It's widely recognized by many scholars that the normalization of Sino-American relationship in 1972 represented a fundamental transition in the history of cold war. However, this great measure was difficult to be simply explained by temporary factors, for at that time neither of the great powers was suffering from an unprecedented threat. On the contrary, if we pay more attention to the Sino-American relationship before the normalization, it would be astonishing that in the whole 1960s, though the two rivals attacked each other with furious ideological words, in action they carefully avoided any incident or misunderstanding which could cause a tremendous crisis in bilateral relations, for which the most obvious example is their persistent ambassadorial talks in Warsaw.

While inquiring into the Sino-American relationship before normalization, the years in the first half of 1960s are extremely important. In the global point of view, Chinese were trapped in a worsening relation with the Soviets, which forced the former to abandon their long insisted foreign policy named as "lean to one side". The breaking up of Socialist Camp brought the Sino-American relationship to a delicate situation where they were probably to meet mutual enemy. As for domestic factors, Chinese leaders at the beginning of 1960s were advocating "a new situation" in external policies, which represented a relatively mild position after their leftist "Great Leap Forward" and just before the more radical "Cultural Revolution". On the other hand, American government became willing to get in touch with China in more affairs since John Kennedy had replaced Dwight Eisenhower as president, which was revealed obviously in the bilateral ambassadorial talks at that time.

In this essay, the focus is given how China and the U.S. interacted with each other between 1961 and 1963, especially in the ambassadorial talks, for the talk was the sole occasion where the official representatives engaged with each other. The author here takes notice in why both the U.S. and PRC (The People's Republic of China) got a consensus on maintaining the long, boring talks without any results, and how the talks played their roles in bilateral relations on earth. The new opened
Chinese foreign archives in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China supplied the essay with essential materials, which paved our path to the hardly available Chinese decision making process at that time.

**Previous Research**

As mentioned above, the Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks had served as the sole official channel between the U.S. and PRC before normalization of bilateral relationship. Generally speaking, scholars divided the whole series of talks into the Geneva Talks (lasting from 1955 to 1957) and the Warsaw Talks (lasting from 1958 to 1970). In the former, the two sides issued an agreed announcement which acknowledged the right of Americans in China and Chinese citizens in the United States to return freely and expeditiously to their countries of origin. In the latter, no agreement was claimed even when the last talk ended in Feb. 10th, 1970.

Although many scholars are interested in the Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks, most of them considered the Geneva talks as more worth studying, especially the agreement of citizens returning to their origins and the interactions around the Taiwan crisis in 1958. Besides that, the 135th and 136th Ambassadorial Talks in 1970 have also caught much attention because they were preludes of the Sino-American rapprochement. Comparatively, the talks between 1961 and 1968 (during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations) were often seemed as futile, while the direct and detailed researches are very rare (1).

Though lacking adequate historical evidences to make their arguments believable, some scholars had tried to evaluate the Sino-American relationship between 1961 and 1963 as a whole. So far, there are five academic opinions on how to view the ambassadorial talks in the three years.

The first opinion came from two famous Chinese historians, Zhang Baijia and Jia Qingguo mentioned in one of their papers that the Sino-American relationship was trapped in a freezing atmosphere through the Kennedy Administration period, while Chinese leaders utilized the ambassadorial talks only as a buffer in bilateral relation (Zhang and Jia 2000). Jia Qingguo, with another young scholar, Tang Wei, brought out the opinion that the two American presidents, John Kennedy and Linden Johnson, almost inherited the China policy characterized as "Containment and Isolation" from their predecessors (Jia and Tang 1998). These scholars represented a kind of traditional idea that neither China nor the U.S. would like to transform their attitude toward each other between 1961 and 1963.

Some western scholars opposed to the opinion above and argued that the U.S. aimed at adjusting its China policy in that period; so it was Chinese leaders’ fault to have missed this opportunity. The best evidence for them was the "Principle of Package" brought out by Chinese government in 1960, which meant that in ambassadorial talks China would reject the negotiation for any affair except for
the Taiwan issue. Kenneth Young, probably the first American scholar made research on the ambassadorial talks, condemned Chinese government to have ignored the diplomatic signals from the Kennedy government, based on the autocratic authority's ideology, domestic politics and the deadlock around the Taiwan issue (Young 1968). Steven Goldstein also stated that between 1961 and 1963 the U.S. was willing to bring more topics to their ambassadorial talks, while China set the Taiwan issue as precondition rigidly. Other than that, Goldstein stepped to say that the China's reaction was restricted by the developing Sino-Soviet conflict at the same time (Goldstein 2000).

Quite opposite to their western colleagues, some Chinese scholars held the opinion that during this time the contact measures from the U.S. were deliberately designed strategy, without the real desire to mitigate the Sino-American relationship. According to them, the "Principle of Package" policy was beneficial as well as necessary for China. Wang Bingnan, the Chinese negotiator in ambassadorial talks, mentioned in his memoir that "Kennedy was too simple and naïve to have thought that we Chinese would yield in front of his petty favors" (Wang 1985). Gong Li also judged the American ambassador's promise to assist China with food supplies as negative, he argued that Americans would utilize these food supplies as leverage to force Chinese to transform their attitudes towards the U.S., it was for that reason Chinese leaders rejected the food stoutly (Gong 1999).

The fourth opinion advanced to claim that Chinese representatives showed their goodwill to the opponents in ambassadorial talks, which was not caught by the American negotiators or decision makers. Gordon Chang concluded that China sent their goodwill to the new American government just after Kennedy got to the power, while Wang Bingnan expressed China's friendly attitude during the Warsaw ambassadorial talks (Chang 1986). Huang Jiameng and Liu Zikui made process tracing to the ambassadorial talks between 1961 and 1963 with the assistance of American opened archives, based on which they considered the U.S. be responsible for the hostile relation during these 3 years, for American government had refused some Chinese suggestions such as beginning their Meetings of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Huang and Liu 2006).

The last opinion regarded that Kennedy was willing to exert some flexible China policies during his administration, but he was hampered by some other factors. Lv Guixia made the argument that Kennedy had exhibited his intention through the promise of food supplies in 1961 and "Keep Door Ajar" policy in 1962. However, there was strong resistance power from the pro-Taiwan forces, the Americans' perception of China as threat and the influence of the Vietnam War. The convergence of above forces caused the Sino-American ambassadorial talks finally fruitless (Lv 2007).

Scholars also held different opinions on the final effect of ambassadorial talks. Some witnesses of temporary Sino-American relationship, such as Alexis Johnson, Jacob Beam and Henry Kissinger, were inclined to consider the talks as useless (Johnson 1984; Beam 1978; Kissinger 1979). However,
Kenneth Young, Harry Harding and Appu K. Soman affirmed that the ambassadorial talks have promoted the final normalization of Sino-American relationship (Young 1967; Harding 1989; Soman 2000). In China, most scholars regarded the talks as useful. Just like Zhang Baijia and Jia Qingguo mentioned in their article: "The ambassadorial talks have played different roles in different periods. At the beginning, Chinese leaders would like to ease up their relation with the U.S., while improving their international position through the talks. After 1956, Chinese government began to lose their hope in ambassadorial talks; reversely they resorted to American civics. In Warsaw talks, China utilized the ambassadorial talks as baffles frequently. At the end of 1960s, Chinese leaders intended to normalize the Sino-American relationship, so they utilized the ambassador talks as political probes" (Zhang and Jia 2000). According to them, the ambassadorial talks functioned through the whole period before China and the U.S. normalized their relation. However, their argument was still a simple conclusion without strong support of adequate historical materials.

In recent years, some historians have made use of new opened archives in the U.S. to make process tracing in their investigation into the Sino-American relationship in 1960s, and came to some conclusions about the ambassadorial talks between 1961 and 1963. Niu Dayong, Dean of Department of History in Peking University, selected the China Policy of Kennedy Administration as the thesis of his doctoral dissertation. In this paper the author argued that the Chinese insisted a rigid position in ambassadorial talks because of their perception that the U.S. represented hegemony, invasion and impenitent. Nevertheless, in despite of China's passivity, the talks still let both sides know that they could not force the opponent to surrender with one strike; on the contrary they must learn how to find the mutual benefits rather than ideological hostility (Niu 2000). In a word, the ambassadorial talks helped each side to learn about its opponent strategically.

Based on the “Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)” and the materials from the National Archives of the United States, Xia Yafeng described the actions of Chinese representatives in ambassadorial talks as "keep on talking and don’t break down; keep on talking but don’t hurry", while the U.S. persisted in the talks in order to "adjust its China policy, but found it difficult to achieve the purpose". Xia mentioned in his book that Chinese leaders saw the ambassadorial talks as both communicating channel and promotion platform, while in fact, the contact in Warsaw was not only an important facilitator for managing Sino-American relationship in the turbulent 1960s, but also shortened the “learning curve” for the future leaders in both countries (Xia 2006).

Another Chinese historian inquired into plenty of available archive materials both in China and the U.S., but finally went to some different conclusions. Wang Dong in his doctoral dissertation claimed that in the beginning of 1960s, the Kennedy Administration deliberately brought in topics to seize the advantage in the Sino-American relationship; however, neither China nor the U.S. believed
that the negotiation in ambassadorial talks would fill the gap between them. Wang considered the Sino-American relationship between 1961 and 1963 as part of "prolonged hostilities" lasted through the whole 1960s, for which the essential factor was not the Taiwan issue but a "preference deadlock". According to Wang, the deadlock existed because "On the one hand, Washington refused to recognize or sanction China's great power status in the international system and in fact resolved to contain China's power. On the other hand, Beijing objected to Washington's position as a dominant power in the international system and moved to undermine American power through the advocacy of world revolution" (Wang 2007). With the deadlock unsolved, Wang believed that however the specific content in ambassadorial talks have altered, it was just strategy conversion with the fundamental preference of both sides unaltered.

"Window of Opportunity"? The Sino-American Relationship around 1961

Starting from 1958, the Warsaw ambassadorial talks between China and the U.S. engaged with the Taiwan issue from its beginning. However, both sides knew that this issue could never be simply resolved by negotiation of two ambassadors. While the second Taiwan Strait Crisis gradually calmed down, the ambassadorial talks accordingly entered a stage that both sides "just talked to themselves" and "avoided private interaction deliberately". Nevertheless, the alternation of American presidents and the adjustment of Chinese diplomatic policy mutually contributed to some transformation in ambassadorial talks. At the beginning of 1960, the standing committees of Chinese Political Bureau made consensus on "strive to open a new diplomatic situation" (Wu 1999). After that, the Premier Zhou Enlai talked about that China was willing to negotiate with the U.S. about the Taiwan issue only if the latter firstly removed its troops from the island (Zhou Enlai nianniu 1997). In the 103rd ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, Wang Bingnan, the Chinese representative told his American rival that Chinese leaders were in hope that Kennedy would change China policy of his predecessor (Wang 1985). All these measures from China, together with the efforts from Kennedy Administration to increase interaction with PRC in ambassadorial talks, made some Chinese scholars believe that the Sino-American relationship is a crossing around 1961.

Did Chinese leaders really desire to ameliorate the Sino-American relationship around the beginning of 1960s? According to the memoirs of Wu Lengxi, the chief editor of People's Daily at that time, the "new diplomatic situation" agreed on by the standing committees were mainly aimed at the relations with the Soviet Union and third world countries. When it comes to Sino-American relationship, the standing committees approved that the imperialism essence of the U.S. should be exposed, while China should insisted "talk without breaking, talk without hurry" in ambassadorial talks. As for Premier Zhou Enlai's speech (with Montgomery in May 1960 and with Edgar Snow in
August 1960), the archive materials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China showed us that Zhou indeed claimed that PRC would began negotiation in two levels after American troops’ retreat: international level with the U.S. and domestic level with Chiang Kai-shek (AMFA 116-00186-01 (1)). However, this point was not firstly brought out by Zhou. In fact, Chairman Mao claimed in 1959 that PRC would initiate negotiation with Chiang Kai-Shek if American troops would retreat from Taiwan (Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan 1994). In another archive to the Bulgarian embassy, China also claimed that they would do everything to prevent American invasion of Taiwan from being admitted (AMFA 111-00268-03 (1)). From this point, it could be said that Premier Zhou’s speech did not back off from PRC’s consistent standpoint.

It’s interesting that some scholars paid attention to Premier Zhou’s discussion with Edgar Snow. As Yang Kuisong, a well-known Chinese historian claimed, the revolutionary Chinese leaders as Chairman Mao "always emphasized on ideology and class; however, he often put every trust in some Americans rather than the Soviets who hold the same ideology and class as him" (Yang 1999). As we all know, Edgar Snow was an American journalist who had visited Chinese communists before the latter got their power in 1949, thus considered by Mao as an “old friend”. Nevertheless, did Chinese leaders invite him to have a sincere discussion in 1960? As the archives told us, the leaders of Ministry of Foreign Affairs referred to the cause of inviting Snow as propaganda and enhancement of China’s political influence (AMFA 116-00187-03 (1)). In the discussion between Snow and Premier Zhou or Chairman Mao, the Chinese leaders sent out some signals about how to improve the Sino-American relationship, but there was no hint that China would back off from its consistent stand actively. On the contrary, Chairman Mao expressed to his "old friend” Snow that PRC would not fear the leverage utilized by the U.S.: "China does not suffer from being rejected by the United Nations, attending in the United Nations will not benefit us too much. China is as big as U.N., even one of our provinces is bigger than certain country” (AMFA 111-00622-02).

All the facts above reflected that in the years around the beginning of 1960s, Chinese leaders had no intention in taking measures to ameliorate the Sino-American relationship. Surely, Chinese Administration would not reject the compromise on core issues from their opponents; however, it is clear that they did not hold any illusion about this. In March 1961, Premier Zhou made an indication to the working group with Taiwan issue that the Kennedy Administration would not alter its predecessor’s basic Taiwan policies, but they were likely to bring out some new measures, such as “the two China”, which PRC should cope with seriously (Zhou Enlai nianpu 1997). In June, Zhou claimed in his discussion with the German Democratic Republic that “Kennedy was more risky but feebler than Dulles. He messed up everything in his five month’s presidency, in Cuba, Congo and Laos” (AMFA 105-01066-06). In view of these, Chinese leaders are well aware of the possible threat from
Kennedy administration, while their impression much more deteriorated after the events in Bay of Pigs and Laos.

Returning to the ambassadorial talks, it is notable that Wang Bingnan made some tempered gestures at the beginning of 1961. In the 105th talk, although Wang Bingnan rejected the American ambassador’s suggestion that Americans would send food packages personally to China as food supplies, Wang initiated to invite his opponent, Jacob Beam, to have a private coffee discussion after the formal talk. In this discussion, Wang explained to Beam that PRC and the U.S. should not fear each other, and Chiang Kai-shek would receive very fine arrangement if the Taiwan issue could be resolved. Wang even suggested that Chinese leaders knew that Kennedy did not transform its China policy only for the constraint of some domestic powers (AMFA 111-00590-03). Having received the report from its ambassador, the U.S. State Department expressed its interest in this kind of informal discussion, and told Beam he should strive to increase the discussions like that (FRUS 1961-1963, Vol.22).

The tempered air continued in the coffee discussion initiated by Beam after the 106th talk. Beam claimed that the U.S. was willing to grasp all chances to improve the Sino-American relation, while the way of interaction could be silent and secret. Wang Bingnan consented to Beam’s point by saying that both China and the U.S. should strive to seek for their mutual interests and settle their disputations peacefully. Other than that, Wang also admitted that China would never invade other country, for China could provide for itself adequate resources as well as holding an internal socialism system (AMFA 111-00334-05). Inspired by their consensus, Beam asked his opponent to continue the informal discussion sometime in future, which was agreed by Wang Bingnan.

However, the next informal discussion was not as favoring as the American side had imaged. On 1st Sep, with the invitation from Wang Bingnan, Beam came to Chinese embassy for the first time to carry through the informal discussion. Nevertheless, Wang Bingnan made a massive attack at the U.S. Taiwan policy, and condemned American government for utilizing the ambassadorial talks as supplement instrument of their invasion. Wang even made the threat that American government would make the biggest mistake if they underestimated the determination of PRC to liberate Taiwan (AMFA 111-00334-05). Beam was ultimately shocked by the transformed attitude of Wang, thus pointing out that he doubted usefulness of this kind of private talks (FRUS 1961-1963, Vol.22).

Why did the attitudes of Wang Bingnan change utterly in this discussion? According to Beam’s report to the U.S. Department of States, “Wang obviously read from prepared governmental statement which completely reversed more conciliatory attitude he had displayed at previous private meeting Sunday Geneva. He seemed slightly embarrassed and made effort to be cordial on my departure” (FRUS 1961-1963, Vol.22). Some later historians also made their estimation on this event.
Xia Yafeng argued that behaviors of Wang showed that Chinese leaders intended to express their dissatisfaction with the unchanged China policy of Kennedy Administration (Xia 2006). Niu Dayong claimed that the cause included "the insistence of PRC in opposing to the U.S., the nervousness of Chinese leaders about the external situation, and the aggressive activities from America" (Niu 2002).

Certain critical archive material in Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China validates Beam's estimation. On the draft of the informal discussion after 106th talk, one of Chinese leaders made some critics on the words of Wang Bingnan. When Wang mentioned that Chinese leaders were friendly and Chinese people were never hostile to American people, the words were criticized as not tough enough. When Beam mentioned that it would be a long time before the Sino-American relationship was built on the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" and Wang did not retort him, it was criticized as "China suffered again". When Beam mentioned that both sides would suffer a lot if atomic weapons were used, it was criticized by the Chinese side as "gangster logic, threat PRC with atomic weapons" (AMFA 111-00590-05). In a word, the content of informal discussion was so severely criticized by the leaders that Wang had to change his tune in the next discussion to make up for the loss, just as what happened in the discussion on 1st Sep.

The cause for Chinese government to be tougher to the U.S. is not clear, but we can make some hypothesis based on the existing materials. In the informal discussions, Wang's strategy was often "to seek common ground while reserving difference", which had left Beam the leeway to publicize his opinion. In the view of Chinese leaders, this instance equals as China losing its advantage in propaganda. On the other side, Beam mentioning atomic weapons might left his opponent with the impression that China was being looked down upon for its lack of nuclear weapons, which could not bearded by the strong self-respected Chinese leaders. In addition, besides ambassadorial talks, PRC and the U.S. had cooperated successfully in initiating the second Geneva Conference in order to relieve the crisis in Laos, which might have left Chinese leaders with the impression not to be too close to Americans. Immersed in the "new diplomatic situation" with the Soviet Union and third world countries, it is probable for Chinese leaders to adopt a "carrot and stick" attitude towards the U.S.

Whatever, the furious attack on 1st Sep brought about the halt of informal discussion, as well as finishing the so-called "window of opportunity" in the Sino-American relationship. In the 107th talk on 28th Nov., the two ambassadors struggled severely with their speeches, condemned the opposing side as aggressive and defiant (AMFA 111-00334-04). In fact, it is questionable that whether the "window of opportunity" really existed around 1961. As we can see from the historical archives, neither party had ever intended to make compromise on their fundamental interests, while the interaction in the informal ambassadorial talks was too slow and too marginal in solving any problems. In this sense, the "window of opportunity" had never existed because both PRC and the
The Sino-American Relationship between 1961 and 1963

U.S. were fairly rational and no one had missed any chance. However, it is lucky that the two powers were rational enough to know that they could still reserve the communication channel even if they could not close their relationship through it.

Function of ambassadorial talks: The Sino-American Relationship in 1962

Through the interaction with PRC in 1961, the Kennedy Administration became more acquainted with its Communist rival. Based on its comprehension of the Sino-Soviet split and the economic difficulties in PRC, American government claimed in a paper prepared in the Policy Planning Council that the U.S. should maintain flexibility to enable them to encourage and capitalize on any movement toward significant favorable change within China, in order to “secure maximum benefit to the U.S. from the changing situation” (FRUS 1961-1963, Vol.22).

Meanwhile, China entered a new diplomatic stage in 1962. Although Chairman Mao called for a more stable and practical foreign policy in “the seven thousand people congress” at the beginning of this year, this guideline was soon broken up by the pouring incidents. The fleeing of Chinese citizens to the Soviet Union, border conflicts with India and the threat from Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, forced Chinese leaders to play tough on their foreign policy. On the other hand, the re-adjustments in foreign policy were connected closely to high-level disparities in evaluating the former domestic policy, such as “Great Leap Forward”. In August, Mao criticized Wang Jiaxiang for the latter’s practical diplomatic suggestions named as “Three Reconciliations and One Reduction (sanhe yishao)”, which meant reconciliation with imperialists, revisionists and international reactionaries, and reduction of support to nationalist liberation war and revolution. For some Chinese historians, this event represented the radical change of China’s diplomacy. As Niu Jun mentioned, the year of 1962 is the eve of the left-turn in China’s Foreign Policy (Niu 2003).

Among all external incidents faced by China, the one closest to the Sino-American relationship is the crisis surrounding the Taiwan Strait. As early as in April, Chinese Central Military Commission had received the information that the troops of Chiang Kai-shek were likely to invade the China Mainland in 1962. From May to June, about 500,000 Chinese troops entered into Fujian Province to accomplish frontline deployment (Huang and Zhang 1996). The Taiwan Strait has never been involved in such terrific atmosphere since 1958, when Chairman Mao had commanded for a dense artillery attack at Jinmen.

The situation in Taiwan Strait was closely connected to the Sino-American relationship, because PRC considered the U.S. backstage supporter of Taiwan while American leaders also feared PRC would liberate Taiwan by initiating attack preemptively. In order to relieve the potential crisis, the ambassadors from both sides made effective interactions in Warsaw, which showed us that the
ambassadorial talks could still play its function without the “sincere and kind dialogue” on the surface.

According to the diagram records in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, both sides exhibited their willing to hold discussion about the Taiwan crisis. On 31st May, just two weeks after the 110th talk, the American embassy in Warsaw made a phone call to Chinese embassy, saying that they hoped to proceed with the next ambassadorial talk ahead of time (AMFA 111-00334-05). Just after 10 minutes, there was another phone call from American embassy to explain that they did not want to change the date of the next talk, but to ask whether the ambassador Wang Bingnan was in Warsaw or not. The strange behaviors of Americans caught attention of Chinese staffs in embassy, so they made the estimation that “Americans were likely to get in touch with us, maybe relevant to the crisis in Southeast Asia” in their report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMFA 111-00334-05).

The diplomatic tests of Americans coincided with Chinese leaders’ will to contact with the U.S. At the same time as PRC deploying its troops in Fujian, Premier Zhou made an indication to Wang Bingnan who was in China for his vacation that the ambassador should halt his vacation immediately and return to Warsaw to get in touch with Americans, in order to know the latter’s attitude towards the potential invasion from Taiwan (Wang 1985). Therefore, the Chinese side surely would not miss the signals sent by Americans on 31st May. However, after having received the reply from Chinese agreeing to change the date of the next talk, Americans delayed for about 30 hours before answering that they did not want to change the date anymore. This time the Chinese became active in accelerating the talk, Wang Bingnan made an invitation to the American ambassador to have an informal meeting (AMFA 111-00605-01).

The careful preparation of informal meeting was revealed in some other details. In the memoir of Wang Bingnan, Wang said that he received the indication from Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the date of informal meeting should be postponed by several days, so he had to pretend to be ill and hid in the embassy. Chinese archives showed us that this postponement originated from the command of Deng Xiaoping that the informal meeting should be put after the news by the Xinhua News Agency, which would make exposure of Chiang Kai-shek’s invasive intention in front of Chinese civics. This arrangement of time sequences obviously served the official propaganda. Nevertheless, in another diagram sent on about 20th June, Wang Bingnan was indicated by Ministry of Foreign Affairs again that the informal meeting should be held at once without waiting the news to be released (AMFA 111-00605-01). This re-adjustment reflected that the informal meeting between Wang and the American ambassador was given high priority by Chinese leaders.

The main content of the informal meeting on 23rd June was the exchange of points about the crisis surrounding the Taiwan Strait. Wang told his American rival that China would liberate Taiwan
if Chiang Kai-shek dared to attack, while the Sino-American relationship would be accordingly devastated. The new American ambassador Cabot claimed that the U.S had no intentions of supporting attack on Mainland under existing circumstances, and if the attack would be made by GRC (Government of the Republic of China) the two ambassadors should continue talk in order to restore peace (AMFA 111-00605-01, FRUS 1961-1963, Vol.22)\(^6\). According to the diagram between Cabot and the U.S. Department of State, although Wang Bingnan refused to make assurance that PRC would not attack Taiwan, the atmosphere of the whole meeting was not particularly tense and Wang was “relaxed and friendly” (FRUS 1961-1963, Vol.22). On the other hand, the records from China revealed that during the meeting, Cabot applauded for the frankness of China for several times, while the American ambassador expressed his desire to visit China sometime in the end (AMFA 111-00605-01).

The ambassadorial talks played its function well for both the U.S and China to know the intention of each other in 1962 thus avoiding a crisis originated from misperception. From the archives we can see that the successful communication was built on careful preparation and instant interaction rather than accidental. In fact, as mentioned above, both the countries had learned that they could make some “silent gestures” by informal meetings from the experience in 1961. Compared with the formal talks, private communication could be more flexible and effective in solving problems. However, the results of the informal meeting on 23rd June were difficult to spill into other fields. In the next two ambassadorial talks, Cabot was enraged by Wang Bingnan’s speech that PRC could not talk about the Taiwan issue with U.S. in ambassadorial talks because it was the interior affair of China. In the opinion of the American ambassador, PRC was utilizing “double standards” on Taiwan issue: when it was on the advantage, the Taiwan issue became its interior affair; while it pulled the U.S. into their conflict when it feared invasion from Taiwan.

This phenomenon discovered by Cabot reflected the realistic characters of China to some extent. On the other hand, it also revealed that in China, the adjustment of foreign policies is not always independent. According to some Chinese scholars, Mao’s condemnation of “sanhe yishao” was just complement to his attack at the people who intended to deny his “Great Leap Forward”\(^7\). Other than the domestic situation, some international crisis, such as the Sino-Indian border conflict also worsened the Sino-American relationship, especially it “reinforced Washington’s perception of a Communist China bent on relentless expansion and strengthened its determination to resist the Chinese Communist aggression” (Wang 2007). However, though both the powers were being more cautious towards each other, they could learn from the past experience that the function of ambassadorial talks actually existed, for which they should preserve the communication tool even if they were in tough confrontation.
Alienation or Consensus: The Sino-American Relationship in 1963

The most serious external challenge faced by China was the acceleration of Sino-Soviet split. Accompanied by the Mao’s condemnation of "sanhe yishao" at the end of 1962, Chinese Communists initiated their combat with "modern revisionism" aiming at the Soviet Union. Since July 1963, the two Communist Parties of China and the Soviet Union launched an ideological battle by debating in their own media, which prevented their differences any chance to be eliminated. On the other hand, the Chinese leaders became more anxious about China’s national security under the threat of the Soviet Union. After the Cuba Missile Crisis, both the U.S and Soviet Union were more inclined to détente in the international safety affairs. PRC, who was developing its own atomic weapons at that time, kept worrying about the bargain of the two hegemonies on arms control, as well as the increasing pressure from the Sino-Soviet border. In the minds of Chinese leaders, Kennedy and Khrushchev were forming cooperation to contain China (AMFA 109-03797-01).

Under this circumstance, the ambassadorial talks resulted in nothing but stalemate in the first half of 1963. The controversy about regional safety and mutual threat filled in the discussion. However, both sides were cautious enough to avoid mentioning the hypersensitive topic of Sino-Soviet split. Americans had tried to make use of the Sino-Soviet split through the other channels, but they were stopped by the Soviet leaders. After the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was created on 27th July, the American ambassador in Soviet asked Khrushchev to comment on China’s progress toward a nuclear test. However, Khrushchev just said that China’s development of nuclear weapons would improve the strength of the socialist camp, while China and the Soviet Union had differences but basically in agreement (Wang 2007).

Nevertheless, the conclusion of Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was not that simple in the eyes of Chinese leaders. Considering the bargain on nuclear weapons as the “anti-China, anti-revolution and anti-Marxism activity”, Chinese leaders were determined to launch a diplomatic battle to cope with the Test Ban Treaty. On 2nd August, Premier Zhou sent letters to the heads of all states calling for certain measures on arms control and denuclearization. In the 116th ambassadorial talk just five days later, Chinese ambassador submitted to Americans a draft on "Prohibiting and eliminating the nuclear weapons completely, thoroughly, cleanly and firmly". Through the whole August, Chinese embassies in all states made their best in propagandizing China’s standpoint in eliminating the nuclear weapons (AMFA 111-00625-02). According to the indication of Premier Zhou, the objective of China doing that was not to get replies but to enlarge its influence. In a word, Chinese leaders aimed at restoring an unfavorable situation made by the conclusion of Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (AMFA 109-03345-06).

Chinese leaders connected the Anti-America battle with their "Anti-revisionist movement".
Chinese Foreign Ministry made a special indication to the embassies that they should not ignore the anti-America battle while fighting with the Soviet Union (AMFA 109-03345-06). Playing the role of the third world countries’ leader, Chinese leaders showed their confidence in pressing Wang Bingnan to keep condemning the U.S. in ambassadorial talks by speech. In the diagrams from Foreign Ministry to Wang Bingnan, there were lots of ideological words such as “Raising the anti-imperialism and anti-revisionism flag, China has achieved unprecedented international reputation”; “We are now in the position of sweeping down irresistibly from a commanding height (gaowu jianling) and attacking actively”. In the report of Wang Bingnan, the behaviors of American ambassador in the talks showed that “the U.S. is in a disadvantage position; its ambassador is now holding a soft attitude with low tune, lack of morality thus being passive” (AMFA 111-00621-02, 111-00621-04, 111-00621-05).

Such words of Chinese representative in ambassadorial talks tallied with the leftism atmosphere inside China. Breaking away from the Socialist Camp, China was suffering from the antagonism from the two great powers simultaneously. However, with the revolutionary faith in mind, Chinese leaders needed to keep their mental superiority through the aggressive words. It is certain that these words were not helpful to the rapprochement of Sino-American relationship. China and U.S. were deeply trapped in alienation when the effective communication in ambassadorial talks was blocked.

Nevertheless, the aggressiveness of Chinese representative did not cause stoppage of ambassadorial talks. Bothered by the difficult situation in Southeast Asia, the American leaders realized that they should take China’s attitude into consideration while coping with the regional problem. In ambassadorial talks in the second half of 1963, the American representative expressed intention to negotiate with China about the latter’s draft on arms control and nuclear-free zones, as well as inspiring Chinese to be more active in alleviating nervousness.

On the other hand, the Chinese representative also revealed flexibility by sending out some kind signals. After the 116th talk in August, Wang Bingnan told Cabot that when he returned to China for vacation, he found that all Chinese people were busy with domestic socialist construction, so the U.S. should not worry about that Chinese would make external expansion. This half-joking word also served transmission of signals. Other than that, Wang Bingnan took notice in the new tendency of Americans, such as Cabot not agreeing with the alliance of India and the Soviet Union, as well as not utilizing the Sino-Soviet split to press China. Though the tendency worked to prove Wang’s claim that the American ambassador was “lack of morality thus being passive” ; Wang also reported to Chinese Foreign Ministry that “the new attitude of Americans worth notice and research” (AMFA 113-0038401).

However, it is difficult to know whether the high-class Chinese leaders really took into their
consideration Americans’ new attitudes. The fact was that while the Chinese domestic atmosphere was quickly turning to leftism after 1963, the Sino-American relationship was still in long hostility without falling back to enemies in battlefield, while the ambassadors continued to “talk without breaking”. The last ambassadorial talks showed us that the talkers began to transcend the ideological attacks to find the new tendency of their opponents, making up “an unspoken consensus” in the talks. Moreover, the “unspoken consensus” also existed in the Sino-American relationship as a whole during this time. The U.S. would like to contain China’s rising power as it had done in 1950s, but it had to resort to China in some regional problems. China intended to deny America’s leading role in the world, while it had to take advantage of the U.S. to make its position of global power being recognized. In that sense, the existence of ambassadorial talks can be seen as the unspoken consensus of the two giant rivals, for each of them could be benefited in preserving the interaction channel though their alienation could not be relieved.

Conclusion

The Sino-American relationship before the two powers normalized their relation was not as simple as being imagined by many scholars. According to the process tracing based on historical archives, the two powers made adjustment in their attitudes towards each other from 1961 to 1963, accompanied by lots of diplomatic tests, interactions in meetings, as well as the influence of domestic and international factors. Working as the only official connection channel between China and the U.S., the ambassadorial talks gave a clear reflection of how the two powers interacted with each other during this period.

The years around 1961 could not be seen as a “window of opportunity” for the Sino-American relationship. Though both China and the U.S. expected the other to transform its attitude, neither was willing to compromise on the core issue. In 1962, the two countries carried through effective communication about the Taiwan Strait Crisis, thanks to their strategic learning of utilizing informal discussion as a tool. However, the cooperation did not spill to other fields because the two countries were still not ready to close their relationship. In 1963, while the U.S. and Soviet Union began to look for détente and China turned to leftism domestically, China and America became more alienated. Nevertheless, they formed an unspoken consensus on preserving the ambassadorial talks, thus preventing the Sino-American relationship from slipping into complete isolation.

Other than information exchange and buffering, the ambassadorial talks played other two roles in the temporary Sino-American relationship. The first one is that the talks had not only detailed but also symbolic significances. For the U.S., since Kennedy Administration there were bigger and bigger domestic forces pressing the government to adjust its China policy, the administration could not
afford to abandon the sole interaction tool with PRC thus betting on Taiwan wholeheartedly, especially considering the War in Vietnam. For China, the leaders needed the ambassadorial talks to show the world that their country was de facto recognized by the U.S., and they possessed the power to negotiate with the U.S. in an equal position. This symbolic significance made the ambassadorial talks could not be given up easily by any of the two sides.

The second significance works in the longer run. The ambassadorial talks provided the U.S. and China with a platform through which they could interact with each other, thus being acquainted with the opponent’s standpoint, core interests as well as behavior patterns. As mentioned above, the representatives learned to transcend the ideological speech to discover the hidden tendency of the other in ambassadorial talks. The same scene reappeared again just before the two countries normalized their relationship, when Mao’s aggressive attacks at the U.S. were judged by Kissinger as just talking big. Unlike the contact of China and the U.S. in other occasions, their interaction in ambassadorial talks was a repeated game, in which the learning results were more authentic. To some extent, the ambassadorial talks represented for the beginning of mutual strategic learning between PRC and the U.S., which still works nowadays.

The Sino-American ambassadorial talks between 1961 and 1963 were just part of Warsaw ambassadorial talks. The author would make further research on the ambassadorial talks during the period of Vietnam War as well as China’s Cultural Revolution, and finally on Warsaw talks as a whole. More historical archives could provide us with a clear image, on how the two most important countries in the world had gone from enmity to rapprochement step by step.

Note

(1) Aimed at some excellent researches about the ambassadorial talks in China and the U.S., Xia Yafeng once comments: “In Goldstein’s article with 37 pages, only 8 pages are used in remarking on the talks in 1960s. In the 94 pages of Wang Bingnan’s memoir, there are also only 8 pages involved with the talks during this time. Zhang Baijia and Jia Qingguo has reviewed the whole process of ambassadorial talks, while oversimplifying the talks from 1961 to 1965”. See Xia Yafeng, “Chongping 1961-1968 nian de zhongmei dashiji huitan(A Reappraisal of Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks in the 1960s)”, in Li Danhui eds: Cold War International History Studies (IV), Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2007, pp. 176.

(2) For this Chairman Mao had explained clearly in 1958: “The only thing we can negotiate with Americans in Warsaw is the Sino-American relation, even after ten thousand years it is still so”. According to Mao, the Taiwan issue was the Chinese interior affair which should not be interfered by Americans. See Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan (Selected Diplomatic Papers of Mao Zedong). Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1994. pp. 360.


(5) The 111th talk was originally set on 12nd July, while in the first phone call made by the American embassy, the Americans hoped to proceed with it on 14th June, the excuse was that they would change their interpreter. It is likely that the Americans would like to negotiate with the Chinese about the worsening situation around the Taiwan Strait. See. AMFA 111-00605-01, pp.1.

(6) In Wang Bingnan's memoir, he mentioned that Cabot told him that the U.S would cooperate with China in stopping Chiang Kai-shek if the latter dared to invade Mainland. However, this kind of words appeared neither in the Chinese archives nor the American archives. It is probably that Wang Bingnan made an exaggeration of temporal situation by saying that.


(8) The measures included that: All military basements, nuclear weapons and launching vehicles outside the country border should be removed. Some nuclear-free zones should be built up around the Asia-Pacific, Central Europe, Africa and Latin America. The technical materials about how to produce nuclear weapons should not be exported by any form. All kinds of nuclear tests (including the underground nuclear test) should be banned completely. See. AMFA 111-00625-02, pp. 23-24.

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The Sino-American Relationship between 1961 and 1963

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