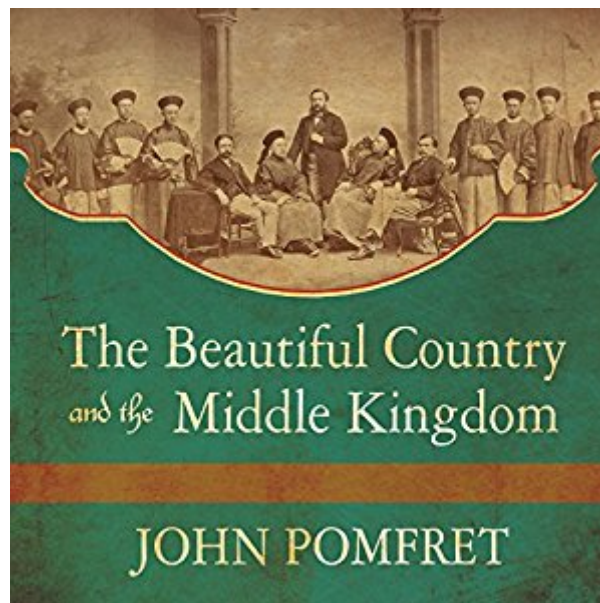




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The Beautiful Country And The Middle Kingdom: America And China, 1776 To The Present



Synopsis

Our relationship with China remains one of the most complex and rapidly evolving and is perhaps one of the most important to our nation's future. Here, John Pomfret, the author of the best-selling *Chinese Lessons*, takes us deep into these two countries' shared history and illuminates in vibrant, stunning detail every major event, relationship, and ongoing development that has affected diplomacy between these two booming, influential nations. We meet early American missionaries and chart their influence in China and follow a group of young Chinese students who enroll in American universities, eager to soak up Western traditions. We witness firsthand major and devastating events like the Boxer Rebellion and the rise of Mao. We examine both nations' involvement in world events such as World War I and II. Pomfret takes the myriad historical milestones of two of the world's most powerful nations and turns them into one fluid, fascinating story, leaving us with a nuanced understanding of where these two nations stand in relation to one another and the rest of the world.

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Customer Reviews

This book is about the co-evolution of the USA and China --- the intimate, and often surprising, ways that each nation shaped the development of the other. Author John Pomfret, who is deeply rooted in both nations, explains it thus:===Many Americans believe that their country's ties to China began when Richard Nixon traveled there in 1972, ending the Cold War between the two nations. In fact, the two sides have been interacting with and influencing each other since the founding of the

United States. It wasn't just free land that lured American settlers westward. It was also the dream of selling to China. The idea of America also inspired the Chinese, pulling them toward modernity and the outside world. American science, educational theory, and technology flowed into China; Chinese art, food, and philosophy flowed out. Since then, thread by thread, the two peoples and their various governments have crafted the most multifaceted and today the most important relationship between any two nations in the world. Now is the time to retell the story of the United States and China. Today, these two nations face each other not quite friends, not yet enemies pursuing parallel quests for power while the world watches. No problem of worldwide concern from global warming, to terrorism, to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, to the economy can be solved unless Washington and Beijing find a way to work together. Pomfret explains how the USA broke away from the British Empire in part so that our Yankee Traders could trade freely with China, which even in the 1700s was viewed as a treasure house of silk, fine art, tableware, tea, and spices. We took possession of the Oregon Ports and Hawaii, as way stations to China, soon after 1800, at a time when we had not yet secured possession of our Trans-Appalachian West. If China had not existed, the USA might have remained a middling nation confined to eastern North America instead of becoming a global superpower. The lure of trade with China carried our flag to the Pacific Coast and then to the Orient. He explains that had the USA not become a global power, because of China, then China might have remained a collection of disunited petty fiefdoms carved up by the European empires. He explains how our cultures complement each other. China looks to the USA to strengthen its mastery of science, technology, and economic development. They admire our modern free-wheeling culture of innovation, and have a profound liking for Americans. The name for America as written in Chinese characters as 'The Beautiful Country'. Likewise Americans have admired China's ancient culture of wisdom, patience, and beauty. 'The Middle Kingdom' filled the role as a wiser, more exotic civilization than the well-oiled if somewhat antiseptic one that Americans were forging. Both countries value a classless society with upward mobility for all people. This shared value made us allies when the European Empires, Russia, and Japan have threatened China's independence. America was drawn into WWII when Japan attacked us after we insisted that it abandon its brutal attempt at conquest of China. In the 1970s the USA and China again became allies, after a period of dreadful relations, when China feared that the neighboring Soviets would launch a preemptive attack against China's emerging nuclear program. Unfortunately, in the interim between these alliances, the USA was drawn into wars in Korea and Vietnam to contain Chinese Communist expansion.

Even after periods of hostility, such as these, the pursuit of the Great Harmony between the USA and China resumed. I approached this book being somewhat knowledgeable on these points. My father, a foreign policy buff who had campaigned for President Nixon, taught me the nuances of American and Chinese relations during the time of Nixon's great overture to China in the 1970s. Even so, this book provided a depth of knowledge about the interactions between Americans and Chinese that I was not aware of. The book is objective, without ideological axes to grind. It explodes myths, such as that the Chinese Communists bore the lion's share of fighting against the Japanese in WWII, while the Chinese Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek were corrupt slackers. This was a myth that my father, a China buff, taught me. Pomfret says the reality is that the Chinese Nationalists did most of the fighting, thereby wearing themselves down to the point where Mao's Communist could take over the country. Pomfret advises us to be objective in furthering our own best interests as our relationship with China continues to deepen: "In the pursuit of the Great Harmony, rapturous enchantment is not America's ally; realism is. At the moment, that means constraining China's ambitions to extend its territory far out into the Pacific, thereby encroaching on our allies' claims to islands and control of the sea lanes. It means coming to terms with our trade with China, which results in \$367 billion trade deficits each year. Americans who want to thoroughly understand our relations with China during our 240 years as a nation will be educated by this book. China has always shaped our history --- mostly in positive ways, but also by the inevitable rivalries of two great powers. We may be nearing some choppy waters in our relations with China, in trade and territorial disputes in the Western Pacific. This book has arrived at an opportune time to help us understand how to negotiate with China to get through the choppy seas together.

Written by one of the last US-Sino journalistic experts out there, Mr Pomfret's work is a true tour de force of the complexity of the entwined US/China relationship. You will learn more in this one volume than in a whole college course. From our two nations' love/hate relationship at the end of the 1900s to our current interdependence. From failed American missionaries to revered US science and educational philanthropists in early decades of the 20th century China - even Mao liked us for a while; to America's absorption of Chinese art, philosophy and cuisine. No more pertinent or timely book out there. A few more volumes like this and Mr Pomfret will deservedly surpass Jonathan Spence as the go-to authority on China.

A meticulously researched book on the history of economic, political and cultural relations between

China and the United States. The substance of the book is convincing, particularly the sections on modern history, some of which has been observed first hand by author John Pomfret. What detracted from the book somewhat for me was its very scholarly denseness. It is replete with detailed personal histories of 19th Century Americans who went to China to make commercial fortunes or harvest Christian souls. In an event, the book is a major achievement in providing a credible backdrop to why the contemporary relationship between the two countries is often fraught with miscues and misunderstanding. It makes the point, directly and indirectly, that all international relationships cannot be conducted without some meaningful understanding of and reference to past encounters.

Pomfret includes a cornucopia of historical details regarding the long relationship between China and America, which began with George Washington. Didn't know that Qing dynasty sent a plaque to honor Washington that still hangs on the wall of the Washington monument today. One could go on at length about the many interesting facts that Pomfret has put into this book, and while the entries vary in importance and gravity, none is so trivial as to be boring. But this is a very good book for both China scholars and the interested reader as well. Highly recommended!

For anyone interested in China, this book is historical research at it's best. Pomfret, knows his subject well, and does an excellent job covering the complicated relationship between China and the USA. For those of us of a certain age who labor under the assumption that the U.S./China relationship started with the Nixon/Kissenger rapprochement in 1972, well, think again. The relationship has seen its ups and downs ever since the American Revolution, and Pomfret draws on an incredible number of sources to bring the story to life. The book is divided into 47 bite-sized chapters of about 13 pages each, roughly in chronological sequence, but each covering a well-defined subject area. Perhaps a key historical figure or family (eg. Stilwell, the Soong family), a movement (eg. Christian missionaries, Chinese studying abroad), a cultural feature (eg. foot-binding), historical snippets (eg. Burma and the World War II), economics (eg. economic competition and alleged currency manipulation). This is a most fascinating story, and the writing is exquisite. Given the the U.S./Chinese relationship is perhaps the most important bilateral relationship in the world today, it should be required reading for our political leaders and anyone doing business in China.

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