TWO CHINAS REVISITED

by Robert J. Myers

If we no longer have Richard Nixon to kick around, we nonetheless have the former president’s advice. On U.S. policy toward China, he states: “China, with its population and resources, is eventually going to be a superpower. It is vital that we help them become a superpower associated with the West rather than one that is against us.”

Sounds reasonable enough, until we consider the options. To announce such a goal might, in the short term, play hob with our diplomatic bargaining positions vis-à-vis Beijing itself or come at the expense of our traditional allies in Asia. And if this is to be the polar star of U.S. foreign policy over the long term, as Nixon suggests, what about other legitimate U.S. interests: what about the notion of the proper play of the international balance of power and America’s concern for human rights and democratic values?

Mr. Nixon is a favorite of Beijing, which considers him a product of the vagaries of the capitalist system. As interpreted by the Chinese leaders, Watergate was not Nixon’s fault; he simply lost out in a power struggle between the capitalist witches of the West Coast and the capitalist witches of the East Coast. When people in power employ this kind of reasoning, it behooves us to ask what kind of men they are, what they believe, and how they think.

In the U.S. today the Chinese are being given a good deal of credit for their “pragmatism,” and the “Four Modernizations” are somehow interpreted as a return to capitalism—which, if one reads Max Weber’s The Religion of China, never existed at all. True, now that incentives are offered, many agricultural production teams exceed production targets and reap the benefits. There are also entrepreneurs who hire others to work for them—raising fish, for example. But to equate sensible inducements with abandonment of communism is to make a considerable leap. Would anyone have ventured as much about Lenin’s New Economic Policy? Making things work a bit better is not completely outside the bounds of good Marxist doctrine; it is not necessary to pursue failure in Communist societies, except perhaps in the Soviet agricultural sector. The implication that all 40 million members of the Chinese Communist party are closet capitalists hardly deserves discussion.

China is now making substantial economic progress—for the first time since the early 1950s—though it starts from a very low base indeed. At the conclusion of the Twelfth Party Congress in September, Party leader Hu Yaobang announced an economic program that aimed at increasing industrial and agricultural production from the 1980 total of 710 billion yuan (1.7 JMP = U.S. $1, in the official exchange rate) to 2,800 billion in the year 2000.

If this goal is met, per capita income on the mainland will have increased from U.S.$250 to $1,000 between 1982 and the new century. This calls for a 7.2 per cent annual growth rate, up from about 4 per cent in 1981 and perhaps 5 per cent last year. Quite obviously, such annual growth rates will become increasingly difficult to attain as the base figures become higher. Just last October, Red Flag, the organ of the People’s Liberation Army, defended these projections as “realistic,” comparing them to the “unrealistic” figures of Hua Guofeng’s 1978 “New Leap Forward” estimates. Those, Red Flag contended, were “ludicrous and fantastic.” In fact, there must be reasonable growth if the army is to be modernized. More recently, though, the New York Times reports that Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang reduced the goals of the 1981-85 five-year plan and called for total growth of 21.7 per cent over 1980. He predicted that in 1982 industrial and agricultural growth would reach 5.7 per cent.

There has been a fundamental and remarkable shift in Chinese investment policy over the past decade, and it is beginning to pay off. For years, heavy industry claimed 50-odd per cent of Chinese investment, light industry a far smaller percentage, and agriculture a mere 20 per cent. This was based on the Soviet economic model; but China, isolated from international competition in heavy industry, suffered from the skewed priorities. In a country where there are only 0.12 hectares of arable land per inhabitant (compared to South Korea’s 0.14, Japan’s 0.25, and the Netherlands’ 0.78), but where 74 per cent of the population is engaged in agriculture, the lack of success in absorbing excess manpower from that sector is apparent. The bias against agriculture has been evident too in discriminatory taxes on agriculture output, levies quite out of proportion to those imposed in the industrial sector. What is more, urban workers have received substantial rent and food subsidies—25 billion yuan in 1981 for that purpose alone, or about 30 per cent of the annual wages received by government and other workers together. Over the past three years this totals 62.8 billion yuan, or 19.3 per cent of all state revenues.

Today’s trend to light industry, organized through the commune system, should help rationalize the economy and permit growth over the next two decades somewhat in line

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with Mr. Hu’s projection, With the new incentives firmly in place, this year’s grain harvest may exceed the 1979 record of 332 million tons. The cotton crop too will be at a new high—cutting U.S. imports, of course, even as the Chinese are pressing Washington to enlarge its textile quota.

This is not to say China soon will be a land of milk and honey. Far from it. For one thing, the primitive transportation system guarantees that there will be famines here and there, whatever the actual food supply, as well as delays before China’s diverse and extensive natural resources can be marshalled efficiently. There are good prospects, then, that China will increase production for its huge internal market and be able to make modest increases in foreign trade. Its new economic strength will gain it influence in international politics, and China is likely to press that advantage in the Third World—at the expense of both Soviet and U.S. aspirations.

TWO HISTORIES
The question of whether Marxist ideology has any importance for relations between China and the Soviet Union—and, ultimately the U.S.—is raised from time to time in America, where it usually is dismissed as being of no particular significance. Does it matter that the Chinese profess communism? According to a recent poll, 37 per cent of Americans are not aware that China proclaims itself a Communist state. In this regard it is sometimes useful to read books that are notably outdated. Take Revolution and Counter-Revolution in China, written in 1946, which noted that “The Communists in China today are Communist only in name.” Author M. N. Roy saw the coming full-scale civil war as a battle between the Democratic National Revolutionary party (read democracy and Mao) and the nationalists (counterrevolution and Chiang). But how do the Chinese themselves see the period up to October 1, 1949, and the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China? There are at least two histories of this era, one resident in Beijing, the other in Taipei. Call it a tale of two museums.

Museums play a critical role in the cultural and intellectual lives of nations. Decisions about what to celebrate and what to ignore reveal the dominant values of a civilization. Today, in the People’s Republic of China there is agreement about what is worth preserving of the past—the important aberration of the Cultural Revolution aside. Of course, on the matter of what to preserve of one period of the less recent past—from the National Revolution of 1911 to the establishment of the Republic of China in Taiwan—there may be some dispute in the future. Whether this would necessitate a change in the artifacts on display is another matter.

On the Southwest corner of Tiên An Men Square in Beijing stands a building almost on the scale of the Great Hall of the People on the opposite side of the square. Here are exhibited the photos and memorabilia of the Communist party during its “Democratic Revolution.” We can follow the fortunes of the men in the CCP pantheon—Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqui, Zhu De—leading the Long March, defying the Japanese, dealing with Ambassador Patrick Hurley, pompous in his homburg; posing a gloomy faced General George Marshall beside a smiling Zhou Enlai. Zhou, in fact, is always smiling. And why not? Everywhere his side is winning.

Inside the entrance, beaming on the portrait of the Great Helmsman, is the quartet representing the CCP’s intellectual heritage: Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. Although the photos of these men have been removed from their prominent place outside in the square, they are offered here as part of the history of the CCP. Stalin’s star may be eclipsed in Moscow, but he is revered in Peking. If Mao is portrayed in official propaganda as 70 per cent good and 30 per cent bad, how is Stalin evaluated? Was Khrushchev’s exposure of Stalin’s terrors and immorality the final reckoning on Stalin’s career?

In China it is argued that Khrushchev denounced Stalin as a matter of expediency, hoping to clear up policy problems and then move on. The Chinese, faced with a different situation, could afford to talk about Party philosophy. We in America often forget that for true believers it is important to establish who owns Communist orthodoxy, and there are plenty of true believers among China’s 40 million Party members. In the competition between the two intellectual archenemies, the USSR and China, for leadership of the world Communist movement, the Chinese are betting that their claim on Stalin is important, perhaps decisive. For the Soviet Union, on the other hand, it was Brezhnev who rated internal “in a place excelled only by Lenin himself.” as the New York Times put it in November. Stalin rests a good thirty paces to the right.

In Taipei, across the Formosa Straits, the Communist Party Museum’s counterpart is the Sun Yat Sen Memorial. This great hall, of roughly equal scale, presents a version of China’s recent past that is more counterpoint to than continuous with the one in Beijing. The visitor in October, 1982, was offered an exhibit depicting the struggles against Japanese imperialism of the years 1931 through 1945. Here, war against the invader is the main focus. The scenes of battles with the Japanese are truly gruesome, and in photographs the enemy poses with the evidence of his slaughter, rape, and pillage.

The presentation of two totally different histories of an era is yet another indication of how mistaken (and dangerous for policy-makers) is the notion of an eventual “convergence” of the Chinese mainland and Taiwan—the illusion that over, say, fifty years the disparity in income, culture, and attitudes toward production and development—the effects of ideology and tradition—somehow will come together. During the 1960s it was popular to make a similar observation about the Soviet Union and the United States; this was during the period of emerging détente. Every photo of a Soviet youth in blue jeans seemed one more indication that everybody had the same political aspirations when you got right down to it.

In fact, the Communists of both China and the USSR have not reconsidered the basic teachings of Marx: that the mode of production pursued by a society determines how it shapes reality and how it harnesses its resources.
If one follows the dialectic path onward and upward toward communism, eventually one achieves the New Man, the New Society, and a situation in which "each according to his needs" prevails. This is the clear and pristine Marx of the Communist Manifesto—before Das Kapital, before the neo-Marxists added their interpretations to eradicating major "flaws" in the master's method—and its continuing appeal to the converted and the uninformed is not easily dismissed.

That simple ideology offers considerable competition to the complex model for development extolled by democratic capitalism; it is one only of the problems that face the West in the future. Here, on the world scene, the ideological struggle is writ large for those who consider themselves Marx's standard bearers, pitting the cause of socialism against capitalist societies—tools of the dominant international class. The Chinese, for example, long have positioned themselves as the champions of the Third World against both superpowers as well as Japan and the second-line capitalist countries of Western Europe.

Is it as incorrect to say that the Chinese are not guided by Communist ideology as it is to say that the Reagan administration is not guided by democratic capitalist ideology. There is more than one brand of each, but within each there is a certain consistency. Neither philosophy can answer all the problems of modern society. To harbor this expectation is to take an unenlightened view of the Enlightenment's extreme claims for the scientific method—an insistence that society at large is like the human body and only awaits the right cure to release it from its ills, or that it is susceptible to ineluctable laws similar to those that guide the study of physics. Political philosophies may undergo some eclectic repairs from time to time; they do not necessarily land in the dust heap.

In any case, when we think about China, it is important that we take the Chinese seriously as a people, a power, and a culture. It is regrettable that the Chinese show little promise of reciprocating. Their fervent interest in the English language, for example, reflects its utility in ensuring immediate upward mobility in Chinese society as well as a recognition that English is the language of science, for which knowledge the Chinese have a thirst. As to those who pursue studies in the United States (about nine thousand students at the moment), they do not seem to be taking back with them any appreciation of Western political thought or culture, much less of the merits of American-style democracy. During the first half of this century Chinese students who returned from America were the yeast of attempts at democratic government and societal reform. Now they return to a closed intellectual society, their Communist ideology firmly in place. Both we and the Soviets ought to keep in mind the enduring quality of China's ideological commitment as we consider relations with the PRC in the future. Likewise, it pays to remember the quartet representing the CCP's intellectual heritage in that great hall in Beijing.

OPTIONS
The softer words that the Chinese and the Soviets have exchanged since October and with increasing frequency since Brezhnev's death shutter the Carter administration's illusion that a Sino-American "strategic consensus" was in the cards. The sign of new movement among the three principal world powers is welcome indeed, for the interplay of forces in a mood of "enlightened self-interest" usually is an omen of a more peaceful period in international relations.

The end of the Brezhnev era may bring more serious efforts by the U.S. and the USSR to reconcile their differences. Such efforts are essential to maintaining the traditional balance of power—and are the very antithesis of former President Nixon's advice. This is not to suggest a new coalition lined up against China. But it recognizes that, in the long term, China will play its own role, one that adjusts to its growing economic strength. This may mean a greater role in international trade, although the Chinese are not disinclined to autarky.

A letter from the Chi-ching emperor to King George II on the occasion of Lord Amherst's abortive mission to China in 1816 is telling:

My dynasty attaches no value to products from abroad; your nation's cunningly wrought and strange wars do not appeal to me in the least....For the future, O King, if you will keep your subjects in order and strengthen your national defenses, I shall hold you in high esteem, notwithstanding your remoteness....If you lovingly accept our sovereignty and show dutiful submission, there is really no need for these yearly appearances at our Court to prove that you are our vassal.

There followed a century of Western pressures to dismantle the Chinese empire. The Japanese and Russians also entered the game. In fact, one ventures to predict that China's claims on Soviet-held territory gained through "unequal treaties" may, in time, become a more significant issue than the question of Taiwan.

The American policy toward China in the future is more likely to be based on pragmatism than on a simple sentiment, "strategic consensus," or bitter hostility. One hopes this new sensibility will lead the United States to examine its policy options with an eye to advancing its own moral commitments as it attends to particular problems of power and diplomacy. As Hans Morgenthau wrote: Many deplore the ethical limitations of international relations, but "if we ask ourselves what statesmen and diplomats are capable of doing to further the power objectives of their respective nations and what they actually do, we realize that they do less than they probably could and less than they actually did in other periods of history."

Whether such efforts will be made in the months ahead is an open question. The new Soviet Party leader, Yuri Andropov, has reconfirmed the USSR's dedication to advancing the cause of Marxism-Leninism, saying that "it is the duty of every Communist to close more tightly our ranks, to rally still closer around the Central Committee of the Party and to do at one's respective post in one's life as much as possible for the welfare of the Soviet people, for strengthening peace and for the triumph of communism." The Soviets' continuing commitment and resolve presumably is the basis for Nixon's advice on American policy toward China. But setting policy goals is a more complicated process than that, and the dangers must be weighed. If peace among members of the international community is the overarching goal, its best hope lies in the skilled appreciation of all the ambiguities at play among the Chinese, the Soviets, and the Americans and a properly nuanced response to opportunities and hazards along the way.