

Educator's Guide
for the film by Howie Snyder

My Beijing Birthday 我的北京生日

(www.mybeijingbirthday.com)



CAST & CREDITS of “My Beijing Birthday”

(2008; 52 minutes; English and Mandarin Chinese with English subtitles)

Produced by Great Leap Capital and China-in-a-Box

CAST

Howie Snyder – American with a long-standing interest in China

Mrs. Ma (Ma Guirong) – Teacher of traditional Chinese stand-up comedy

Liu Hengjun – One of the funniest kids Howie has ever met

Wang Yifei – Howie's number one stand-up partner

Tang Meng – Howie's “Barber Shop Skit” buddy

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written by **Howie Snyder**

GRADE LEVELS: 8-12th

SUBJECT AREAS: Social Studies, Asian Studies, World Cultures, Chinese

ESTIMATED DURATION: Each individual lesson plan, approximately 1 hour

I. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY GUIDE

To expose students to basic information about the People's Republic of China and her language and culture, and to encourage further study and understanding of China.

If possible, the teacher should first watch "My Beijing Birthday" before delving deep into this study guide. The movie operates on several different levels and deals with many subjects, so watching it first will make this study guide a more effective educational tool.

The guide consists of four lessons. The first lesson includes a pre-viewing warm-up exercise to find out what students know about China, stimulate discussion about China's role in the world, as well as to set the stage for the viewing of the movie. The second and third lessons include viewing and post-viewing activities that further expand upon the students' knowledge of China and touch upon themes such as culture and identity, the growing up process and globalization. The final lesson includes a writing assignment and prepares teachers with learning extension possibilities and research ideas beyond the film.

These activities are designed to help enhance the viewing experience and build upon important themes that are introduced in the movie. The lessons include probing questions that stimulate critical thinking and class discussion as well as creative class activities. Please view these lesson plans as guidelines only, and feel free to adapt them to your personal teaching style and to the needs of your students.

II. DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY – HOWIE SNYDER

After being one of the first Westerners to study in Beijing in 1981, Howie has spent the last 25 years living and working in China and Japan and several other Asian countries. Howie most recently worked as a Project Manager for The Coca-Cola Company's sponsorship of the 2008 Beijing Olympic. Howie is currently working on developing his own talk-show to introduce China to Western audiences.

Fluent in Chinese, Japanese and several other languages, Howie worked for a major US financial institution in Tokyo during the mid-80's, and then for a major investigative company in Tokyo and Hong Kong through most of the 90's. Howie has also worked on several mega-events such as the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, the 2002 Japan Korea FIFA World Cup and the 2007 Special Olympics in Shanghai.

Howie has had a long-standing interest in media, and worked as a White House Producer for the Nippon Television Network's Washington Bureau from 1990 – 1992. In 1996, Howie studied directing at the Beijing Film Academy, and produced, wrote and directed the original "My Beijing Birthday" which was aired on Beijing Television in 1996 and China Central Television in 1997.

Howie received his Master of Arts degree in International Economics and Japan Studies from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in 1992, and a Bachelor's degree in East Asian Languages and Cultures from Columbia University in 1984. He has also studied at the Beijing Film Academy, Bowdoin College, the Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute and Middlebury College.

In his spare time, Howie enjoys practicing yoga, swimming and hiking. Howie is an American citizen and was born in Rochester, New York in 1962.

III. LIST OF CHARACTERS

1. Howie Snyder



The protagonist of the film, Howie is a 46 year-old New Yorker who has been coming back and forth to Beijing ever since studying there as a sophomore in college in 1981. In 1996, Howie wanted to become a children’s talk-show host in Beijing, and ended up studying traditional stand-up Chinese comedy with Mrs. Ma at the Children’s Cultural Palace in Beijing. “My Beijing Birthday” tells the story of Howie and his interaction with his classmates in 1996. In 2008, Howie comes back to Beijing to find his old classmates and see how their lives have changed.

2. Mrs. Ma 马贵荣



Mrs. Ma (Ma Guirong 马贵荣) is a mid-to-late fiftyish teacher of *xiangsheng* (相声), traditional Chinese stand-up comedy. Mrs. Ma has dedicated her life to teaching children *xiangsheng*, and has been teaching at the Children’s Cultural Palace since 1992. Mrs. Ma is a tough but loving teacher who grew up during the tumultuous Cultural Revolution. She was sent to the countryside in Manchuria (Northeast China, known in Chinese as “Dongbei” 东北). In the film we see how *xiangsheng* and teaching children has sustained Mrs. Ma during her difficult life.

3. Liu Hengjun 刘恒君



Liu Hengjun is one of the funniest kids in Howie’s class who was 8 years old in 1996. He is an innocent and fun-loving child who is one of the most talented and interesting of Howie’s classmates. His natural-born talent also comes from the warmth and love of his parents, with whom Howie visits in both 1996 and 2008. Liu Hengjun now wants to be a filmmaker, and gives his opinion on the current state of China and how China is coping

with the pressures of rapid modernization.

4. Wang Yifei 王一飞



Wang Yifei is a cute little 6 year old who was Howie’s number one stand-up comedy partner. She is a sensitive girl who, even as a 6 year old, wanted to contribute to the development of China and her people. Her parents are a little older than most of her other classmates, leading us to conclude that their marriage was delayed by the Cultural Revolution. We catch up again with Wang Yifei as an 18 year old freshman in college. She is a real “party” girl; not the type that likes to go clubbing until 4 in the morning, but the type that wants to contribute to the development of China by becoming a member of the Communist Party. We see Wang Yifei waxing nostalgically about the carefree days of her youth in contrast to the pressures that the modern-day Chinese college student is under.

5. Tang Meng 唐萌



Tang Meng is a well-spoken 20 year old who is studying to become a legal secretary. Howie and Tang Meng went to her elementary school on International Children’s Day in 1996. That is the day when kids become members of the Young Pioneers, a group in China that is sort of like a Cub Scouts for future members of the Communist Party. We watch Howie and Tang Meng perform the “Barber Shop” skit to the delight of a couple hundred of Tang Meng’s classmates, and Howie is also honored by the school at the end of their performance. Tang Meng has now grown up into a mature young woman who has lost touch with Mrs. Ma and her other classmates. Watch as Howie reunites her with her teacher and former classmates.

IV. GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN “MY BEIJING BIRTHDAY

1. **Children’s Cultural Palace (少年宫):** A community center in Chinese cities where children go on weekends to study extra-curricular activities such as English, calligraphy, piano, computer, etc. Children’s Cultural Palaces in Beijing also have courses in traditional culture such as Beijing Opera and *xiangsheng*.
2. **College Entrance Exam “Gaokao” (高考):** The National Higher Education Entrance Examination is an academic examination held annually in China that determines whether high school graduates can attend university. The *Gaokao* is, in most cases, the sole determining factor as to whether a student can move on to university.
3. **Chinese Communist Party “CCP” (中国共产党):** Founded in 1921, the CCP is the ruling political party in China. It controls all political appointments, the security services and all other organs of the state apparatus as well as the legislative process.
4. **The Cultural Revolution (文化大革命):** A movement launched by Mao Zedong from 1966 – 1976 that led to widespread social, economic and political upheaval. The Cultural Revolution is said to have delayed China’s development by a generation.
5. **Deng Xiaoping (邓小平 born 1904, died 1997):** Deng Xiaoping, China’s ruling leader from 1978 until the early 1990’s, is credited with opening China up to the West and starting China’s economic transformation.
6. **Globalization (全球化):** The process of transformation of local or regional phenomena into global ones. It can be described as a process by which the people of the world are unified into a single society and function together.
7. **International Children’s Day (国际儿童节):** Celebrated on June 1st in China, International Children’s Day is the day when first graders become members of the Young Pioneers, kind of like a cub scouts for future members of the Communist Party.
8. **Korean War (War to Resist America and Aid Korea 抗美援朝):** The Korean War started in June 1950 and lasted until an armistice was signed in July 1953. When American troops under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur advanced near the Yalu river at the border of North Korea and China in the Fall of 1950, Chinese troops entered the war.

9. **Little Emperor (小皇帝):** Little Emperor refers to single children born after the inception of China's one-child family planning policy in 1979. Many of these children are looked at as selfish and lacking independence. As there is only one child in the family, the pressure on these children to succeed is tremendous.
10. **Little Red Book (毛主席语录):** The Little Red Book is a collection of speeches and sayings of China's revolutionary leader, Mao Zedong. It was published from 1964 until 1976, and is said to be the most printed book in the world, with over 5 billion copies.
11. **Mao Zedong (毛泽东 born 1893, died 1976):** Mao Zedong was the leader of the Chinese Communist Party and the leader of the Chinese revolution that established the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. He ruled China from its founding until his death in 1976.
12. **Xiangsheng (相声):** Sometimes translated as **crosstalk**, *xiangsheng* is a traditional Chinese comedic performance rich in puns and allusions usually performed by two people. The American equivalent would be something like the "Who's on First?" routine by Abbot and Costello.
13. **Young Pioneers (中国少年先锋队):** The Young Pioneers is a mass youth organization for children in China. The Young Pioneers of China is run by the Communist Youth League, an organization of older youth that comes under the Communist Party of China "CCP". The Young Pioneers of China can be viewed as a cub scouts to prepare the youth of China for future membership in the CCP.

V. FILM OVERVIEW

“My Beijing Birthday” is a 52-minute documentary that takes a heart-felt and humorous look at the rapidly changing lives of a group of young Beijingers through the eyes of an American, Howie Snyder. The story shows us the group as 6, 7 & 8 year olds in 1996 studying traditional Chinese stand-up comedy (“*xiangsheng*” 相声) with Howie and their teacher Mrs Ma. By examining how a bunch of typical seven and eight year old Chinese children view the world, the film offers a light-hearted and realistic view of daily life in China in 1996, and insight into what China will look like in the future.

In the spring of 2008, Howie revisits his old classmates and teacher to see how they and China have changed over the last 12 years. “My Beijing Birthday” is thus a true portrait of modern-day China that captures the changes a group of children have experienced in a country that has undergone the fastest economic and social transformation that the world has ever seen.

In “My Beijing Birthday” Howie breaks through language and cultural barriers to show us how these children – and Beijingers in general – are a lot like his native New Yorkers: rough on the outside, but tender on the inside. The film offers a light-hearted and realistic view of China in 1996 and 2008, and provides insight into recent changes in China and what she will look like in the future.

The film consists of two parts: 1) Part One: the best footage from 1996 and 2) Part Two: footage taken in the spring of 2008.

In Part One, humorous examples of Howie and the children studying traditional Chinese stand-up comedy are interspersed with interviews of the children’s parents, Beijing street scenes and Howie’s reflections on the changes that have occurred since his first visit as a foreign exchange student in 1981. Pertinent issues such as China’s one-child policy, Beijing culture and the Cultural Revolution are also examined.

Part One then brings the audience into the homes of several of the “Comedy Kids,” and shows how typical Chinese live. This section has several highlights, including: 1) Scenes of the children being initiated into the “Young Pioneers;” 2) An exploration of the love of Chinese parents for their one and only child; 3) Scenes showing the tremendous hospitality of Chinese people. Conversations with the children allow the audience a glimpse into the hopes and dreams of China’s “little emperors.”

At the end of Part One, Howie invites his classmates to his home to celebrate his 34th birthday. Scenes of children enjoying McDonalds and ice-cream cake are juxtaposed

against comments from Mrs. Ma about why she is upset that it takes an American to hold such a celebration for her comedy kids. The conclusion of the party leads the viewer into thinking about what China and her children will look like in the future.

In Part Two, we are back with Howie in modern day Beijing on the eve of the 2008 Olympic Games. One by one, Howie re-visits his young friends and Mrs. Ma – all of whom he has not seen in many years. We discover what they have been doing and who they are today. Did these children grow up to fulfill their dreams? Does Wang Yifei still want to become a doctor and cure all the sick people in China? Has Liu Hengjun become a comedian? And how is Mrs. Ma doing?

Howie finds that the kids are now old enough to ask him questions, and are as curious about his life as he is about theirs. The kids have grown into young adults, and we see them trying to find their way in the modern world.

By the end of the movie, Howie concludes that China is a mosaic of generations that has experienced everything from the Korean War to the Cultural Revolution, from the opening to the West to unabashed market capitalism. While each generation lives in stark contrast to the experiences of its predecessors, Howie is comforted by that fact that Beijing culture runs through them all.

Howie's experience with these kids has showed him that one can only understand people by learning about their language and culture. He is amazed at how easily people will let one into their lives if they are approached with an open and humble heart. The kids' acceptance of Howie has helped him build a life in China, and he looks forward to keeping in touch with his them and Mrs. Ma for the rest of his life to see how they and Beijing develop over the next few generations.

VI. THEMES IN THE MOVIE

“My Beijing Birthday” touches upon many different themes. While most of the themes deal with Chinese culture, language and society, the movie also raises universal themes touching on cultural identity, globalization and modernization, and issues that people in all societies inevitably must deal with when growing up.

Some possible themes to consider are:

- 1. The Rise of China:** What does this mean for the world and the United States in particular? Is China a competitor, an ally, a potential adversary or a combination of all of the above? On what topics will it be important for China and the United States to work together on in the future (possible topics include the financial crisis, global warming, North Korea, Iran, the international trading system, etc.)?
- 2. Identity:** What does it mean to be Chinese? What does it mean to be American? How do modernization and globalization affect identity, especially in developing countries?
- 3. Cross-cultural Studies:** Do students in the United States have more in common or more differences with the kids in the film? Are people become more alike or more different in the world today, and what are the influencing factors?
- 4. Language and Culture:** How important is it to learn about language and culture to understand other peoples? Why is it important to learn about other languages and cultures?
- 5. Growing Up:** What does having a generation of “little emperors” mean for a society? What changes occur in children from elementary school to high school? Do dreams for the future change as one gets older?
- 6. Nostalgia:** Is it a human impulse to look back “on the good old days?”
- 7. Teachers:** Have you had any teachers who have affected or influenced your life?

VII. HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

If possible, the teacher should first watch “My Beijing Birthday” before delving deep into this study guide. The movie operates on several different levels and deals with many subjects, so watching it first will make this study guide a more effective educational tool.

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1. Activity 1: Pre-Viewing – What do we know about China? (60 minutes)

Before viewing the film, lead the students through a preliminary discussion about China. This will serve to both pique their interest and personalize their experience. First ask the students why they think it is important to study China. The teacher should have some facts in hand about China, e.g., that it is the world’s most populous country, the world’s 3rd largest country, etc., to set a context for the discussion. (Facts about China’s geography, people, government, economy, etc. can be found at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>.)

Ask the students what they think of when they hear the word “China,” and to write down 5-10 images or ideas that come to mind. List the ideas on the blackboard and start a discussion as to what the ideas mean, the source of the ideas, and again, why China will be important in the future. Next, ask the students where they have gotten their information about China. TV programs? CNN? Friends who have been to China? And ask them if they have ever met a person from China, as well as how important they think it is to know the language and culture of a country in order to understand that country. The list will most probably cover everything from Pandas to Peking Duck, Mao Zedong to Yao Ming, Firecrackers and Human Rights.

Lastly, ask the students what more they would like to know about China, and make another list. The lists of what the students know and what they want to know should be kept to see

how the students' perceptions change after watching the film.

2. Activity 2: Viewing – “My Beijing Birthday” (60 minutes)

(The movie can be viewed all at once or split into two viewings. Regardless, the students should have time to discuss what they saw immediately after viewing the film while the ideas are still fresh in their minds).

Before showing the film, tell the students that the film they are about to see is not only about the rise of China and the ideas that the class listed in Activity 1, but also about themes that may be common to students anywhere in the world. Tell them that some of the universal issues to be touched upon are: 1) What do you want to be when you grow up? 2) Have you ever changed your mind about what you want to do in life? 3) What you would do if given one wish to do or change anything in the world? 4) The impact of globalization on different cultures.

3. Activity 3: Post-Viewing – What did the film mean to you and why? (90 minutes)

After watching with the film, first ask the students what they thought the movie was about. Also ask them to list out the themes of the movie. Some other suggested questions to ask the students are as follows:

1. What is the most important message or idea that you take away from this film?
2. How has your view of China and Chinese people changed after viewing the film?
3. What surprised you most about the film?
4. What have you learned about China from the film?
5. Which character did you like the most and why?
6. Do you remember what you wanted to be when you were in elementary school? Has that changed now?
7. What sacrifices have you made for your studies? How does this make you feel?
8. What commonalities do you see between the children in the film and children in the US? What differences did you notice?

4. Activity 4: Post-Viewing – Writing Assignment and China Monitoring

Writing Assignment

Have the students write about any facet of the movie they liked, be it China related or something related more to their own life. Suggested topics include the themes listed in Section VI “Themes in the Movie,” or any of the topics listed in Section VIII “My Beijing Birthday – Scene by Scene Explanation and Topics Covered.”

China Monitoring

Divide the class into groups and have students bring current events stories about China to class. Each group could be assigned to summarize the stories on a weekly or monthly basis, and present an analysis of the significance of these stories to the class.

VIII. MY BEIJING BIRTHDAY – SCENE BY SCENE EXPLANATION AND TOPICS COVERED

1. Introduction (介绍)

In this section, we meet Howie Snyder, the protagonist of the film. Howie tells how in 1996 he came to Beijing to become a children’s talk show host in China and starting studying traditional stand-up comedy classes with a bunch of 6, 7 and 8 year olds at the Children’s Cultural Palace in Beijing. Howie’s classmates are known as China’s “new little emperors,” and they grew up amidst the most tremendous economic and social changes the world has ever seen. Howie has now come back in 2008 to see the changes that have occurred with his classmates and China.

Topics covered:

“New Little Emperors” and the one-child policy
“Most tremendous economic and social changes the world has ever seen”
“Real Beijinger”

2. 1996

In this section, Howie introduces his class, his teacher (Mrs. Ma), *xiangsheng*, and the social and economic background of China in 1996. While Howie’s classmates are growing up with McDonald’s, Coca-Cola and Kentucky Fried Chicken, their parents grew up chanting slogans from Chairman Mao’s Little Red Book.

Topics covered:

“These children are a unique social experiment”
“Difference in Generations”
“Stand-up comedy (Xiangsheng)”

3. Liu Hengjun (刘恒军)

In this section, we visit the home of 8 year-old Liu Hengjun, a chubby and funny classmate of Howie whose parents are very supportive of him and his interest in Xiangsheng.

Topics covered:

“What is your favorite food?”
“What do you want to do when you grow up?”
“Love and support of parents”

4. Wang Yifei (王一飞)

In this section, we visit the home of 6 year-old Wang Yifei, a cute little girl who is Howie’s number one stand-up partner.

Topics covered:

“What do you want to do when you grow up?”

“What would you wish for if you only had one wish in the world?”

“The Cultural Revolution”

5. Beijingers

In this section, we see Howie interacting with some pedicab drivers, his local “homeboys,” as well as follow Howie as he goes to eat at some classmates’ homes.

Topics covered:

“Character of Beijingers”

“Going to someone’s house as the only way to get to know somebody”

6. The Young Pioneers (少先队员) and Tang Meng (唐萌)

In this section, Howie visits his 8 year-old classmate Tang Meng at her school on International Children’s Day.

Topics covered:

“Young Pioneers” and “Love the Motherland”

“One of the funnest days Howie has ever had”

“Repaying kindness”

7. The Day of the Party (生日那一天)

In this section, Howie celebrates his 34 year-old birthday with his bunch of comedy kids.

Topics covered:

“Business opportunities in China”

“Celebrations”

“McDonald’s – culture of the lowest common denominator”

“Why is Mrs. Ma sad?”

“Plaintive about that day – meeting Candyman on their road to adulthood”

8. 2008

In this section, Howie sets the scene for re-visiting the kids and seeing the changes that have occurred in them, China and Beijing.

Topics covered:

“Changes in China – the fastest economic and social transformation the world has ever seen”

“Foreigner but not an outsider”

“Children’s Cultural Palace and extra-curricular activities”

9. Liu Hengjun Revisited

In this section, Howie re-visits the now 20 year-old Liu Hengjun to catch up on his life and his family

Topics covered:

“Simpler days of youth”

“Unity versus individuality, conformity over freedom”

“Remaining grounded while being bombarded by influence from the West”

10. Wang Yifei Revisited

In this section, Howie re-visits the now 18 year-old Wang Yifei to catch up on her life and her family

Topics covered:

“Growing up – dreams versus reality”

“Party girl and contributing to the development of one’s country”

“Social progress and Wang Yifei’s mother”

“College entrance exams”

11. Tang Meng (唐萌)

In this section, Howie re-visits the now 20 year-old Tang Meng to catch up on her life, and also brings her to see Mrs. Ma, whom she hasn’t seen in 12 years.

Topics covered:

- “Remembering events from one’s youth”
- “Having a foreign friend”
- “Kids tell the truth”
- “Keeping in touch with your teacher”

12. Mrs. Ma (马老师)

In this section, we learn more about Mrs. Ma’s life and the role of Xiangsheng

Topics covered:

- “Had a difficult life – the Cultural Revolution”
- “Loneliness”
- “People have to move forward”
- “Happiness”

13. Reunion

In this section, Howie gets together with his old classmates and they talk about the past and the present.

Topics covered:

- “Catching up on old times”
- “Problems with modernization – “Some people are sacrificed when society advances”
- “Why did Howie come to China?”
- “Feeling at home in a foreign land”
- “Generation gap”

14. A Day in the Park

In this section, Howie visits Jingshan Park, one of the old imperial parks that dot Beijing.

Topics covered:

- “Beijing culture”
- “Nostalgia”
- “Korean War (War to Assist North Korea Against American Aggression)”
- “Mosaic of generations”

IX. DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As a kid I always liked to look at maps and read stories about famous explorers – Magellan, Columbus, Marco Polo, Vasco de Gama and the like. There was something inside of me that resonated with distant and faraway places.

I came to China as a foreign exchange student in 1981, and have been coming back ever since. The Chinese, and most Asians for that matter, treat anyone who speaks their language like a movie star, and I have thoroughly enjoyed having my ego stroked by adoring locals.

China, however, is a vast and complex country that has been closed to the outside world for most of her 5,000 year history. Many people have little understanding of China's rich language and culture, and view China as a rising power with different values and customs from the West, as well as a potential threat to the world order.

I made "My Beijing Birthday" because I wanted to show people the positive experiences that I have had in China. Almost every other documentary I have ever seen on China, whether foreign or Chinese made, deals with depressing and negative subject matter. In "My Beijing Birthday," I hope that the audience gets a feel for the real China and the life of her people, who, when it comes down to it, are just like us.

While there are many problems in China, I personally feel that being abroad makes one more aware of the problems in his / her country of birth. If the US can clean up its inner cities, close down Guantanamo, come up with a manageable health care system, get out of the war in Iraq, etc., then I will start talking about the bad things in China. Until then, I just want to try and share my knowledge and experience.

The world is now focusing on China, and I hope that my little movie helps people begin to understand this vast and mysterious nation.

My advice is to throw away any preconceived notion's one may have about China and her people, and to try and understand them on their own terms. This includes learning about her language and culture, and spending time traveling throughout her vast hinterlands.

Good Luck!

X. WEBSITES FOR FURTHER STUDY ABOUT CHINA

1. www.china.org.cn: General news and information site about China
2. www.danwei.org: Hip site about Chinese media, advertising and urban life.
3. www.jongo.com: A portal with news and information about China.
4. www.economist.com/countries/China: Political, economic and social information about China from the famous Economist magazine
5. www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html: Facts about China's political, social and economic organization from the CIA.
6. www.chinadaily.com.cn: China's official English daily newspaper
7. www.chinatoday.com: A China information base with a comprehensive list of sites about China.
8. www.orpheus.ucsd.edu/chinesehistory: A comprehensive site on Chinese history run by the University of California at San Diego.
9. www.chinavitae.com: Online biographical database of Chinese political, economic and military leaders.
10. www.baidu.com: China's Google (in Chinese only).
11. www.zhongwen.com: A site dedicated to learning Chinese and Chinese characters.
12. www.pbs.org/independentlens/pleasevoteforme/more.html: Website created in conjunction with the documentary "Please Vote for Me" that has good information on modern Chinese society and Chinese children.
13. www.china.org.cn/english/2006/Feb/156806.htm: Article on the resurgence of *xiangsheng*.
14. www.lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/China.pdf: Comprehensive study of China by the Congressional Research Service

XI. CHRONOLOGY OF U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS SINCE 1978

Milestones in normalization of relations between the United States and China

1971: After decades of isolation, China invites U.S. table tennis team for visit, prompting start of "pingpong diplomacy" that brings first significant thaw in U.S.-China relations.

1972: President Richard Nixon visits Beijing, establishing diplomatic channels for the countries to counter Soviet Union.

1973: China and U.S. open diplomatic liaison offices in each other's capital.

1979: Diplomatic ties formally established Jan. 1. Deng Xiaoping becomes first Chinese leader to visit U.S., setting tone for warmer relations.

1982: China pledges to seek reunification with U.S.-allied Taiwan by peaceful means but does not explicitly rule out use of force, while U.S. promises not to expand — and gradually to reduce — arms sales to Taiwan.

1987: First U.S. fast food company, KFC, opens in China.

1989: China crushes pro-democracy demonstrations, putting chill on relations with U.S.

1999: During NATO airstrikes in Serbia, bomb hits Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, killing three Chinese and setting off anti-American protests across China.

2000: Congress grants China "most favored nation" trade status.

2001: Damaged U.S. spy plane lands on China's Hainan island after colliding with Chinese fighter jet. Crew of 24 detained 11 days until U.S. issues apology to Chinese government.

2001: China joins World Trade Organization.

2008: Sichuan earthquake kills 70,000 people, prompting huge outpouring of aid from U.S. and other nations. President George W. Bush attends opening of Beijing Olympic Games.

2009: Secretary of State Clinton visits China and asks the Chinese government to continue investing in U.S. Treasuries.