



Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World

By Margaret MacMillan

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With the publication of her landmark bestseller *Paris 1919*, Margaret MacMillan was praised as “a superb writer who can bring history to life” (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*). Now she brings her extraordinary gifts to one of the most important subjects today—the relationship between the United States and China—and one of the most significant moments in modern history. In February 1972, Richard Nixon, the first American president ever to visit China, and Mao Tse-tung, the enigmatic Communist dictator, met for an hour in Beijing. Their meeting changed the course of history and ultimately laid the groundwork for the complex relationship between China and the United States that we see today.

That monumental meeting in 1972—during what Nixon called “the week that changed the world”—could have been brought about only by powerful leaders: Nixon himself, a great strategist and a flawed human being, and Mao, willful and ruthless. They were assisted by two brilliant and complex statesmen, Henry Kissinger and Chou En-lai. Surrounding them were fascinating people with unusual roles to play, including the enormously disciplined and unhappy Pat Nixon and a small-time Shanghai actress turned monstrous empress, Jiang Qing. And behind all of them lay the complex history of two countries, two great and equally confident civilizations: China, ancient and contemptuous yet fearful of barbarians beyond the Middle Kingdom, and the United States, forward-looking and confident, seeing itself as the beacon for the world.

Nixon thought China could help him get out of Vietnam. Mao needed American technology and expertise to repair the damage of the Cultural Revolution. Both men wanted an ally against an aggressive Soviet Union. Did they get what they wanted? Did Mao betray his own revolutionary ideals? How did the people of China react to this apparent change in attitude toward the imperialist Americans? Did Nixon make a mistake in coming to China as a supplicant? And what has been the impact of the visit on the United States ever since?

Weaving together fascinating anecdotes and insights, an understanding of Chinese and American history, and the momentous events of an extraordinary time, this brilliantly written book looks at one of the transformative moments of the twentieth century and casts new light on a key relationship for the world of

the twenty-first century.

Margaret MacMillan is the author of *Women of the Raj* and *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*, which won the Duff Cooper Prize, the Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction, the Hessel-Tiltman Prize for History, a Silver Medal for the Arthur Ross Book Award of the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Governor General's Literary Award for nonfiction. It was selected by the editors of *The New York Times* as one of the best books of 2002. Currently the provost of Trinity College and a professor of history at the University of Toronto, MacMillan takes up the position of warden of St. Antony's College, Oxford, in July 2007. She is an officer of the Order of Canada, a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and a senior fellow of Massey College at the University of Toronto.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to Beijing to open relations with Communist China was both a Cold War milestone and compelling political theater. Diplomatic historian MacMillan, author of the acclaimed *Paris 1919*, gives a lively account of the pomp and protocol surrounding the trip: the awkward banquets, the toasts to peace and friendship (punctuated by occasional anti-imperialist lectures), the Great Wall pilgrimages, the proletarian operas (Nixon attended *The Red Detachment of Women*, in which peasants and revolutionaries battle landlords). MacMillan's even better on the behind-the-scenes negotiations, as the two sides wrangle over every word of the climactic Shanghai communiqué. More than Nixon and the cloistered Mao, the central figures are Henry Kissinger and Chinese premier Chou En-Lai, tasked with finding common ground and finessing differences with subtle verbiage and winks and nods. The author fills in the background with colorful, incisive biographical sketches and a lucid history of Sino-American relations. The encounter seems to have had little impact on the issues discussed during the trip—the Vietnam war, the fate of Taiwan, relations with the Soviets. Still, MacMillan argues, it opened the door to today's necessary relationship between the two Pacific powers, and she turns a potentially dry diplomatic story into a fascinating study in high-wire diplomacy, full of intrigue and drama. Photos. (Feb. 20)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Margaret MacMillan follows *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (**** Mar/Apr 2003) with another tale of a world-changing encounter. She draws parallel narratives of how the two world leaders met in a momentous (if stilted) handshake, and she peppers her analysis with fascinating details, such as what led to Mao's 1958 decision regarding the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu and the American commitment to defend Taiwan. MacMillan's use of flashback (the narrative begins with Nixon's trip to Beijing and then moves backward to the months leading up to the flight) confused a few critics, and some wished for more nuanced analyses of Chinese and Soviet politics. Macmillan's portrayal of key characters, including Henry Kissinger and Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, stands out. After meeting Mao Zedong, Nixon remarked to him that "history has brought us together." Thirty-five years later, it has brought them to MacMillan's capable hands.

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From [Booklist](#)

In February 1972, President Nixon met Chairman Mao in Beijing. The meeting was the result of intensive diplomatic activity that had been ongoing for several months but was itself anticlimactic. Nixon offered platitudes and tried to discuss substantial issues. Mao, who was already in declining health, avoided specifics and spoke in vague generalities. Nevertheless, the preceding diplomacy and the negotiations that followed their initial meeting changed the world. It ended two decades of vitriolic hostility between the U.S and China, led to a new alignment of political and military power in East Asia, and dramatically influenced American relations with the Soviet Union. Macmillan, an author and *New York Times* journalist, recounts the negotiations in a crisp narrative that utilizes a wide variety of sources. She is at her best, however, in her analyses of the key players. The portraits of Nixon, the vociferous anti-Communist, and Mao, the uncompromising true believer in violent revolution, are both interesting and surprising. A useful account of a series of events that transformed the geopolitical map. Jay Freeman

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