

CHINA IN OUR MIND'S GEOGRAPHY

William Pfaff

There are hatreds which are devoted to real things and people, and there is a hatred which displaces inner violence onto any accessible external object. The deepest causes for hate are racial, fraternal, communal. No trip by Henry Kissinger will mend the savagery of Moslem Pakistani toward Bengali Hindu or solve the fixed enmities of Ulster, for such wars are merciless and personally felt, "popular" in the most terrifying significance of that word.

America's turbulent relationship with China, and the Kissinger expedition, cannot be understood in terms of such hatred. Yet one *does* find in American feelings toward China a violent and unstable emotion that cannot be accounted for in a relationship based solely on rational calculations of interest and advantage. America has certainly had intelligible reasons to *oppose* Chinese policy. The Chinese government itself elected a course of world defiance—and self-isolation—that was not inevitable. But the American *reaction*—both political and popular—was wholly out of proportion to real causes. As with Castro's Cuba, America has hardly considered the China which actually exists. Our national preoccupation has been with a China of our own imagining, and thus, for us, China has been what we wanted or needed it to be. Some inner violence was displaced onto an accessible external object.

Now, suddenly, the hatred has ended. What yesterday was described by government and press as the most dangerous political power on earth has melted away. That vast revolutionary China—irrational, violent, incomprehensibly bloodthirsty, and against which America has for two decades deployed nuclear weapons, considered preventive or pre-emptive war, mobilized mainland Asia and pressed Japanese rearmament, stubbornly blocked trade and maintained embargoes, and resisted in the U.N.—that China is transformed before our eyes.

Now, it seems, China is a plucky and puritan land, its people adequately fed, clothed and housed for the first time in their history, regimented, but in curious and inoffensive ways that involve mass calisthenics at dawn, little red books of platitudes, and streetcorner loudspeakers. The trains and hotels are

tidy, the food distinguished, the people remorselessly honest. The visitor bemusedly regards a hundred thousand bicycles, clear skies and clean air, cities without prostitutes, imperial gardens, the banners bearing the poems of Mao Tse-tung, the tireless working people who lecture the stranger upon the socialist achievement and political consciousness accomplished in their factories and farms. Chou En-lai reveals himself an astute and amusing diplomatist and dinner partner, a good host. The American people, reading of all this, seem unmistakably relieved that the long hostility is ended. They now want to like China.

Yesterday they wanted to fear and hate China. The Committee of One Million, the press services of the Nationalist Government of Taiwan, the China Lobby did not create this hostility. They articulated and exploited a real, popular emotion rooted in still earlier American moods of enthusiasm for China, and disillusion, broken hopes. The chronicle of American popular attitudes toward China, from their missionary and mercantile origins in the nineteenth century through our educational, political, and military patronage of the republican and nationalist reformers of China's twentieth century, is perhaps the most extraordinary and contradictory mixture of good will, ill will, racism, missionary religion, missionary politics and enduring ignorance in the history of American foreign relations.

Our most recent reversal is entirely consistent with the tradition. In 1943 Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist China was regarded as a democratic great power, potentially a postwar guardian of the world's peace; by 1944 we were disillusioned with the warlords of the Kuomintang and our national enthusiasm—as attested in the press and popular magazines of the time, including many which subsequently ran with Senator McCarthy and the China Lobby—was transferred to the incorruptible Communists in Yanan: they would battle Japan for democracy's sake. By 1947 we had lost our enthusiasm for the Communists; by 1951 we were at war with them and in a frenzy of self-laceration over who, in our government, had "lost" China. By 1962 we regarded China—this land of nuclear bombs, backyard blast-furnaces, brainwashing, meticulously exterminated flies, and miraculously efficient (we believed) agents of international

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subversion—with a greater degree of horror and fear than we had ever lavished on the Stalinist Russia of the Great Purges or prewar Nazi Germany.

At that point in the 1960's, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's annual report on American defense dealt with Russia in a merely perfunctory way, appropriate to a combat long formalized in the minds of American leaders, drained of all real threat or urgency. He revealed real emotion only in dealing with the Chinese. They provided the real danger, posing a world emergency by reason of China's revolutionary doctrines and subversive agencies and alliances with Cuban and Congolese revolutionaries. Marshal Lin Piao's doctrine of revolutionary union among the "rural" peoples of the world was recounted by McNamara in sober detail, as if it were the new *Mein Kampf*. McNamara's views were echoed from the White House and the State Department. Indeed, we have bombarded and blasted Vietnam for nearly a decade now in no small part because the Vietnamese Communists provided an available surrogate and symbol for the threat of China.

Now, while the B-52's and the gunships still methodically exterminate life in the eastern regions of Laos and along the seventeenth parallel of Viet-

nam in the course of their mission of "containing" Asian communism, Mr. Nixon prepares to be banqueted in Peking. *Times* editor James Reston relates his favorable experience with acupuncture. If so many people had not died from all of this, it would be a comedy, but it is a comedy whose run is not yet completed.

A quarter century of American national policy and popular belief and fears mercurially shifts. The nuclear contingency plans and the official rhetoric of the past twenty-five years are pushed aside. The American people are bored with these things, ashamed of the excesses of the 1950's, fed up with Asia. We don't even have time to warn our Asian clients that we have changed our minds. The Japanese, pressed for twenty years to oppose China, read the news from Washington in their morning papers. Thus do we enter that generation of peace which Mr. Nixon has promised us. We will now make peace with China with the savage indifference to anyone but ourselves, the deafness to inconvenient realities that distinguish our warmaking. No doubt this constitutes, on balance, a net gain for the world. But upon what part of the geography of our imaginations will we next displace our thwarted angers, our frustrations?

NOTES ON THEOLOGICAL PRIORITIES

Georges Casalis

Are the message, structures and socio-political implications of Christianity in harmony with the teaching, person and life of its Founder? To the degree that one of its functions is to examine this question critically at every moment, theology today is confronted with urgent revolutionary imperatives.

This reflection may possibly seem applicable only to the Western or Euroamerican world, and it is undoubtedly true. However, two things are clear: First, the present epoch requires that everyone return to his sources and examine his own roots in

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order to assume his identity creatively rather than accept it passively. Secondly, all spiritual and ideological families are today faced with the demanding task of *hermeneutics*: negatively, to reject formulas that correspond to a past, outdated situation and to refuse to continue traditional behavior; positively, to search for a language and a style of behavior that are meaningful for us at the end of the twentieth century. Whoever rejects the task of hermeneutics is condemned to disappear after having culpably set obstacles in the way of history and condemned men to various forms of institutional slavery. The hermeneutical task is necessarily riven with a permanent internal tension: fidelity to one's origins runs the risk of paralyzing the indispensable adaptation; adaptation runs the risk of uprooting and hence killing the original substance. While hermeneutics is today the "top priority," it