

二十四

Instead, “Made in China”
was on every thing
from toys and clothing
to music and bling
China opened its doors
and we were invited
the flame which had smouldered
had been re-ignited



Chapter 24 – Ping Pong Diplomacy and Rapprochement

The Republic of China was first recognized by the USA as the legitimate government of China in 1928 by US Secretary of State, Frank Kellogg. In 1937 the US supported the Republic of China (ROC) in defending its western flank from Japanese air attacks with an American volunteer group called the “Flying Tigers” led by Claire Chennault. But it wasn’t until 1941, after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, that the US and the Republic of China established formal relations. Unfortunately General Joseph Stilwell, who President Roosevelt had appointed as the Commander of US Military Forces in China, and Chiang Kai Shek, knocked heads when they met in Chongqing in 1942. Fortunately for Chiang Kai-Shek, the U.S. public had fallen in love with Song Mei Ling, Chiang Kai Shek’s English speaking Wellesley graduate wife. After Madame Chiang delivered a powerful speech to the U.S. Congress in 1943, the US agreed to help the ROC in its push to become a major world power and guaranteed the return to China of Manchuria, Taiwan, and “other territories that had been seized by Japan.” Even though President Truman was leaning towards granting legitimacy to the People’s Republic of China, when North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950, the PRC fought with North Korea against the USA. Truman sent the U.S. 7th Fleet into the Taiwan Straits to protect Taiwan from a PRC invasion, but when General Douglas MacArthur authorized a raid by the U.S. deep into Chinese territory in 1951, President Truman recalled MacArthur from his command. In 1955, the US reconfirmed its commitment to Formosa (Taiwan.) In October, 1971, the United Nations recognized the Peoples Republic of China as the official representative government of China – and Taiwan was expelled from the UN in September of that same year.

In April, 1971, while the US Table Tennis team was playing in the 31st World Table Tennis Tournament in Nagoya, Japan, a member of the US team, Glenn Cowan slept in and missed his bus to the tournament. Determined to participate, Cowan hitched a ride with the next bus, which just happened to be the Chinese team bus. Chinese player, Zhuang Ze Dong, having just read about an interview Mao Zedong had with an American reporter, bravely approached Glenn Cowan, and, with the help of an interpreter, Zhuang presented Cowan with a silk screen image of the Yellow Mountains. Cowan, not having brought a proper gift, decided to give Zhuang a t-shirt with an embroidered peace sign. Soon after journalists snapped photos of the two coming off the bus, the U.S. team received a spontaneous invitation to visit China to play exhibition matches with China. This was the first semi-official visit of Americans to China in two decades and was the beginning of “ping-pong diplomacy,” which was soon followed up by Henry Kissinger taking a circuitous route through Pakistan to China to pave the way for President Richard Milhaus Nixon to travel to Beijing in 1972, where he met with Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou En Lai. From that trip, came the “Shanghai Communiqué,” where both China and the United States agreed that “all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain that there is but one China

and that Taiwan is a part of China,' and that the United States did not challenge that position." Although there was only one China, and Taiwan was a part of China, the United States clearly asserted that it wanted a peaceful resolution to the "Taiwan Issue." President Nixon also made it very clear that he was not in favor of "Taiwan independence."

Following their meeting, unofficial Liaison Offices were set up in both Beijing and Washington D.C. in 1973, while Taiwan continued to have its own "Chinese Embassy" in Washington D.C. - until it morphed into the Coordination Council for North American Affairs

Just eighteen months prior to Nixon's resignation from the US Presidency following the Watergate Scandal, on January 27, 1973, the Paris Peace Accords aka "The Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam", was signed by representatives of the USA and Vietnam. But the war in Viet Nam continued to smoulder until the fall of Saigon in April of 1975.

In China, the Cultural Revolution officially ended in 1976 when the "Gang of 4" (四人幫 Sì Rén Bāng) – which included Mao Zedong's third wife, 江青 Jiāng Qīng aka Madame Mao – were all tried and sent to prison only months after Mao's death. Shortly after Mao died, Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平 Dèng Xiǎopíng), a different kind of revolutionary leader emerged who understood that China needed to change in ways very different from those of Mao and that meant not only serious reforms in China's economic policies, but the breaking down of the "bamboo curtain" and an opening of China to the world.

It was Polish-American National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski who served under President Jimmy Carter, chief negotiator Leonard Woodcock, and Deng Xiaoping, the Paramount Leader of China who crafted the agreement that would formalize diplomatic relations between China and the USA in 1978. In this agreement, the USA reaffirmed the "one China policy" and declared that Taiwan was a part of China. The USA also insisted that it be allowed to "maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan."

Cristy and I were living in Taipei when the official "denormalization" announcement arrived on January 1, 1979. After the Armed Forces Radio Taiwan (renamed ICRT shortly thereafter) made the surprising announcement, they went on to suggest that Americans living in Taiwan should probably stay close to home for the next couple of days. Taipei American School was still out on Christmas holiday, but resumed the following week. Nobody knew quite how to react, so life pretty much carried on with very few incidents. Along with "denormalization", the PRC issued a statement declaring that China would suspend the bombardment of Jīnmén aka Quemoy and other nearby islands which it had been periodically shelling since 1958.