

Introduction

Kathleen Woods Masalski and Tedd Levy

It has been more than 60 years since Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China, more than 30 years since formal diplomatic relations were established between that nation and the United States, and 25 years since the last *Social Education* special issue on China was published. Obviously, the world has changed a great deal since these events occurred, and we, the guest editors, believe that another look at China and its people is very much in order.

Changes in China are evident in its relations with the United States and the rest of the world, in its economy, its politics, and in the daily life of its people. Just as students in China need to know that there is more to the United States than Mount Rushmore, Richard Nixon, the civil rights struggle, guns and greed—so too, do American students need to know there is more to China than the Great Wall, Confucius, Mao Zedong, and Tiananmen Square.

When China appears in the curriculum in many U.S. schools, the focus tends to be on Cold War stereotypes or on the political, economic, or military rivalry between our two countries. Our goal in this issue is to provide articles based on recent scholarship and personal experience that offer perspectives on China and its people different from those found in most American textbooks. We hope these selections will help teachers move beyond outdated assumptions; encourage further study about this important, changing, vast, and varied nation; and provide an improved education for students.

As educators, we bring to this issue our longtime personal and professional interests in China. Each of us first visited China in the early 1980s, and our visits prompted a commitment to learning more about this ancient and modern land. For the past 20 years, Kathy Woods Masalski has directed programs for K-12 teachers at the Five College Center for East Asian Studies,

located on the campus of Smith College. Since 1998, she has been a national site director of the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA), which offers seminars and study tours for teachers across the country. Tedd Levy is a former middle level social studies teacher and past president of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). He has developed social studies curriculum for both middle and high school classrooms, and for several years conducted seminars on East Asia in Connecticut as part of the NCTA project.

In October 2008, we accepted an invitation to speak on American social studies education at a conference of the National History Teachers Association in Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi province, where we were encouraged to promote a further relationship between Chinese and American educators.

As part of that effort, we invited a delegation of Chinese educators and writers to participate in the NCSS conference the following month in Houston. Discussions there with our Chinese counterparts motivated us to propose this special issue to the editor of *Social Education*. As guest editors, we called

on people whose scholarship, teaching, and personal experiences we admire. We thank them all for their contributions.

We see this issue of *Social Education* as just one example of the many steps that educators in both nations can take to develop stronger ties and promote better understanding between current and future generations of the American and Chinese peoples. 🌐



Pictured from left to right: Jing Lu, Keming Liu, Tedd Levy, Shijiang Ren, Kathleen Woods Masalski, Haiying Li, and Qi Chen at the NCSS annual conference in Houston, Texas, in 2008.

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Dear Social Studies Educators

I am pleased to join with so many other distinguished contributors to this issue of *Social Education*. The articles you are reading attest to the reasons why Americans, more than ever, must develop the language skills and cultural understanding which will allow us to engage, work and compete in the world. As a longtime student of Chinese language and culture, I know how important cross-cultural interactions have been in helping achieve my own personal and professional goals.

I am deeply honored to be serving at this time as the U.S. Ambassador to China. The challenges we face internationally in the coming decades cannot be addressed without the active cooperation of the U.S. and China. So it is imperative that we increase mutual understanding on both sides of the Pacific and there is no better way to ensure that than through exchanges at all levels, but most certainly between our young people.

Although, we have very different historical and cultural traditions, we share many of the same hopes for the future—a safer and more secure world, a cleaner environment, increased economic opportunity for our citizens, just to name a few. We need to bridge the Pacific Ocean, open our minds to one another, embrace our differences and, as the Chinese have always said, “search truth from facts” and “seek common ground.” When I was Governor of the state of Utah, we greatly increased the number of high schools offering Mandarin language classes because I was then—and today remain—convinced that America’s relationship with China will define the 21st century. We need Americans who understand China to carry our relationship forward. A greater understanding of China is vital in our social studies classrooms.

The history of the formal relationship between the United States and China dates to 1844 when President John Tyler appointed Caleb Cushing the first U.S. envoy. Cushing had been the Attorney General and a Representative in the U.S. Congress before his appointment. In 1845, Cushing negotiated the Treaty of Wanghia, which dealt with customs and port facilitation, as well as trade and consular issues. When I look back on the work of Caleb Cushing in China, I find that much of the work we do today—trade issues, assisting American citizens, issuing visas to Chinese—is similar to the work that was done in the earliest days of this relationship. Things change, but they also remain the same, in large part because diplomacy is people-oriented and the work of diplomats is relationship building.

While the ties between our two countries stretch back some 165 years, the U.S. did not establish formal diplomatic ties with the People’s Republic of China until 1979. In 2009, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of that relationship. And as we look back, it’s interesting to see how far we’ve come—then versus now.

- Thirty years ago, there were 1,200 foreigners living in Beijing. Today, we have 1,200—actually more than that—Americans affiliated with the U.S. Embassy alone. Today, there are more American citizens living in China than in the entire state of Montana!

- Thirty years ago no private cars were on the road in China. Now, there are 60 million. Ten million new cars are now manufactured in China every year. China’s GDP has increased 82-fold in that period of time, a testament to the ingenuity, the commercial dynamism, and the entrepreneurship of the Chinese people since the doors of China were opened by Deng Xiaoping in the late-1970s.
- In 1979, U.S.-China trade was in the low billions. Today, it exceeds 400 billion, in large part a result of China’s acceding to the World Trade Organization in November of 2001.
- Thirty years ago talk about the rule of law and civil society was the purview of a few intellectual salons in China. Today, these issues are a subject of Internet chatter, discussions in leadership circles, driven by some 100 million bloggers and nearly 350 million Internet users.



- In 1979, the U.S. Embassy issued 4,700 non-immigrant visas for Chinese citizens to visit the United States, of whom 770 were students. Last year, our Embassy and consulates throughout the country issued nearly a half million non-immigrant visas to Chinese citizens and 77,000 were students. That’s right, a hundred times more than in 1979!
- There were only a handful of U.S. news correspondents in China in the late 1970s. Every one of them wrote a book about living here—such was the appetite for information about China. Today, there are more than 150 correspondents. They still get their

book contracts, of course, but for the most part they are blogging every day about what they see and do here.

As China has emerged as a force in the world, as our bilateral relationship has matured, it is obvious that—as our two presidents have said—we need a “positive, cooperative, and comprehensive” relationship to successfully manage pressing global challenges. We both recognize that our work together has implications far beyond our bilateral concerns.

This doesn’t mean we will always agree, but it should mean that we will always be respectful, treat each other as equal partners, and, more than ever before, seek to understand our shared interests.

There is an old Chinese saying that I think we always need to remember as we manage the U.S.-China relationship. It is “*hu xiang bang mang, hu xiang xue xi, gong tong jin bu.*” If we remember these words—“together we help one another, together we solve problems, and together we move forward”—the world most definitely will have a much more peaceful and prosperous future.

Thank you for your work as educators in preparing American young people to step onto the world stage. I encourage you to support their interest in China and in the Chinese language. Their future and the future of their children depend on it. 🇺🇸

—Jon Huntsman
United States Ambassador to China