

**People-to-People Contacts
between China and the
United States in the 1970s:
Report on Materials at the
Rockefeller Archive Center**

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The primary collection I travelled to the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) to use was the newly available archival collection from the US non-governmental organisation, the National Committee on United States-China Relations (NCUSCR, or simply the National Committee). That group was set up in the 1960s and soon established itself, first, as the leading organisation for lobbying for an end to US containment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and, then, the foremost group for managing transnational visits between the United States and the People's Republic of China. The group was co-host for the visit of Chinese table tennis team to the United States in 1972, the return leg of the famous ping-pong diplomacy that kickstarted Sino-American rapprochement in April 1971.¹

The Rockefeller Archive Center's NCUSCR collection is the first time that the organisation's records have been made publicly available in a catalogued form. I had previously used a limited number of the group's records that I was granted access to in its working files in the New York office, but my trip to RAC was my first opportunity to conduct a comprehensive consultation with the organisation's full records from the 1960s and 1970s. These records are highly pertinent to my own research, which considers how non-governmental groups such as the National Committee contributed to the rebuilding of ties between the Chinese and American people and governments. This research is the subject of my forthcoming book, under contract in Cambridge University Press's Cambridge Studies in US Foreign Relations series, with the title *Below the Summit: How Physicists, Acrobats, and Seismologists Remade U.S.-China Relations, 1969–1978* (forthcoming, 2021).

The records are rich and full. Among the many highlights are accounts by the National Committee of its exchanges to China, documents detailing the group's

careful planning of its reception of Chinese visitors, correspondence between the organisation and its Chinese counterparts, as well as photographs and paraphernalia from the exchange visits organised between the group and China. Prospective researchers might note that these valuable materials are located within a substantial collection that also documents what may be less immediately valuable to research (for example, materials from the large, nationwide volunteer community that supported the National Committee's work in its early years). I was grateful to have several weeks at the Rockefeller Archive Center that allowed me to search through these records and locate among them many documents that were of significance to my research.

A few highlights from the National Committee collection that I might draw attention to here:

1. Documents pertaining to the National Committee's role as co-host of the return leg of ping-pong diplomacy, in which the People Republic of China's world-championship-winning team became the first official delegation from that country to tour the United States after the Chinese Communist revolution of 1949. These documents include, among many other facets of the visit, records pertaining to the commercial sponsorship of the tour, with detailed records of the NCUSCR's negotiations with Pan American Airways, for example, for providing both commercial sponsorship and support in kind. (Pan Am flew the players around the country on a courtesy jet.)²
2. Records documenting the role of the National Committee in arranging the Philadelphia Orchestra's trip to China in 1973. The 130-strong delegation was in the PRC from September 12 to 23, giving six concerts in Shanghai and Beijing under the direction of the noted Hungarian-American director Eugene Ormandy. Records in the Rockefeller Archive Center files include correspondence between Ormandy and Henry Kissinger, President Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor, who assumed the role of US Secretary of State during the Orchestra's trip to China. Ormandy told Kissinger that the trip had been the highlight of his career to date.³

3. Conversation memoranda from a delegation focussed on “world affairs” sent by the National Committee to China in 1975 and led by the then chairman of the Rockefeller Foundation and vice president of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Cyrus Vance, who later became President Jimmy Carter’s first secretary of state. Conversation records in the Rockefeller Archive Center files include those of talks between Vance and Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping at a time when Deng was perhaps the most foremost policymaker under Mao and just a few years before he assumed the role of China’s paramount leader.⁴

Further NCUSCR materials are located at RAC in the Douglas P. Murray papers. Murray, who sadly passed away in April 2020, was a key figure in the group in its early years, serving in a range of senior roles including program director and then as vice president. He left the group in 1975 to take a role at Stanford (soon helping to make Stanford one of the first American universities to have an ongoing programme of student exchange with Chinese universities) but continued to advise the National Committee through its board and in an informal capacity. Murray’s papers are particularly well organised and, as a consequence of his seniority, they offer a more high-level perspective on the NCUSCR’s activities. They may be an appropriate starting place for a researcher who is not planning to dedicate significant time to the National Committee’s full records, or to act as a primer for the full collection. For example, Murray’s files have meticulous records of the NCUSCR’s board meetings.⁵ Murray’s papers also contain high-level correspondence between the National Committee’s most senior figures and other influential Americans and Chinese, even for the period beyond Murray’s role as vice president. For example, his files include correspondence between NCUSCR chairman (and former US ambassador to the United Nations) Charles Yost and President Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski.⁶

The length of my stay at the Rockefeller Archive Center also allowed me to make use of other collections beyond those connected with the NCUSCR. One particularly useful collection were the records of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). The Social Science Research Council was one of the three leading American scientific organisations that supported the founding of the Committee

on Scholarly Communication with Mainland China in 1966 (soon renamed the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China, or CSCPRC). The Committee on Scholarly Communication was the leading American organisation for developing scientific contacts with China in the 1970s, and the group is, alongside the National Committee, the other foremost organisational protagonist in my forthcoming book. The Social Science Research Council continued to be a key supporter of the CSCPRC throughout the 1970s. As a result, a significant volume of documents created by the CSCPRC, or relevant to the activities of that organisation, is located in the Social Science Research Council's archival holdings at the Rockefeller Archive Center. These included trip reports from exchange delegations between the Committee on Scholarly Communication and Chinese scientific organisations, reports on Social Science Research Council funding of the CSCPRC, and other communications concerning the CSCPRC to which the Social Science Research Council was privy. One notable example of these valuable historical sources are records from a major scientific delegation sent by the Committee on Scholarly Communication and its three sponsoring organisations – the National Academy of Sciences, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the SSRC itself – to China in the summer of 1977. The delegation was jointly led by Social Science Research Council President Eleanor Sheldon, American Council of Learned Societies President Robert Lumiansky, and the National Academy of Sciences President Philip Handler. The Rockefeller Archive Center's records from that trip include the reports sent by Sheldon, Lumiansky, and Handler to Cyrus Vance, by then in office as secretary of state. They reported to him on the progress of the negotiations during their meetings with the Chinese, ahead of Vance's own visit to China just a few months later.⁷ Another highlight of the Social Science Research Council files are early documents created by the SSRC and by the Committee on Scholarly Communication on the very first student exchanges with the People's Republic of China. Planning for these first student exchanges began in 1978 and within just a few years many thousands of Chinese students would take up places in American universities through the programmes designed and implemented by the CSCPRC. Less than a generation later, Chinese students had become the largest group of international students in US universities.⁸

Working at the Rockefeller Archive Center was a pleasure and the staff and facilities allowed me to dedicate myself to the research while I was in New York. Most importantly, the archivists proved themselves both highly knowledgeable about the collections and enthusiastic about sharing that knowledge with researchers. This allowed me to get a grip on the materials I had come to use, and also led me to discoveries of other materials that I had not initially located using the catalogue. In addition to the archivists I worked with, the rest of the Rockefeller Archive Center staff made my time at the Center a pleasure. From the shuttle bus collection at Tarrytown Station through the weekly shared lunch to the generous provision of coffee and snacks, I felt right at home in the beautiful facility. The Rockefeller Archive Center runs a tight ship, but all the better for the researcher who is pressed for time with a wealth of materials to get through!

In summary, my research trip to the Rockefeller Archive Center was highly fruitful and made a major contribution to the research towards my book project. Since my trip to the Rockefeller Archive Center, I have finalised a first version of the manuscript and the value of the Rockefeller Archive Center materials to that work is attested to by the 54 citations of Rockefeller Archive Center-located documents in the text! I have also used some RAC records drawn from the NCUSCR and Social Science Research Council collections in a journal article on Sino-American scientific exchanges that was published by the *Journal of Contemporary History* in 2020.⁹ I am sincerely grateful for the funding that allowed me to access the materials described above and I look forward to sharing the insights I have gained from the materials in my book and other future publications.

¹ For more on the organization and the Rockefeller Archive Center's collections, see two Rockefeller Archive Center research reports on these collections: Jeffrey Crean, "From Propitious Birth, through Troubled Adolescence, to Prosperous Maturity: The Journey of the National Committee on United States- China Relations, 1966-1972," 24 September 2019; Kazushi Minami, "The History of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, 1966-1989," 18 June 2019.

² B. Preston Schoyer to John W. Makely, 29 June 1971, Folder 289, Box 30, Series 9, Record Group 4, National Committee on US-China Relations records, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY, United States (hereafter RAC).

³ For example, Henry A. Kissinger to Eugene Ormandy, 26 October 1973, Folder 126, Box 16, Series 3, Record Group 4, National Committee on US-China Relations records, RAC.

⁴ Memorandum of conversation, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping and Cyrus Vance, 11 October 1975, Folder 113, Box 15, Series 3, Record Group 4, National Committee on US-China Relations records, RAC.

⁵ For one example, see Minutes of 23rd meeting of the National Committee on US-China Relations board, 29 October 1973, Folder 73, Box 6, Series 1, Douglas P. Murray papers, RAC.

⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski to Charles Yost, 9 January 1979, Folder 15, Box 1, Series 1, Douglas P. Murray papers, RAC.

⁷ Philip Handler and Eleanor Sheldon to Cyrus Vance, 5 August 1977, Folder 6372, Box 527, Series 1, Accession 2, Social Science Research Council records, RAC.

⁸ Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China paper: 'Students exchanges with the People's Republic of China: A statement of capabilities and management options', 23 July 1978, Folder 6374, Box 527, Series 1, Accession 2, Social Science Research Council records, RAC.

⁹ 'An "Exceedingly Delicate Undertaking": Sino-American Science Diplomacy, 1966-78' (*Journal of Contemporary History*, first published online: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022009419888273?journalCode=jcha>)

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