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Dealing with the Chinese

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CHAPTER IV.

DEALING WITH THE CHINESE

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The continuing Chinese revolution is certainly the biggest and possibly the most thoroughgoing social transformation the world has ever seen. My first posting in the Foreign Service was to Peking, as was my last. So great were the changes in the quarter-century intervening, my experience was, indeed, "a tale of two cities." It is awesome to watch one of the world's oldest civilizations methodically taking itself apart — at times, as during the height of the tumultuous Cultural Revolution, seemingly blasting itself apart — and then meticulously trying to put itself back together again in a vastly different form. The course which that revolution will eventually take will have a profound effect on the future of us all. Especially affected will be the manner in which the United States relates to the Chinese — including of course, Taiwan.

For more than 3,000 years, the Chinese developed their remarkable culture with minimal outside influence. When the Middle Kingdom was invaded, its invaders tended to adopt the more advanced Chinese civilization. The Chinese naturally came to view themselves as the center of world civilization. In the middle of the last century, however, the comfort of China's womb-like isolation and the self-satisfaction of its presumed centrality were shattered by the not-so-civilized military and economic insistencies of the industrially advanced West. The erosion of the two thousand year-old Confucian social order began. For the better part of a century, the increasingly conscious, deliberate destruction of that ancient social order by the Chinese themselves has caused repeated crises of national authority.

At the turn of the century, America's trade and other interests in China prompted us to proclaim the so-called Open Door policy. This helped save China from dismemberment by the Europeans, the Japanese and the Russians, but we were quick to share in the rapacity of those powers, short of territorial demands. At the same time, our rather pious interpretation of the Open Door policy fostered in us an affectionate, yet presumptuous protective feeling for the Chinese. This was strongly nurtured by the missionaries who followed the battleships into China. In general, the missionary effort was viewed by the then religiously eclectic and tolerant Chinese as an imperti-

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nent claim to a monopoly on truth, as well as a fundamental challenge to the Chinese way of life. Indeed, the modernizing influence of the secular institutions so prolifically spawned by the missionary effort — hospitals, schools and colleges — caused violent opposition to the missionary effort, a violence finally resulting in the Boxer Uprising. Just how much religious impact the missionaries made on China is moot, but they certainly made a heavy impact on America. Many a dollar was dropped into the collection plate with the sincere and fraternal, if naive, hope of saving our "heathen" Chinese brothers from starvation of their bodies and damnation of their souls. The century and a quarter love-hate relationship had been well established.

The Nationalist, supposedly democratic, Revolution of 1911 intensified American sympathy for China. Under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen and subsequently, Chiang Kai-shek, fairly substantial social and economic progress was made, especially considering the magnitude of the problems. But the long Sino-Japanese war fragmented the country and undermined the integrity of the Nationalist Revolution. The regime became venal and ineffective, and along with civil war, inflation finished it off until its revival on Taiwan. The Communist revolution gained its strength from the peasants and the intelligentsia, promising land and national dignity after China's 100 years of ignominy.

Many people have forgotten that our diplomatic and consular personnel remained on the mainland of China for months after the Communist take-over, until the Communists made it impossible for us to stay with any semblance of dignity. I myself remained some eight months under the Communists in Tientsin where I had been transferred after two years in Peking. When I was called home, I was asked by the Assistant Secretary of State whether I thought we should recognize the new regime.[1] I said I supposed eventually we should, for I suspected it was there to stay; but I did not think we should be hasty, partly because I was not convinced that the new regime would return the compliment! Chairman Mao had announced the previous summer his "lean to one side" policy (*i.e.* toward the Soviet Union) yet, for the ensuing decade it seemed on the surface more like a "prostrate to one side" policy.

It is not surprising that capitalism is a dirty word in China, where the free enterprise system never evolved as it did in the West. Furthermore, capitalism in China was inextricably associated with semi-colonialism. China is, of course, Communist in ultimate intent and Socialist in present practice. I

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1. *Editor's Note:* The Assistant Secretary of State to whom Mr. Jenkins refers was W. Walton Butterworth, Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs (1947–49). Today, the office is entitled, Assistant Secretary of State, East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

doubt that the intent will ever materialize and the socialist structure is in trouble. In the past, the Chinese have tried to reach their goals largely through a combination of exhortation and intimidation but they are now finding that these methods have severe limitations. Communist society in China has been a grey one, with little room for the soul to run and jump. But Chinese practicality seems to be coming cautiously to the surface. Actually, Chairman Mao was not a very orthodox Marxist and his most successful followers are turning out to be not very orthodox Maoists. Maoism was designed for a sedentary, chiefly agrarian society and industrialization, a course on which China seems now irrevocably set, will bring very fundamental changes in the nature of the society — mobility, urbanization and, of course, better education. (The Chinese may or may not succeed in their efforts to prevent the large cities from becoming larger, but countless smaller cities are certain to spring up.) In short, I believe the Chinese people are among the most pragmatic on earth. They have an enormous affinity for that which works. I believe that the Chinese will prove too intelligent and perceptive to hold on indefinitely to anachronistic policies out of blind loyalty to ossified dogma.

So far, the Chinese revolution has taken sharp twists and turns. During periods of relative leniency, the intelligentsia and the technocrats have usually come forward, regretting their emergence in the inevitable period of orthodoxy which followed. Accordingly, the foreigner has experienced varying negotiation climates, depending not only on the state of bilateral or multilateral relations, but also on the trends of Chinese domestic policy.

The first contact I had with Chinese Communists was heartening. In mid-January 1949, on the day after the battle for Tientsin ended, the Consul General and I met with some half dozen members of the People's Liberation Army who were temporarily running the city. They were an impressive lot: young, clean-cut, intelligent, articulate, personable, and almost intrusively healthy. We were given a perfectly reasonable lecture on how there would no longer be special privileges for foreigners in the New China, a change of which we fully approved. We were assured that so long as we dealt on a basis of equality and reciprocity we could expect mutually satisfactory dealings. The discussions were pleasant and cautiously friendly.

Satisfactory dealings, however, turned out to be more than two decades away. While we were waiting for "the dust to settle" after the Chinese civil war, the Korean War intervened and changed our China policy overnight. The U.S. China policy became one of declared opposition to Peking and resumption of support for Taipei.

The long and bitter negotiations for the peace treaty at Panmunjom baptized us in the realities of the adversary type of negotiation with the Chinese, and the even more drawn-out Warsaw talks with them further

educated us in this type of frustrating, unsavory and largely sterile exercise. The Warsaw talks, carried on for the better part of fifteen years, resulted in but one negotiated agreement (on repatriation of citizens) and involved rejection of more than twenty proposals. There were times when each side evidently wanted to make a limited approach to the other, such as the policy of an exchange of newsmen. Not until 1970 did this readiness appear on both sides at the same time. During the 50s, the bitter legacy of the Korean War and the paranoia induced by the McCarthy era prevented a United States approach to the Chinese. During this decade, the Chinese were somewhat forthcoming; by the mid-50s, they desired formal U.S. recognition, and I suspect, were already finding problems in their ostensibly understudy relationship with the Soviet "big brothers." Indeed, the climate was such that the negotiations I carried on in Geneva in 1954 were conducted with unfailing civility and partial success in obtaining release of Americans detained in China against their will.

During the 60s, we tried to be more open-minded but found the roles switched. The Chinese were then not ready to move. They were picking up the pieces from the economically disastrous (but partially, politically successful) Great Leap Forward; they had had three bad crop years and they were adjusting to the departure of the Soviet technicians. Understandably, they would not negotiate from weakness. Furthermore, they were unhappy even then with our policy toward Vietnam and, of course, with our continuing support of Taiwan. So, in the mid-60s, the Cultural Revolution and the Red Guard disruptions began. China entered upon its own version of a paranoic "McCarthy period" in which they could not have anything to do with the so-called imperialists. During this very electric period, an even more stringent form of adversary negotiation ensued. For a time, the Warsaw talks were even broken off. This tense atmosphere was finally dispelled and relations were incrementally established following a series of events. The Cultural Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Brezhnev Doctrine, Soviet cocktail party talk of a possible "surgical operation" to remove Chinese nuclear installations and an enormous Soviet military build-up on the long Sino-Soviet border all combined to make possible ping-pong diplomacy and the Kissinger and Nixon trips to seek détente.

I should like to return to the characteristics of adversary negotiation. When Alex Johnson met with the Chinese at the ambassadorial level in 1955 to initiate the series of talks which later became the Warsaw Talks, he arranged the chairs more or less in a circle. He wanted to avoid the adversary implications of dividing the chairs into opposing sides, and to invite informality which was so lacking in the exasperating Panmunjom negotiations. When it was, however, the Chinese turn to arrange the second meeting,

they placed the chairs so that opposing sides faced each other across a gap. This remained the pattern for the next fifteen years of palaver.

Actually, the talks did provide the space and time for a then pathologically Sino-centric, revolutionary China and a world-oriented, conservative America to adjust to each other's markedly different styles, policies and philosophies. They provided a forum for bringing up a very wide range of subjects of mutual interest and concern; even when no tangible results were forthcoming, the subtle evidences of changes in terminology and emphasis from crisis to crisis contributed toward the all-too-little mutual understanding possible in that hostile circumstance. At least the two governments had the means of signaling each other promptly and, if necessary, in confidence. (The confidence was obtained only in a rare meeting between the two ambassadors in one or the other of their embassies. The regular conference room was bugged.) The mechanism of the talks proved to be especially valuable in tailoring down the military action in the off-shore island crises.

For the most part, however, the talks were used for an exchange of polemics and for painfully soporific recitations of positions. I attended nineteen talks in Warsaw as an adviser, first to Ambassador Jacob Beam and then to Ambassador John Cabot. Sometimes it seemed as if each side was making credit points with its own exigent gallery back home rather than talking to the party across the table. Today, some of these exchanges read like petulant attempts to make mere debating points. I cringe to recall that I was "particeps criminis" in these dreary exchanges, for in addition to advising on some of the Warsaw talks, I drafted the guidance in Washington for many of the others. Yet the climate of the time made it all deadly serious.

When in a strictly adversary relationship, the average Chinese negotiator is a highly Sino-centric chauvinist, a dedicated ideologue, evincing the static and provincial quality of Chairman Mao's thinking. He is usually, however, very articulate and has done his homework thoroughly. He has a consuming, not to say blinding, sense of national rectitude. In the past, he could be expected to have a distressingly limited understanding of the rapidly evolving modern world and its implications, but that is changing as more Chinese have travelled and attended conferences and meetings all over the world. He is persistent and likely to be numbingly verbose, using repetition in the tiresome manner of Madison Avenue — and often with the same telling effect.

The Chinese negotiator will usually be armed with a cascade of facts, but they may only be used to embellish doctrinal preconceptions, with little logic or relation to the real world. Facts will often play a subservient rather than a corrective role in forming a conclusion. The "non-negotiable" principle and rigid dogma will be foremost. If on our part, however, we exhibit persistence, composure, patience and sometimes a very valuable bit of insouciance, the

"non-negotiable" will sometimes turn out to be negotiable, or will quietly drop out of the discussion. While the Chinese positions may be couched in ringing ideological terms, they are almost certainly more intimately related to the more pragmatic concerns of national security, vital interests and China's standing in the world — all of which have a perverse way of flying in the face of ideology.

In the adversary role of negotiating, the Chinese are particularly prone to extensive use of hyperbole, characteristic of authoritarian societies, especially heirarchical ones. China continues to be both. (For some reason, however, the phraseology in Chinese does not sound quite so stark as it does when literally translated into English.) In addition, they will often use maddeningly patronizing phraseology, such as "We caution the United States side to ponder this well." Although sensitive to matters of face themselves, the Chinese are masters of invective and insult when engaged in adversary negotiations. They use rudeness in hopes of making the other side lose its temper.

The Chinese are usually sophisticated in tactics. This may be evinced in the very beginning when they try to affect the substance of negotiations by the way in which an item is phrased in the agenda. The battle for the agenda can, in fact, be crucial. Also, a Chinese negotiator would not show satisfaction at an achieved success while negotiations are in progress; he knows this would enhance his opponent's competitive resolve. He may be quite "poker-faced" throughout. The novice may think a proposal he has offered is meeting with approval, or at least with tolerance, because there is initially no overt show of disapproval. Later, he may find that it is totally unacceptable. Henry Kissinger places the Chinese high on the list of sophisticated, able negotiators; but then he was negotiating with the most sophisticated, personable and effective of them all: the late Premier Chou En-lai, whom I consider to be one of the most impressive diplomats of all time. Of course, we were meeting with him in a far more agreeable climate than the former strictly adversary one. The Chinese can be incomparably likeable when the occasion permits.

The Chinese are more willing than most westerners to forego immediate advantages if they would come at the cost of long-term disadvantages. This may be related to the different sense of time in East and West. The American wants immediate results because his watchful constituency demands them. Knowing this, the Chinese often play very effectively on public opinion. The traditional approach to time, it should be noted, is reinforced by the Communist belief that time is on the side of Communism, courtesy of alleged historical inevitability.

In Chinese Communist adversary negotiation, capitulation leading to the defeat of the opponent is the goal; compromise in finding common ground on

which to stand, for mutual profit, is the more classical, but not universal, western pattern.

It was mentioned earlier that Chinese Communism is a secular religion. It has virtually all of the trappings of a religion: canonized writings, a strong sense of mission and of infallibility, an abhorrence of heretics, and for a time during the Cultural Revolution, even a near-deified leader. All that was lacking was a devil, and for a time we were elected. For a while, the Soviet Union was a strong competitor for that role, surging ahead in the seventies. During the 50s and 60s, the Chinese seemed to regard enmity between China and the United States as basic, natural and destined to be long-lived. This philosophy embraced the possibility of periods of peace or even of collaboration, but the long-term inimical nature of the relationship remained. This philosophy, however, would seem to be based on pristine dogma unsullied by reality. If dogma is set aside, there is little reason why our two countries should not get along reasonably well. Our economies seem complementary; there are many areas in which we can learn from each other. We have no troublesome contiguous territories, and when given a decent chance, the personal chemistry between our two people appears to be uncommonly felicitous.

I believe we cannot yet be sure whether we are in one of those temporary periods of a beneficial relationship that is destined to revert some day to a more hostile confrontation, or whether the earlier philosophy of Peking may itself have evolved. Certainly the negotiations with the Chinese in the 70s have been a very different proposition from those of the 50s and 60s. Most of the world was relieved when the representatives of two great nations in hostile confrontation for twenty-two years sat down and talked with courtesy and candor, listening and responding reasonably and constructively. This had rarely happened before. In the Kissinger-Chou negotiations prior to the Nixon trip, there was astoundingly full and frank give-and-take. Each side not only gained a clearer grasp of the thinking of the other, but more importantly, they gained a clearer understanding of just why each side thought as it did. There was little peddling of dogma and no diplomatic double-talk. Those negotiations in Peking were fascinating, exhilarating and, for the most part, satisfying. The Chinese were tough, but they were forthright, fair and generally constructive. We gained respect and liking for most of our Chinese counterparts, even while warmly disagreeing with them on a number of issues. Those several trips to China were emotion-filled for an incurable Sinophile such as myself. I derived great satisfaction from the cautious understatement of our new-found relationship. The unnatural intensity of the traditional love-hate syndrome in Sino-American relations seemed to have become muted, more objective and realistic, making the new reltationship much more likely to last. Our increased understanding of

China's past humiliation reached the level of empathy. We were able to recognize China's legitimate security interests while stating clearly our opposition to foreign domination of Asian developments. We gained renewed appreciation for China's magnificent culture but had serious reservations about some of the curious courses it was currently taking. And, last but not least, we gained a far greater understanding of the uniquely complex and difficult problems of modernization and change which China faces.

My heading the advance group which opened the U.S. Liaison Office in Peking in April 1973 several weeks before the arrival of Ambassador Bruce was an especially gratifying privilege. I could not have asked for better cooperation from the Chinese in that endeavor.

In the past few years, the fond hope has grown that the Chinese now realize that borrowing from the technologically advanced centers of the world will not resolve their problems. Rather, the Chinese must gear their technological development into an increasingly interdependent, transnational economic and cultural world matrix. That hope may be overblown. But at a minimum, our two nations have found some common ground on which we can build mutually profitable cooperation in quite an array of fields. Each has a clearer view of those national priorities which may be safely pursued on a shrinking, interdependent planet. For that the whole world should be thankful, and with care, we can build towards more.

Much of that requisite care involves understanding the fundamentally different nature of the problems faced by each society, the different historical antecedents and the different current motivations, so that we may discover how diversity can be made to enrich an association rather than poison it. Neither the normally placid Chinese nor the normally jaunty American is inscrutable, unless one fails to scrutinize. If we will only spend the necessary time and energy in forming a clearer understanding of the basic beliefs and motivational impellents of others as well as ourselves, then our natural kinship with all humankind might emerge more clearly and we may outgrow the precious tenacities of exclusive monopolies on truth — petty luxuries simply no longer affordable in our polyglot global community.