CONGRESS AND THE U.S.-CHINA RELATIONSHIP,
1949–1979
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Guangqiu Xu

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This book uses pinyin romanization, a system that is applied to Chinese names of persons, places, and terms. However, some popular names have traditional Wade-Giles spellings appearing in parentheses, and traditional spellings are used for place names and personal names that are long familiar in the West or difficult to recognize in pinyin. Thus, Tachen Island is retained in preference to Dachen Island, and Chiang Kai-shek is used rather than Jiang Jieshi. Names in Taiwan and Hong Kong are not within the pinyin system.

As a convention in this book, total transliteration is employed for Chinese personal names, in which surnames are in front of given names, exactly as they are in Chinese. For example, in the name of Deng Xiaoping, Deng is the surname, and Xiaoping is the given name.
The Taiwan Straits
ABBREVIATIONS

CCP  Chinese Communist Party
GMD  Guomindang (Nationalist Party)
MFN  Most-Favored-Nation
PLA  People’s Liberation Army
PRC  People’s Republic of China
U.N. United Nations
U.S. United States
CONGRESS AND THE U.S.-CHINA RELATIONSHIP,
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INTRODUCTION

The Truman administration was working on a new China policy when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took over mainland China in 1949. The policy was not shaped completely until North Korea attacked South Korea in 1950, when President Harry S. Truman adopted a policy of diplomatic isolation and military containment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The containment-and-isolation policy continued through the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations and helped the Nationalists survive the Taiwan Strait crises of 1954 and 1958 when units of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), with varying degrees of enthusiasm, sought to take over Taiwan’s outlying islands. In the late 1960s, the U.S. government made an effort to begin a dialogue with the PRC with the intention of resolving the Vietnam issue and putting pressure on another enemy—the Soviet Union. President Nixon’s visit to Beijing in early 1972 marked a new start in Sino-American relations, ending two decades of separation between the most prosperous and most populous nations in the world. Several years later, President Jimmy Carter declared diplomatic recognition of the Beijing government and established official relations with the PRC on January 1, 1979.

What role did Congress play in China policymaking between 1949 and 1979? This question has received attention from scholars interested in determining the role and influence of Congress, both in absolute terms and relative to the president. Notwithstanding the great number and variety of studies on U.S.-China relations in both the English and Chinese languages, few of them pay attention to the role of Congress. The existing literature on Congress’s role in China policy is inadequate in relation to the research on U.S.-China relations during this period.
Several Ph.D. dissertations examine this subject, but scholarly books focusing on this topic are not available. Scholarly books do examine specific issues in the Sino-American relationship for certain periods but often concentrate only on the functions of the administration rather than those of Congress.

A few scholars have studied congressional involvement in China policy from 1949 to 1979, but they reach different conclusions. Some studies conclude that Congress’s role was largely unimportant in China policy. Historian Chang Tsan-kuo, for example, after studying the interaction between the press and the administration in shaping China policy from 1950 to 1984, concludes that, “For the most part, Congress and other nonadministration sources are excluded from the dialogue and discourse in the making of China policy. When their voices are heard sporadically over the course of Sino-American relations, they usually come out supporting the actions and decisions taken by the White House.”

Victoria Marie Kraft, after examining the pattern of executive-legislative relations in the making of China policy between 1949 and 1976, reaches an opposite conclusion: “The history of U.S. China policy in the postwar period was primarily one of constant give-and-take between the executive and legislative branches of government. Throughout these years, Congress played a pivotal role in helping to set the direction of China policy, and for political reasons, which varied tremendously from one administration to the next, Presidents Truman through Ford either acquiesced in or actively encouraged that congressional role.”

Yang Jian’s book, Congress and US China Policy, argues that Congress’s role in making China policy was inconsistent: “Historically, Congress’s role in China policy has not been consistent. In some periods, such as in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and on some issues, such as the Taiwan Relations Act, Congress played a key role in shaping China policy. At other times, and on other issues, such as President Nixon’s visit to China, normalization of U.S.-China relations and the 17 August 1982 joint communiqué on arms sales, Congress was hardly involved in shaping US China policy.”

Researchers not only disagree on how much of a role Congress played
in the shaping of China policy from 1949 to 1979, but they also differ on Congress’s role in the making of China policies during specific periods. Congress’s role is better discussed in some detailed studies of U.S.-China relations during certain periods. Nancy Tucker and Thomas Christensen, for example, study U.S. policy toward China in the crucial years between the late 1940s and the early 1950s, a very important period because China policies made during these crucial years had long-term effects. They agree that Congress played an important role in China policy during that time. In his book, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958*, Christensen argues that Congress’s role was important and even essential in some cases. To Christensen, Congress always accepted as true the idea that “armed Communists were thriving in an economically devastated postwar environment and the recognized government, an American ally in World War II, was threatened by overthrow.” Therefore, the American government had little choice but to keep on supporting Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Guomindang (GMD). Christensen stresses that, since the 1948 China Aid Act was to be terminated on April 1949 before all American aid had been delivered to the Nationalists, Congress had to force the administration to cooperate and to continue such aid. Under such circumstances, the administration had to do what Congress wanted because it needed congressional approval for its European Recovery Program, as well as later the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and its Military Assistance Program. Christensen also claims that Secretary of State Acheson was ready to recognize the Beijing government in late 1949 and early 1950, a predominant issue in the administration’s China policy, but Truman later refused because of congressional pressure as well as media and public opinion.

Nancy Tucker believes that Congress did not formally shape China policy but exercised decisive power over a number of important issues of foreign affairs because Congress controlled the financial resources essential to carrying out U.S. foreign policies immediately after World War II. After comprehensively analyzing the issue of recognition of the Beijing
government between 1949 and 1950, she remarks that the administration was obliged to pay attention to Congress because some pro-Nationalist congressional leaders were totally disappointed with Truman’s reelection in the presidential campaign in 1948 and firmly believed that “the Democratic administration was soft on Communism at home and abroad.” Although not numerous in Congress before 1950, thereafter they effectively created an alliance with those officials of the administration and other congressmen who disagreed with Truman’s China policy. The consequence was that those pro-Nationalist congressional leaders increased their influence in the making of China policy under the powerful climate of McCarthyism. Truman, Acheson, and most State Department officials tried to resist the pressure of the pro-Nationalist members in Congress but decided that a small compromise was necessary to win the support of other senators and congressmen. The compromise the State Department made with the pro-Nationalists in Congress was to continue to provide economic and military aid to Chiang Kai-shek, and Congress had a significant voice in China policy from 1949 to 1950.6

Unlike Christensen and Tucker, David Finkelstein believes that Congress had only a minor role in Taiwan policy, one important issue in China policy. He argues that when the Truman administration was ready to finalize policy paper NSC-48 in December 1949, a memorandum concerning a possible nuclear explosion by the Soviet Union in August of that year and a blueprint for the cold war, the administration was “the most powerful force for reversing Taiwan policy” because Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson and other administration members advocated strongly for providing military aid to Chiang Kai-shek’s government in Taiwan. Finkelstein also accepts as true that the administration did not ignore Congress and actually was in need of congressional support for its China policy in general and for its Taiwan policy in particular.7 Thus, a close examination of scholarship on China policymaking from the late 1940s to the early 1950s reveals that scholars differ on what role Congress played in forming the containment-and-isolation policy toward the PRC
during that time, a strategy enforced by the White House for more than twenty years.

The study of China policy from late 1949 to early 1950 has created good scholarship, but scholars do not ignore China policy from 1953 to 1963. Scholarly writings on China policy focus on the Taiwan Strait crisis, a harrowing confrontation between the United States and the PRC over a number of small islands just off the coast of China held by the Nationalists. After studying U.S. policy toward the crisis, Robert Accinelli believes that “Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles charted their course with a watchful eye on Congress and on domestic opinion generally” and that congressional opinions had an effect on the administration during the crisis and “at several critical junctures helped tip the balance toward moderation and restraint.” Accinelli, however, holds that the congressional effect on the administration’s Taiwan policy was “important but intermittent” and that Congress, “though sometimes balky and quarrelsome,” “usually followed the lead of the executive branch” and “nearly always subordinated to national security considerations.” In his extensive survey of U.S. policy toward Taiwan from 1950 through 1955, he concludes that Congress played a “significant, inconsistent and secondary role.”

Thomas Stolper reaches almost the same conclusion as Accinelli. He discusses in his book *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands*, the Formosa Resolution, a determination by Congress on January 28, 1955, to grant the president authorization to use American military forces in the area of the Taiwan Strait. Stolper maintains that many congressmen were reluctant to defend Taiwan, especially the small offshore islands, but after Eisenhower alleviated congressional skepticism by “giving private assurances,” Congress lopsidedly passed the Formosa Resolution. Stolper concludes that Congress was submissive rather than assertive during the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1955.

In addition to the Taiwan Strait crisis, scholars analyze the role of Congress in making China policy during the Kennedy administration. William Bueler writes that President John Kennedy believed that U.S.-
China relations were unreasonable because the Beijing government had been consolidating its power over mainland China since 1949 and that the White House had to review China policy. Bueler concludes that the Kennedy administration might have wanted to modify China policy, but domestic political pressure, including pressure from Congress, made it impossible for Kennedy to carry out a new China policy.12

John Rourke also stresses the important influence of Congress in discouraging any modification of the containment-and-isolation policy toward China, asserting that Kennedy’s every attempt to deal with China was overcome by Congress. For example, after being admitted to the United Nations, many African and Asian countries demanded the admission of the Beijing government to the international organization in 1961. In that situation, the Kennedy administration was discussing whether Beijing might be admitted while Taiwan remained in the United Nations. Yet thanks to strong congressional opposition, such a policy shift was not realized.13

From the mid-1960s to 1971, an important period when a new China policy was being shaped, some historians argue that Congress was trying to increase its influence in foreign policy in general and in China policy in particular. A. James Gregor notes that Congress “had sought to exercise greater influence over the foreign policy prerogatives of the executive office” by establishing a Subcommittee of Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Congress was also becoming enthusiastic and more interested in the China issue in the late 1960s.14

Many scholars think that the Nixon administration deserves credit for opening the door to China because Congress, like most Americans, was surprised by Nixon’s announcement in July 1971 that he would travel to China in February 1972. Many congressional members were not happy after the announcement because Congress had not been openly and extensively consulted before, although Congress later supported the administration’s dramatically different China policy. According to Michel Oksenberg, such congressional unhappiness probably “cost the executive
branch some support in its subsequent dealings with China,” and Congress’s role was insignificant in opening the door to China.15

Yet after examining the congressional role in opening the door to China by President Nixon, some historians reach different conclusions, arguing that Congress played a principal role in encouraging the administration to modify its China policy from 1964 to 1972. Victoria Marie Kraft, for example, identifies an unexpected change in congressional attitudes toward the China issue during the mid-1960s, commenting that a bipartisan alliance of “moderates and liberals” in Congress “increasingly used the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as a platform from which to make their own views on China known.” She concludes that Congress played a significant role in Nixon’s trip to China because of “the critically important role the Senate Foreign Relations Committee played in making the president’s trip to China politically possible in the first instance.”16

The role Congress played in the process of China-U.S. normalization from 1972 to 1979 is interesting to scholars, too. They generally agree that the number of congressional members crying for modification of China policy increased and that congressional views were by and large positive in normalizing U.S.-China official relations in the 1970s. Many members of Congress worried about the U.S.-Taiwan relationship in general and Taiwan’s security in particular after Sino-American normalization. Researchers add that, for that reason, many members of Congress were in opposition to the PRC’s conditions for establishment of official U.S.-China relations at the cost of Taiwan, which slowed down the normalization process. As Jaw-Ling Joanne Chang points out, if Congress had not opposed Chinese leaders’ conditions, “full diplomatic relations between Washington and Beijing might have been established long before 1978 or even during President Nixon’s 1972 trip to China.”17

Robert Ross supports such arguments as well. He observes that when Henry Kissinger was trying to improve American relations with China, such senators as Barry Goldwater, Strom Thurmond, and Jesse Helms blocked his efforts, particularly opposing the Ford administration’s China policy. Ross adds that, in October 1975, Goldwater suggested that Presi-
dent Gerald Ford, rather than establish close relations with Communism, should guarantee “freedom in the Far East,” encouraging the president to call off his visit to Beijing and go to Taiwan as an alternative. Ross concludes that some senators even threatened to support Ronald Reagan, rather than Ford, for the Republican nomination in the presidential campaign and that Ford thereafter found it difficult to make a decision to end diplomatic relations with Taiwan and to establish official relations with China under the pressure of conservative Republican senators. In Ross’s view, Congress played an important role in delaying the normalization process during the Ford administration.

John Rourke stresses the negative congressional role in the normalization process, too. He argues that the congressional objection to dealing with Beijing did not suggest that, without Congress’s opposition, the administration would have established a close relationship with the PRC, but things would have been different, and “the road to recognition might have been shorter.”

Some scholars claim that, in the final stage of negotiation between Beijing and Washington, the talks were conducted secretly, and only a small number of congressmen were told about the Sino-American agreement a minute before the announcement. James Mann observes that “Congress had been blacked out for most the year,” suggesting that Congress was not a major participant in the final U.S.-China compromise.

Some researchers argue that external factors, rather than domestic ones, were mainly responsible for the pace of normalization. Robert Sutter, for example, observes that the Carter administration changed its China policy from 1977 to 1978. He remarks that, after 1977, the Soviet Union was not so aggressive that the United States was in a rush to establish official relations with the PRC; but, beginning in 1978, Carter was becoming increasingly worried about the Soviet Union’s antagonistic policies toward the United States and was determined to accelerate the process of normalization with Beijing in order to reduce the Russians’ global influence. Therefore, according to Sutter, Congress was not a major actor in the process of normalization. Professor Hao Yufan also
notes in his book *Dilemma and Decision: An Organizational Perspective on American China Policy Making* that, before 1978, the China issue was not a major one for Carter. He cites several major factors responsible for Carter’s final decision to establish official relations with Beijing in 1978, one of which was that the U.S.-Soviet relationship was worsening, while Chinese-Soviet relations were improving. Thus, Congress’s role was trivial.\(^{22}\)

The above discussion indicates that the question of congressional influence has provoked a great amount of discussion, and scholars are still debating what role Congress played in the making of China policy from 1949 to 1979. Why do scholars have different assessments of Congress’s role and influence in the making of China policy during that time? One explanation may be that scholars generally focus only on congressional legislation related to China and the interaction between the administrative and legislative bodies in shaping China policy, while ignoring other congressional means of influencing foreign policy, such as nonlegislative instruments.

The U.S. Constitution divides foreign policy between the president and Congress. The executive branch dominates the making and conducting of foreign policy because the president has at hand a large bureaucracy to help him and is commander in chief of the armed forces, the most influential power in foreign policy. Congress, the supreme lawmaking body, and its members play a role of lending legitimacy to foreign policy, amending or vetoing executive proposals as well as accepting, modifying, or rejecting executive policies. Legislators introduce bills and resolutions, conduct hearings in committee, present reports to the full chamber, speak in committee or on the floor, and, finally, vote on a bill, resolution, treaty, or appointment. Congressional activism on foreign policy is not, however, limited to legislation. Members of Congress can become active on foreign policy in numerous ways. Congress and its members play the valuable role of critic. Legislators bring different values and perspectives to bear on policy debates, as well as views that place useful political restrictions on the administration’s proposals. They can speak
to or be consulted by members of the executive branch, meet with fellow members of Congress and lobbyists, and speak to their constituents, the press, and foreign audiences. Congressional legislators can travel to other countries and sometimes even take part in international negotiations. As a matter of fact, Congress and its members can influence foreign policy to the highest degree because Congress has a wide array of legislative and nonlegislative instruments at its disposal.

The first objective of this book is to redress the lack of comprehensive investigation of the role of Congress in China policymaking from 1949 to 1979 by examining congressional legislation on China. It examines not only congressional legislative means but also nonlegislative instruments Congress and its members used in influencing China policy, such as hearings, investigations, legislators’ trips to China, and other congressional activities relating to China. Congress’s role in China policy needs such an exhaustive investigation from different perspectives.

The second objective of this book is to examine Beijing’s reactions and responses to Congress’s attitudes and actions toward China. Few previous studies look into the details of the impact of Congress’s activities on the Chinese leaders. Few scholars study Beijing’s reactions and responses to Congress’s legislative acts, resolutions, hearings, and activities regarding China. For example, what was the impact on the Beijing government of the purge of Chinese scientists under the McCarran Act? What was the impact of Congress’s economic embargo acts against the PRC on the establishment of the Sino-Soviet alliance in 1949? What were the reactions of the Chinese leaders to the Formosa Resolution of 1955 and to congressional approval of the Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan? What were Mao’s attitudes toward the U.S. rejection of the PRC’s admission to the United Nations, advocated by Congress? What was Beijing’s attitude toward the 1966 China hearings? Why did Chinese leaders reject Senator Mike Mansfield’s trip to Beijing before 1971? What role did congressional members who traveled to China play in the process of Sino-American normalization between 1972 and 1978? How well did the Chinese policymakers understand the role of Congress? This book will
try to answer all these questions, studying the impact of congressional activities on Chinese leaders, and Beijing’s reactions to such congressional activities during that time.

The study of the role of congressional intervention in the making of China policy and the impact of Congress’s China policy on Beijing is significant. First, the subject of the book is of great interest to scholars of U.S. foreign relations. There is an established literature on legislative-executive interactions with regard to foreign policymaking, but there is at present no across-the-board examination of those interactions over China between 1949 and 1979. As a comprehensive investigation of those interactions, this book will fill a gap in the historiography. Second, the study of this subject helps one understand the making of China-U.S. policy during that time. Since few historians have studied the impact of Congress’s China policy on Beijing in both the Chinese and English languages, the study of this subject will open a new forum, breathe fresh air into the field, and shed new light on many important questions, such as how Beijing shaped its foreign policy in general and its U.S. policy in particular. Finally, this book not only helps anticipate or predict Congress’s role in U.S. foreign policy generally and U.S.-China policy especially, but it also helps one understand better the making of China-U.S. policy in the future.

This book takes the Congressional Record as an important source of evidence of congressional members’ decisions and actions, one useful in helping understand the behavior of members of Congress. Other sources are published congressional documents on hearings, investigations, discussions, and legislation as well as Department of State documents. The personal papers of Mike Mansfield, H. Alexander Smith, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Harry Truman are also used.

The book is supported by fresh Chinese sources made available in recent years. In China, the government opens its archives based on national security and domestic political considerations. Current political circumstances can influence which documents remain closed or declassified. In addition, access to the available archival materials is not univer-
sal. In 2004, however, the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China made available to the public the records of fifteen hundred items between 1949 and 1953. In recent years, local archives, such as the Shanghai Municipal Archives and Guangdong Provincial Archives, made some government records available to the public concerning Beijing’s U.S. policy before the 1970s. Materials collected from such Chinese archives constitute a part of the Chinese-language material of this book.

The Chinese materials also include collections of party documents and leaders’ papers; memoirs and diaries by those who were engaged in U.S. policymaking and implementation; scholarly articles and papers by Chinese scholars and research institutions; and official and semiofficial publications using classified documents. The Beijing government has made publicly available a large body of materials documenting the foreign policy activities of the Chinese leaders, such as Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Liu Shaoqi. Additionally, many retired Chinese high-ranking officials, including translators and ambassadors, have written memoirs that describe Chinese decision making and diplomacy in detail. Despite the limited release of such documents and the partiality of the memoirs, these readily accessible materials are helpful primary sources that shed light on China-U.S. policymaking and Beijing’s reaction to the U.S. Congress’s activism after the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949.23

In addition to the materials generally drawn from Chinese leadership speeches, memoirs and biographies, histories of both Chinese domestic politics and foreign policy, and contemporary newspaper articles, this book uses internal writings published by the government for government officials and scholars only. Such internal literature reveals the thoughts of the key policy architects and helps one better understand Chinese-U.S. policy.

Using extensive multiarchival research, the author, moving his study away from the usual one-sided approach, looks at both sides with a more balanced view. This distinctive analytic framework, a new research
method using multiple perspectives, should sharpen readers’ interest in this book.

This book, the first on this subject, covers the time period between 1949, when the Chinese Communists took over China, and 1979, when the United States and the PRC formally established official relations. It is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1, “Congressional Influence on China Policy and the CCP’s Reaction, 1949–1951,” discusses the congressional role in U.S.-China policy, focusing on five issues. It examines how legislators in the U.S. Congress attacked Truman’s China policy, how Congress passed legislation to provide the Nationalists with economic aid, how Congress discouraged the administration from recognizing Beijing and admitting it to the United Nations, how Congress put pressure on the administration to defend and aid Taiwan, and how legislation calling for a trade embargo on Communist countries forced the Truman administration to establish a trade embargo against the PRC. This chapter also analyzes Beijing’s reactions and responses to congressional activism.

Chapter 2, “Congressional China Inquests and the McCarran Act, 1950–1952,” studies how Congress investigated China through a series of hearings on State Department employee loyalty, Douglas MacArthur, and the Institute of Pacific Relations. This chapter pays special attention to the long-term impact of the purge of the State Department’s China experts and to the consequence of the return of American-trained Chinese scientists to China under the Internal Security Act.

Chapter 3, “Congressional China Policy and the Issue of Taiwan, 1953–1963,” examines the congressional approval of the Formosa Resolution and Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan as well as congressional China policy. It also studies Beijing’s response to congressional full support for the administration’s Taiwan policy and Congress’s actions and attitudes toward China.

Chapter 4, “Congress’s Role in U.S.-China Rapprochement, 1964–1972,” investigates how some members of Congress advocated modifying the containment-and-isolation policy toward China and what role Con-
gress played in opening the door to China. It explores the 1966 Senate hearings on China and their impact on both the American public and the administration’s China policy, while examining the Beijing government’s reaction to the great China debate and scrutinizing Prime Minister Zhou Enlai’s contact with Senator Mike Mansfield about his plan to visit China before Nixon’s trip to Beijing in 1972.

Chapter 5, “Congress’s Role in U.S.-China Relations, 1972–1979,” focuses on the role of Congress in general and the influence of congressional trips to China in particular in the process of normalization. This chapter pays special attention to the conversations and discussions between Chinese leaders and congressional leaders visiting China during that time. It also analyzes congressional hearings on the issue of normalization and Congress’s role in China-U.S. trade during that time.