



US Centre Summer Research Grant

Recipient name: Gray Sergeant

Project title: Between Two Chinas: Reconciling Anglo-American China Policies 1957-72

Summary of project:

My thesis will explore how the UK, recognizing communist Beijing, and Washington, allied to Nationalist Taipei, attempted to reconcile their diverging China policies between 1957 and 1972.

I will identify areas where the UK and the US, in attempting to meet these challenges, aligned and where they diverged in terms of perceptions, interests and policy prescriptions. Where gaps between the two existed, I will explore if and how policymakers attempted to reconcile them or influence the other. Lastly, I will assess how successful these efforts were and, if they were, identify what this reconciliation came at the expense of.

Summer Research Trip

With the help of the of the Phelan US Centre PhD Summer Grant I was able to travel to four presidential libraries (in four different states) and to the National Archives at College Park (NARA II) from 10 July to 15 September. Here I was able to view, and scan, documents relating to the administrations of Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, as well as those of the State Department. The areas explored were as follows.

Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library:

The Bermuda and Washington conferences of 1957 in which the UK and US discussed the China trade differential and the question of Chinese representation in the United Nations (UN). A lot of material was also collected in relation to the 1958 Offshore Island crisis. The papers of John Foster Dulles were particularly fruitful.

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library:

UK-US top-level visits, UN Chinese representation, general US China policy and possible reviews of it. As well as items relating to UK trade with China. Some material was also gathered covering the Sino-Indian border clash if it related to broader policies towards Beijing.

Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library:

UK-US top-level visits, UN Chinese representation, general US China policy and possible reviews of it. Additional material was also gathered covering American views of the cultural revolution.

Richard Nixon Presidential Library:

Chinese representation, especially the 1971 vote which expelled Chiang Kai-shek and seated Beijing. As well as material covering the 'Nixon Shock' and his subsequent visit to China.

National Archives and Records Administration College Park:

Here I viewed the State Department archives and covered all the topics listed above. While there was some duplication, as some State Department memos would be sent to the White House, this was not always the case. This was especially true for more general, or routine, correspondence from the American embassy in London to Washington, which would comment on UK China policy. I also found, for example, very little in the LBJ Library on the 1967 pro-communist riots in Hong Kong but plenty in NARA II.

Initial Findings

It is impossible to draw any firm conclusions from all the material which I gathered. In the coming years I shall organise and take extensive notes from the documents I scanned. Only by doing this will I be able to properly interpret these sources and incorporate into a narrative. However, cursory observations can be made from the notes taken in the archives, and from the documents which I have begun incorporating into some chapter drafts.

The question of Chinese representation in the UN will be a major part of my thesis. Not only was it a constant issue throughout the period I am focusing on, but it was a problem which, most of

the time, American policymakers felt they needed British support for. Thus, pressure was brought to bear.

On other issues, where British support was not seen as vital, US policymakers appear to have avoided pursuing alignment if it would cause Anglo-American antagonism. Moreover, although it should not be a surprising finding, it became clear from going through the US documents that when devising policy towards Beijing it was more important for officials to consult other countries. One of which was, of course, the Republic of China (Taiwan) but also Japan too. This was not the case for London who only had one 'special relationship'.

Stronger alignment between the Cold War allies can be seen in opposing Beijing's revisionism and aggression in the rest of Asia. Both the UK and US also appear to share similar assessments of the situation inside of China, including the Cultural Revolution, and frequently shared information on this.

It has also been interesting to see in the documents the perceptions of the UK's China policy which American officials held. From a more thorough dive into the US sources from 1957 it is remarkable to discover how optimistic senior US policymakers were about the future of Britain's relationship with Beijing. They not only believed that many British officials deeply regretted recognising the People's Republic but also aimed to encourage the UK to break-off ties.

Other

This trip gave me the opportunity to travel from the East coast to the West, via small town middle America and Austin, Texas. It was an opportunity to see the diversity, and vastness of the US (and see it at a turbulent and possibly pivotal political moment).

The presidential libraries I visited are in the hometowns/cities of the presidents, in the case of Eisenhower and Nixon on the site of their births (you can, as I did, walk around their childhood homes). Attached to all four are also museums showcasing the presidencies of these leaders.

While all of this is, at best, secondary to the archival material collected throughout the trip all the above does provide a better sense of who these four men were, how their background shaped them, the times they lived in, and the array of domestic and international challenges they faced while in office.

It was also personally very enriching.