

 **Article REVIEW**

**Yafeng Xia.** “China’s Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1965-February 1972. *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8. 4 (Fall 2006): 3-28.

Reviewed by **Warren Cohen**, University of Maryland, Baltimore County  
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**Y**afeng Xia brings to bear an enormous range of Chinese sources, many of them only recently available. The scholars he cites are highly reliable, even if the documentary evidence must be used with caution. The Chinese government is even less inclined than its American counterpart to provide material useful to understand its inner workings.

His dismissal of the “factional model” in Chinese policymaking in the late 1960s and early 1970s is persuasive and fits neatly with the results of interviews I conducted in 1986. My conversations with aides to Zhou Enlai left little doubt of Mao’s total control of China’s foreign policy agenda. Sometimes ruefully, each of my interlocutors confessed that they had believed Mao to be infallible, even when they had been targets of his attacks.

Xia is also persuasive in pointing to Chinese concerns about the Soviet threat as central to their willingness to pursue rapprochement with the United States—a point that some recent writings have understated. Consistent with the case made by Bill Burr, Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, and now Margaret MacMillan, he leaves no doubt that American abandonment of Taiwan led Chinese priorities and was the price demanded of Kissinger and Nixon—and which they were willing to pay, despite Kissinger’s efforts to obscure this fact. Xia also introduces evidence of China playing the Soviet card, threatening to resolve differences with Moscow if the Americans held back—evidence I’d not seen before, however obvious the point.

His discussion of Lin Biao’s role is interesting, but not conclusive. On the other hand, we may never get any closer to the true story. His argument that Lin was never concerned about foreign policy issues is not persuasive—hard to separate from his strategic concerns. And then there’s his famous, presumably misunderstood, September 1965 article addressed to Hanoi.

In all, an interesting article, primarily for the texture it adds to our knowledge of the Chinese side of the equation. We can’t get too much of that.

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at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County*

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