

## Some Thoughts about China

No nation holds sway for long. In the 19th century Britain was at its zenith and in the 20th century the USA had its moment in the sun. Will the 21st century be China's moment in the spotlight? That seems a distinct possibility.

What the United States did to Native Americans since the late 17th century, China has done to Tibetans since 1950s: attempt to mold an foreign culture to their own norms and kill or imprison any who resist. And the way the USA handled Native Americans after 1968 is likely how Chinese will handle Tibetans after 2160: once economic and political dominance is firmly assured, they can afford to be "liberal" and allow symbolic vestiges of independence. Once a minority group is firmly under control, the dominant group then can make symbolic gestures of largess.

When you attempt to see life without ideological distortions, the ironies are amazing. China, reputedly a bastion of communism, is now fueling capitalist enterprises throughout the world thanks to industrial outsourcing. And the United States, claiming to be a bastion of democracy, is probably doing more to impair liberty and human rights than any country in the world. Its clandestine operations are "above the law" and any government that is not pro-US – no matter how democratic – is in peril. Regardless of the ideological system countries reputedly endorse, to a large degree countries seem to work in their own Machiavellian self-interests. We need to create more "win win" scenarios in which nations work together for the global good instead of selfish short-term interests.

The myopicism of most nations is alarming. Most Japanese are unaware of how deeply they wounded Chinese and Korean pride from 1895 to 1945. Most Americans are unaware of the subtle ways they are currently wounding Chinese pride and alienating India. And most Chinese are unaware of how they have hurt other people in southeast Asia. Hubris invariably causes suffering.

Mao Zedong was skilled at shifting his rhetoric to retain power. Moreover, he did not hesitate to use violence and propaganda to suit his ends. Though he unified the nation in some positive ways, he was overly obsessed with personal power. Not unlike an ancient emperor, he build up a cult of personality worship. The Chinese people have paid a heavy price for worshipping this icon. I firmly believe transpersonal principles and basic laws must count more than any given leader's personality or whims. That is why it is essential to limit the term of office of leaders. We must also make constitutional laws difficult to change. Anyone becoming a "chairman for life" is on a mistaken path.

China and Taiwan: not unlike a married couple wishing they could divorce, but too worried about loosing face to do the paperwork properly.

China has swallowed Tibet: that's a fact. However, the chemistry isn't complete – in the process of "digesting" Tibet, China itself will inevitably change. Tibetan thought will creep into Chinese consciousness. Any nation wishing to swallow up another nation should learn this lesson: be careful what you eat, because to some degree you become what you devour. This is what happened to Rome after swallowing Greece and Palestine. It is also what happened to the Moghuls after swallowing much of the Middle East. And Tibetan consciousness is now flowing into the Chinese psyche: the impact is not merely one-way. The influence on both sides will be powerful for many generations.

Most Americans tend to forget the past quickly and focus on the present moment. By contrast, too many Chinese are so obsessed with the past that they lose sight of the present.

The movement from communism to plutocracy in China appears almost inevitable. Yet if plutocracy stretches too far and the gap between the rich and poor widens beyond a critical point, some form of radical neo-communism and major turmoil seems likely to emerge.

There are many things China is rightfully proud of: its wonderful literature and art, food and tea, its knowledge of acupuncture and the martial arts, its traditional recycling methods, and basic understanding of how to enable large numbers of people to live on limited land in a degree of relative harmony. Not perfect harmony – but most of the time, with some modicum of peace. That is an accomplishment worth emulating.

On paper, there is no racism in China. In reality, it would seem that many Chinese do have racial feelings that are not doubt uncomfortable to publicly acknowledge. Perhaps more than we like to concede, humans are tribal animals and some type of racial awareness appears to be present in many human interactions. However, in the long run I am optimistic: through education our notions of what is "self" and "other" can be expanded. I do believe there will be a day when skin color is considered as largely irrelevant and many people on this planet will have multiple ethnic heritages.

Three things I wish China could rectify: (1) the way many laws exist only on paper without enforcement, (2) the widespread use of capital punishment, and (3) a lack of independence of the press and judicial system – I believe it is healthy for every nation to have an independent press and also a court system that is free of undue political pressure that functions on the basis of law, not personalities.

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