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Reginald Murphy Photo Essay

In 1972 Richard Nixon became the President in office to visit China. His trip to China is significant because it was a step in normalizing the relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China. This visit ended twenty-five years of isolation between the two nations and led to the foundation of the diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1979. The photos from this essay are not from this inaugural visit by President Nixon, but from Reginald Murphy on a visit shortly after the President returned to the United States. Murphy's photos are of many different points of view and themes. Many of the photos are candid's of citizens of the People's Republic going about their daily lives. From these photos I was able to develop a theme that I found very interesting, especially after twenty-five years of isolation. The theme was the amount of photos in which there is evidence of western influences on the Chinese society. There are three particular areas in which the photos displayed western influence on Chinese society: clothing, personal activities and transportation.

Even with twenty-five years of isolation between the United States and China there is evidence of cultural diffusion from previous encounters as pieces of the clothing represents some traditional western styles. The cultural diffusion may not just be a result of the United States, but from other western states as well. Baseball is an American tradition and the clothing a person wears to play the game, especially the baseball cap, is distinctly western. In two of Murphy's photos there are young boys wearing front billed caps that look like little league baseball hats. Another photo shows how Western culture has had their influence on what adults wear as well. In this photo there is a man wearing a neck tie and collared shirt. These are not the only examples of a western influence on Chinese culture; it extends to personal activities and transportation.

There are plenty of personal activities that many Americans do today that have been brought over from Asian cultures. Americans have also had their impact on what some Chinese do on their own free time as well. There are several photos by Murphy that personify this idea of cultural diffusion through leisure activities. The first is through sports in which children can be seen playing basketball. The second and third examples are a child biking on a tricycle and a woman jogging. The bike was invented in Germany and made its way to Asia from there. Jogging was an activity made popular in New Zealand, so it may have traveled to China from there, but the movement migrated to the Americas in 1962 by way of the University of Oregon track coach. By foot was not the only way to get around China by 1972, there was a more American way of traveling available.

The next example of cultural exchange may be more a product of the fact that we had Americans traveling around China. Murphy has a picture in which an automobile is present. This picture is where the inspiration was found for the theme of western influences on Chinese society because the automobile is one of the most symbolic American machines.

In conclusion, even though for a period of twenty-five years before 1972 there was no political contact between America and China there was still an influence through culture. This process of cultural diffusion may have happened before this twenty five year period, but one can undoubtedly see the influences of Western society on Chinese culture through architecture, clothing, personal activities and transportation. The pedagogical implications of this work is very relevant today as many class are forced to deal with the fact that we are becoming a more globalized society and that ideas and technologies travel the fastest the world has ever known. In World History, teachers are encouraged to teach about cultural diffusion between ancient societies and how technologies and ideas traveled through the ancient worlds. Using this essay we would be able to create a connection to the past by teaching students that the concept of cultural diffusion has not stopped, but increased exponentially.