want the United States in the region to balance Japan. These are two different perspectives on what threatens Vietnam, coming from two very different areas of Vietnam.

In general, however, the potential for competition exists. I am not talking about confrontation between China and Japan, which
would be a long way in the future. But at the very least, the implicit competition of military expenditures would place military programs and capacities that are already out of the league of any Southeast Asian country even further away, and would induce catchup military expenditures by Southeast Asian countries that will never catch up. Eventually, it might lead to alliances that would be more exclusive than the current economically based diplomatic relations in the region. Though this is not something that will happen in the next three or five years, it is still a severe, long-term worry for Southeast Asia. These are the kinds of problems that exist in noncrisis situations. It is not a case of the trees falling in the forest and attracting attention, but one of termites in the forest.

What negative developments might occur as a result of such competition? These developments would be characterized by induced militarization, forced choices, and eventually possible threats, but these are a long time off.

The last potentially problematic area between Southeast Asia and China is the relations between China and Vietnam and how those relations may or may not change in the 1990s. This situation has two different aspects. I will begin with continuities. To say that China and Vietnam hate one another is a little too strong, because it implies that the relationship is symmetrical. Vietnam mortally fears China. China despises and resents Vietnam. It is not a very positive relationship. The relationship’s asymmetry will continue for a long time to come because it is both an expression of Vietnam’s vulnerability to China and China’s invulnerability to Vietnam.

China has never worried about the southern barbarians. They have always been considered interesting, but the main threats have been from the north. Vietnam’s identity is defined by its independence from China, which is how the country emerged. Regarding continuity, conflicts could develop that might force choices in Southeast Asia but that could also keep Southeast Asia more unsettled and less prosperous as a region than it would be without these conflicts.

Although China and Vietnam normalized their relationships two years ago, their trade is still not normalized. Tensions continue to exist. China, for instance, has been seizing Vietnamese ships on the high seas and impounding their cargos due to alleged smuggling into China through Hong Kong. Vietnam just put 17 major categories of goods on an embargo-impoundment list; that is, these goods are not allowed into Vietnam. If you look at what goods are on the list, you find that they are the primary Chinese export items to North Vietnam. These goods, such as bicycle parts and other items, have destroyed local industry in Vietnam because the Chinese competition is much more efficient. Consequently, there are tremendous tensions and conflicts in the context of an improving relationship between Vietnam and China. Still, it is not at all impossible that at some point in the future those conflicts will instead be in the context of a deteriorating relationship.

The other possible role of Vietnam in the relations between China and Southeast Asia is perhaps more interesting, and it is also more distant. As Vietnam prospers and opens to the rest of the world, it would not surprise me if south Vietnam became more assertive of its interests vis-à-vis the north. Since the national government of Vietnam is controlled by the north and tends to have a northern perspective, separatist tendencies may develop in Vietnam. There is a much greater likelihood of separatist tendencies developing into a major problem in Vietnam than in China.

What this means for China’s relationships to Vietnam is a very interesting question. Differences between northern and southern Vietnam may mean different relationships with China. The economy of the north and quite possibly the political relationships of the north will be dominated by Vietnam’s relations with China. For southern Vietnam, however, China is not as significant an actor as it is for the rest of the Southeast Asian region, Japan, Taiwan, and other big investors in the south.

The geographical reasons for this are obvious. It is further from Hanoi to Saigon than it is from Chicago, Illinois, to Brownsville, Texas. Vietnam is a very long country—over 1,000 miles from one end to another—and the simple geographical and geopolitical situation of Saigon is very different from the geopolitical situation of Hanoi. If the situation in Vietnam did develop into a conflict, north and south Vietnam’s natural pattern of alliances would probably develop very differently. The National government of the north would ally with China and the political
power based in the south would ally primarily with other countries in Southeast Asia and with global actors, such as the United States. Given such a situation, there is a clear likelihood of China's unintentional involvement in a potentially serious military confrontation or civil war in Vietnam. That, in turn, could lead to major divisive tensions in the region.

This development, however, is not likely to happen in the near future, because a lot would have to happen before the reemergence of such divisiveness in south Vietnam. At the moment, there are practically no domestic signs of this divisiveness. Having visited north and south Vietnam five times in the last six years, however, I guarantee that there are some resentments in both directions. Hence, the potential for such a situation developing, given the far greater ability of south Vietnam to respond to a world market, is certainly there.

IV

Where does U.S. policy figure in this scenario? My first observation is that the United States is not very significant in this problem. To some extent, the declining role of the United States is inevitable as the Asian economies expand. To some extent it is self-imposed by U.S. foreign policy in the area. The United States isolated itself with its ongoing embargo of Vietnam, and it threatens to isolate itself again from China, given the instabilities or potential instabilities in U.S.-Chinese policy.

As for Southeast Asia, U.S. relations are friendly with all countries except Vietnam. Even our friendly relationships are not close, however, and the countries of Southeast Asia generally do not feel that the United States has the same regional hegemony that it did 20 years ago.

The general policy of the United States toward Vietnam might best be described as “missing.” There is no policy toward Vietnam, though the country has been in existence for 17 years, which is longer than the war in Vietnam lasted. Our policy is derivative from the war, and it is a policy of inaction. The United States tends to be slow in responding to Vietnamese efforts, such as cooperation on MIA and POW issues. One thing to do would be to rethink the U.S. position.

The United States might also do what the Australians are doing in Southeast Asia and the world in general, which is to foster relations of mutual economic advantage with other countries in the post-Cold War era. They will do so by supporting their domestic manufacturers and developing markets. By contrast, the United States has developed the habit over the last generation of keying its attention to world affairs by the bipolar political/military struggle of the Cold War. Smaller matters were not worthy of attention in their own right, and our partners were not our equals. But the post-Cold War world is a world of markets, and markets focus on specific economic advantages and opportunities. Big talk will not create markets for America. It needs to develop its industries. The sale of American telecommunications equipment in Vietnam needs to be pushed in the same way that the Australians have been pushing the sale of Australian telecommunications equipment over the past ten years. The failure of the United States to take these actions will mean the deterioration of its position in a post-Cold War environment defined by economics, even as Americans celebrate the victory in the Cold War.

The challenge ahead involves more than determining what will be the new grand vision of the post-Cold War era; it is a question of visual acuity. It is a question of seeing the little things and not reducing every conflict to, and ignoring every opportunity that is smaller than, the mortal military competition between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The third U.S. policy implication is the recognition of the importance of Southeast Asia and the complex roles of Japan and China in Southeast Asia. These factors are unlikely to change. They are realities that Americans will have to deal with in this important area of the world, and unless we understand the complexities of these relationships, we can not deal intelligently with China, Japan, or Southeast Asia.

Until the worst happens and relationships become redefined by military considerations, the U.S. global strategic relationship will continue to be based on the interactions of China, Japan, and Southeast Asia, which are beyond the control of the United States.
and of which it wants to be a part. A practical implication arising from this observation is that the United States should reduce the pressure for militarization in Asia. Military pressures are unsound for Asia and unsound for the United States, and reduction of those pressures should be a U.S. policy priority. Given our export of military equipment—jet fighters to Taiwan, for example—this change in priorities would require a reversal of several practical U.S. policies.

The change in policy may not make much difference to Charlottesville, where the major exports are apples, wine, and peer-reviewed articles, but in my native town of Fort Worth, any talk about supporting demilitarization in Asia would spark some alarm. The conflict is between near-term interest—in particular, U.S. interest in military exports—and long-term interest, specifically in avoiding a conflictual situation that the United States would not be able to control. One lesson from the war in Vietnam is that U.S. military power is inadequate to enforce our interests in Southeast Asia. If people are going to live in a post-Vietnam-illusion world, then they must understand the complex relationships that exist and become an informed part of them.

**QUESTION:** Would you say a few words about Cambodia, which is in somewhat of a crisis now, and China's shifting attitude toward Cambodia?

**MR. WOMACK:** Cambodia is in a miserable situation, and people are suffering, though perhaps not as greatly or acutely as they are in Bosnia. As a regional issue, however, Cambodia has been about 80 percent insulated from the major course of developments in the 1990s. Consequently, Cambodia's problems in the 1990s will tend to be Cambodian problems and to a lesser extent, regional problems.

Beginning around 1990, the Chinese more or less realized that their interest in better relations with Vietnam and better relations with Southeast Asia were more important than their continued support of the Khmer Rouge. As a result, they began a diplomatic retreat from the Khmer Rouge. I do not know how far China has backed away militarily. Chinese foreign policy, especially at the practical level, tends to be very multidimensional. It would not surprise me if some support for the Khmer Rouge still remains.

The Khmer Rouge has become much more dependent on Thailand than it is on China. The Khmer Rouge is selling gems and timber to Thai generals and to other entrepreneurs in Thailand and becoming quite prosperous and very strong in western Cambodia. Chaos, not the Khmer Rouge, is the main threat to the national government, since this government at present lacks the capacity to do anything.

There is a large risk that Cambodia will become partitioned into two parts: a Thai-oriented Khmer Rouge-operated segment of western Cambodia and the rest of Cambodia. At least one more step in that direction will be taken in the next few months when the United Nations decides whether or not to exclude the Khmer Rouge from the elections and again when it see the results of the elections. It is an unfortunate situation in Cambodia, and it is worthwhile for us as Americans to recall that Cambodia is in this situation because we demanded that the Khmer Rouge be included in the country's coalition government.

From the early 1980s, the Vietnamese were happy to have a coalition government excluding the Khmer Rouge. Our insistence, China's insistence, and in a more derivative sense, ASEAN's insistence was that the Khmer Rouge be included. Consequently, in Cambodia today we see the difficulty of including a rabid group of what have become Chinese-supplied mercenaries in a coalition government.

**QUESTION:** How much central control does the Chinese government continue to exercise over heavy industrial production such as that of steel and cement?

**MR. WOMACK:** One of the basic changes in China during the 1980s has been a gradual shift away from the centrally controlled economy to, first of all, a more mixed economy, and second, toward a more decontrolled, controlled economy—that is, an economy controlled to a great extent at the provincial rather than the national level. Last year, for example, 50 percent of China's industrial product was in nonstate enterprises for the first time,
which means that there is a smaller percentage of production at
nationally owned factories in China than there is in India and than
there still is in Poland.

There has been a kind of shift, not toward privatization, but
away from the centrally controlled Stalinist economic model that has
played a large role in the growth of the Chinese economy. It is not
quite privatization, because the Chinese are not selling their state
assets the way they are in the European post-Communist countries.
What has happened is a growth in private and cooperative
production rather than a sale and divestiture of state assets.

Second, the provinces are very different. The trade patterns
of Guangdong province are both global and within Southeast Asia,
which is very different from the trade patterns of an inland
province. The individual provinces are allowed to pursue their own
interest to a far greater degree than at any other time since 1949.

Economically, China is becoming a much more diverse place,
and the political uniformity may today be somewhat misleading.
China may have a national governmental structure, rather than a
federal structure, but in practical terms, there are limits to what the
national government can do now.

**QUESTION:** With regard to American policy toward Vietnam, one
gets the impression from the mass media that a tremendous
obstacle to American policy is the perfectionism involved in
identifying the remains of those missing in action. Is this the real
reason for what you called the "missing" policy of the United
States, or is it just a convenient excuse to avoid having a policy on
Vietnam?

**MR. WOMACK:** In 1988 I led a delegation of senior American
China specialists to Vietnam, which included Jonathan Pollack of
the RAND Corporation. Keep in mind that 1988 was before
Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia and U.S. policy toward
Vietnam was that normalization would take place when Vietnam
unilaterally withdrew its forces from Cambodia. Throughout the
1980s, the MIA issue was treated as a humanitarian issue and not
as the basis of U.S. policy. Hence, the Vietnamese presence in
Cambodia was the one foundation for the embargo and lack of

normalized relations. Since the 1978 invasion, the U.S. government
has told Vietnam that the United States will normalize when they
pull out of Cambodia. Vietnam had options at that time, and they
did not have to pull out. Mr. Pollack and I explained and argued
for this official position when we talked with our Vietnamese
 counterparts.

The head of the North American desk at the foreign ministry,
however, said, "Things are not so simple. Our presence in
Cambodia is the big rock in U.S.-Vietnamese relations, but if the
United States moves this big rock, there will be a smaller rock. I do
not know what that little rock will be. If that little rock is moved
out of the way, there is going to be another rock." Basically, the
United States does not want to have relations with Vietnam.

I ran into Jonathan Pollack at a meeting after the Vietnamese
withdrew and after the United States added the MIA condition and
the condition that Vietnam participate in a comprehensive settle-
ment of the Cambodian question, which Vietnam has also done, in
addition to cooperating on the MIA issue. Mr. Pollack and I agreed
that the man at the North American desk in Vietnam knew more
about the United States than we did.

Given past events, I hesitate to say that the last rock is being
removed or that the material issue of those missing in action has
been the real problem. There is not much pressure for normal-
ization, because Vietnam just does not seem to be that much of an
opportunity. Also, to some extent, it has been a personality issue.
In the National Security Council, Kissinger especially is viscerally
anti-Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese have opened their military archives to explore
the MIA question. They have not demanded a symmetrical opening
of U.S. military archives to find out what happened in the last 25
years to the Vietnamese. The United States would refuse. It is a
situation where the Vietnamese are doing all they can, not from a
desire to see every last MIA family happy, but from a belief that
they really need U.S. involvement and from a preoccupation with
the question of what more they can do to bring this about. For
mainly domestic political reasons and for lack of leadership on this
issue, the United States does not want to take a step that might
reawaken questions about the Bush administration or the Clinton
administration "going soft" on Vietnam. Someone is sure to bring up the issue of remaining MIAs in Vietnam. After all, the French still have MIAs in Vietnam, and there are groups in France too that still say the Vietnamese are holding MIAs and POWs.

QUESTION: What about the boat people that are going to Hong Kong? Why are they leaving Vietnam and what does that do to China?

MR. WOMACK: There are fewer of them leaving now, and that is partly due to the fact that many of them are being returned by Hong Kong. The question of the Vietnamese in China has been a minor question in Chinese-Vietnamese relations over the last few years, but it may become more significant.

The boat people in Hong Kong are now known as the "bus people" because most of them do not take a boat the whole way. What they do is take a bus into China and then a short boat ride into Hong Kong. The bus people are a major headache in British-Vietnamese relations, but the problem is already decreasing and does not involve China.

China's problem with refugees from Vietnam dates from 1978. Vietnam expropriated the property of businessmen in the South (primarily ethnic Chinese) and drove the ethnic Chinese in the North over the border into China. There were 400,000 ethnic Chinese pushed into China. Some of those ethnic Chinese are now returning to Vietnam and demanding their property back.

The Vietnamese negotiators, according to the Chinese foreign experts—not the negotiators themselves—said that the foreign ministry talks leading to normalization did not bring up the question of either reparations or return. Since relations have been normalized, however, several Chinese communiqués have questioned what should happen to these former residents of Vietnam that are now in South China. It will be a small issue. It will not break the relationship in itself, but it will be the kind of resentful issue that continues to feed the friction between Vietnam and China.

QUESTION: What effect will Clinton and his possible emphasis on human rights questions have on Sino-American relations?

MR. WOMACK: The question revolves around what type of spin Clinton's foreign policy will be given by the Congress's tendency to emphasize human rights questions. Clinton has said that he does not want to isolate China. If you remember the first debate, Clinton and Perot followed Bush in making this statement. Yet the human rights question and most-favored-nation status in trade relations are both separately—and as linked issues—important for China and for U.S.-China relations.

The American preoccupation with human rights in China places the United States at a disadvantage in their bilateral economic relations with China compared to those countries that do not raise that issue. If the choice is between developing a market for Chinese textiles in Malaysia and developing a market for Chinese textiles in the United States, one consideration will be the threat of possible trade retaliation with the United States.

I would be surprised if the Clinton administration took action with the intent to cause a serious deterioration in relations. Due to careful handling of U.S.-Chinese relations from both the American side and the Chinese side, U.S. officials have managed to avoid a destructive tit-for-tat policy that leads to more deterioration of relations than either country wants. That is, U.S. action might provoke what China would consider a righteous readjustment of policy, only to have the United States find that action a new cause for offense and react further. That pattern of relations and that type of deterioration is by no means impossible.

At a minimum, a Democratic administration will make U.S. policy more adverse to a future Tiananmen-like situation. It will tend to have stronger reactions to a similar event than the Bush administration had to Tiananmen. While the potential for crisis in China will not affect relations with Southeast Asia that much, it will affect relations with the United States. Crisis is by no means inevitable, but Chinese politics faces some hard choices in a post-Deng Xiaoping era.
QUESTION: When Secretary of State Kissinger brought the war with Vietnam to an end in Paris, were there not some severe financial commitments made by President Nixon and Kissinger? Has that been forgotten, or is it still on the table?

MR. WOMACK: It was not forgotten by the Vietnamese until mid-1978. They made reparations a condition on their side for normalization of relations with the United States until about five months before the invasion of Cambodia.

The Carter administration would have been willing to normalize relations with Vietnam earlier had this condition not been attached by the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese were operating from exactly the kind of commitments that you are talking about, but people who worked on this issue in the State Department during the Ford administration were of the opinion that regardless of the commitments, it was politically impossible. Nixon would never have been able to convince the U.S. Congress to agree to fulfill the financial obligations that were agreed to in Paris, especially given the fact that the U.S. official claims that the Paris Accords were being massively violated by the North Vietnamese began in January 1973—weeks after the accords were signed.

The Paris Accords were being violated on both sides, and if one analyzes the Paris Accords, they were made to be violated. The leopard-skin settlement of 1973 has as its only rational explanation getting the United States out of Vietnam. There is no way that the Paris Accords could have been viewed as the blueprint for a peaceful relationship between the forces acknowledged to exist in South Vietnam. What the Paris Accords did do was close the books a bit prematurely on some MIA questions and allow the United States to move out of Vietnam by March 1973. With the U.S. public's shift of attention, the result of resentments about Vietnam and the boat-people issue that began to emerge in 1976, an American administration would not domestically be in a position to execute those agreements.

NARRATOR: We thank Professor Womack for this insightful presentation.

CHAPTER FOUR

China Calls: Paving the Way for Nixon's Historic Journey*

RON WALKER AND ANNE COLLINS WALKER

NARRATOR: Anne Collins Walker has been a member of the National Park System Advisory Board and the chairperson of the 1989, 1990, and 1991 HOPE Balls, which are a principal source of fund-raising for Project HOPE. Since 1990, she has belonged to the Women's Board of the American Heart Association, Nation's Capital Affiliate. From 1984 to 1987, she worked as deputy director of public affairs at the U.S. Department of Commerce, and in 1984, she was responsible for delegate, media, and V.I.P. housing arrangements for the Republican National Convention in Dallas. She has also served as special assistant to the chairman and deputy director of congressional relations for the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Mrs. Walker is the author of China Calls: Paving the Way for Nixon's Historic Journey. It tells the story of Ron Walker's first trips to China as President Nixon's director of the White House Advance Office.

Ron Walker is well known in public affairs. He was raised in India, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon while his father was employed by the U.S. government and the Ford Foundation. Mr.

*Presented in a Forum at the Miller Center of Public Affairs on 21 July 1993.
# Table of Contents

**Preface** ................................................................. vii  
*Kenneth W. Thompson*

**Introduction** ........................................................... ix  
*Kenneth W. Thompson*

## I. China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia

1. **Impressions of China** ........................................... 3  
*Robert J. Myers*

2. **China and Taiwan** ................................................ 17  
*Shao-chuan Leng*

3. **China and Southeast Asia After the Cold War** ............... 29  
*Brantly Womack*

4. **China Calls: Paving the Way for Nixon's Historic Journey** 49  
*Ron Walker and Anne Collins Walker*

5. **China in the 1990s: Three Perspectives** ...................... 71  
*Inis L. Claude, John Armitage, and Shao-chuan Leng*

## II. Japan, China, and the United States

6. **Contradictions in the Japanese-American Relationship** .... 91  
*Chalmers Johnson*

7. **Japan's Reforms and Relations with America** ............... 115  
*Stephen J. Anderson*
Preface

Thanks to Professor Shao-chuan Leng, Asia has emerged as a field of study for the Miller Center. His influence on the field is reflected in numerous graduate students who come to the University of Virginia for Asian studies. Most come because they know of Professor Leng’s reputation or have heard of the role he has played in the study of China and Taiwan.

Under the heading of a major topic for forums and studies, we have included Asian countries and governance. Our primary interest has been China and Taiwan, Japan, Southeast Asia, and a few smaller countries. Recognized authorities have visited the Miller Center, conducted forums, or taken part in colloquia or conferences.

Miller Center conferences on Asia has resulted in the following publications: Changes in China: Party, State, and Society (1989); Coping with Crises: How Governments Deal with Emergencies (1990); Chiang Ching-Kuo’s Leadership in the Development of the Republic of China on Taiwan (1993); and Reform and Development in Deng’s China (1994). Presentations and papers by individual scholars and policymakers appear in the Miller Center series on constitutionalism in The U.S. Constitution and the Constitutions of Asia (1988). Distinguished Asian guests have discussed arms control and governance. Their chapters appear in books with that title. Asia is part of our program.

Finally, we are engaged in completing arrangements for the creation of the C. K. Yen Chair, dealing with political leadership in Taiwan, China, and Asia. President Yen was the father of Nora Leng, Professor Leng’s able and charming wife. The creation of the chair assures the continuation of the study of leadership in China and Taiwan for years to come. It makes possible a comparative dimension that would otherwise not exist in Miller Center programs.
Copyright © 1998 by
University Press of America,® Inc.
4720 Boston Way
Lanham, Maryland 20706

12 Hid’s Copse Rd.
Cumnor Hill, Oxford OX2 9JH

All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
British Cataloging in Publication Information Available

Copublished by arrangement with
The Miller Center of Public Affairs,
University of Virginia

The views expressed by the author(s) of this publication do not necessarily represent the
opinions of the Miller Center. We hold to Jefferson's dictum that: "Truth is the proper
and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by
human interposition, disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate."

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

China, Taiwan, Japan, the United States, and the world / Edited by Kenneth
W. Thompson.
p. cm.—(Miller Center series on Asian Political leadership ; v. 5)
1. East Asia—Relations—Foreign countries. 2. China. I. Thompson,
Kenneth W. II. Series.

ISBN: 0-7618-0989-9 (cloth: alk. ppr.)

© The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of
American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of

TO

TONY AND NORA LENG
China, Taiwan, Japan, the United States, and the World

Edited by
Kenneth W. Thompson

Series Editor
Shao-chuan Leng

Volume V
The Miller Center Series on Asian Political Leadership