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## China and the Future

(Lecture 3 in the Dorothy J. Killam Memorial Lectures, Fall 1978, on the theme "1984 and Beyond".)

The subject of my lecture is "China and the Future." When I last lectured at Dalhousie University twelve years ago, I spoke about "China—Past and Present."

The past and present was a subject upon which I felt I could speak with some authority. I have devoted a lifetime of study and research to China's past, and have been an eye-witness to her present, and indeed, for part of that time, an active participant in it. That lecture, first published in the *Dalhousie Review* in 1966, and its sequel (The Centennial Lecture given at the University of Prince Edward Island) entitled *China as the Third World Power* have often been reprinted. I felt therefore that on that subject I could not only speak with authority but to some purpose.

But to speak of China's future caused me, at first, some uneasiness. Was one leaving the firm ground of attested sources and scholarly evidence and straying (against all the rules of the academy) into the fanciful world of clairvoyance and crystal gazing? I at least reassured myself that this was not necessarily so. Much of what I had said in my previous lectures has since been borne out by the events of the intervening twelve years. My theme then was that contemporary China can best be understood in the light of China's past. I saw, and insisted in 1966, that continuity in change was a more plausible basis of understanding China than the view, prevalent in the West at that time, that the "Communist takeover" in 1949 as it was called marked an abrupt and irrevocable change of direction.

Certain political scientists at that time disagreed with this strongly. They felt then that at last enigmatic China could be understood in terms of familiar Marxist models. Reference to China's past they felt was humanistic obscuration. One University in the United States went so far

as to divide its Department of Chinese Studies into two departments—one for pre- and one for post-1949 Chinese Studies. This seemed to me simplistic, raising more problems than it solved. Clearly events in China could not be understood purely in Marxist terms. The contradictions were too stark. Even journalists from the Iron Curtain countries recognized this. They were as much perplexed by “the puzzling manifestations of the Chinese mind” (as one journalist described it) as those of their Western counterparts.

My colleagues in the political sciences today are less assured of the value of their earlier models. Events have proved only too clearly the limitations of those exercises. Balzac spoke of “*le pays réel*” and “*le pays légal*.” Legality—the world of laws, of administrative divisions and offices—was one thing, the real world—the customs and religions of the inhabitants of a country, their opinions and values and world-views—quite another. No historian of China’s past and present can disregard this very real dichotomy—either in his reading of the two thousand years of Confucian historical writing (a *pays légal par excellence!*) or in the pronouncements of modern Chinese political theorists. All my own reading led me to see far more of continuity in contemporary China than change, more innovation in expression than of practice—in short, that Mao’s China, viewed in the long term, was in a very real sense in the mainstream of the long continuum of Chinese history.

This has become particularly clear in the events of the last two years since the death of Mao. The mechanisms of dynastic succession have repeated their off-charted historical course. A declining and corrupt régime replaced by an authoritarian figure. Popular toleration for draconian measures to revive the fortunes of a restored dynasty. The regaining of national *amour-propre*. A period of intense activity and achievement. The Great Wall under the Ch’in. The Grand Canal under the Sui. And the hydro-electric dams under Mao. These are the stock features in Chinese history of dynastic change. The Mandate of Heaven is withdrawn from the old and bestowed on the new. Nothing was so telling in the fall of Chiang K’ai-shek as the Communist accusation that he had “lost the Mandate.” (And here let me interpose, that the Chinese word which we misleadingly translate as “revolution” is *ke-ming*, which means literally, “reverting to the Mandate.” The emotional undertones of these two words are quite different in East and West).

It is not only I as an historian who sees these parallels. Mao is often compared in China by both his critics and his admirers alike to Ch’in Shih Huang-ti, the First Emperor (c. 2nd B.C.—2nd A.D.). Indeed Ch’in became a pseudonym for Mao, to avoid the impiety of mentioning

him by name. He was likened to Ch'in by his admirers as the abolisher of feudalism and as the architect of China's first unified empire; as the builder of the Great Wall and the delineator of modern China's boundaries. He was likened to Ch'in by his critics, particularly in his later years, for the despotism, for which Confucian historians have execrated Ch'in ever since, and for the excesses of a growing megalomania. Ch'in eventually died a madman.

The historical parallels have been particularly pertinent in the past two years. After Ch'in's death he was denounced in a famous essay, "The faults of Ch'in." Mao, the authoritarian reviver of the fortunes of a dynasty, is now in a not dissimilar process of decanonization, at first, indirectly by an exposé of the evils of his wife. The intrigues of the concubines and court eunuchs at the close of an epoch is a classic Chinese happening. Madame Mao and the Gang of Four have now been made to personify and to provide a scapegoat for all the un-Chinese excesses of a draconian régime. More recently the process has begun of the gentle dethroning of Mao himself. These matters were predictable. The only surprising element to me is the speed and thoroughness with which they have happened. This extrapolation from the past as a productive method of understanding the present emboldens me to extrapolate further into the immediate future and to suggest in this light the shape of things to come in 1984 and after. This then will be the main burden of my approach to China in the Future. For only when we understand where China has come from can we tell where she is likely to go.

But, a secondary theme of these lectures—as the title of the series suggests—is to ask to what extent are we, or for my immediate purposes, China, heading towards the traumatic nightmare of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*? In the early stages of the Chinese People's Republic, it seemed to many Western observers to possess all the Orwellian ingredients. Big Brother in the person of the "Great Helmsman," Double-think and Newspeak in the Little Red Book and the journalism of the *Jen-min Jih-pao*. But was this really so?

During the summer I re-read *Nineteen Eighty-four*, this time trying to imagine how it would appear to a Chinese, and conversely to try to imagine what cautionary vision a Chinese Orwell might have of China in 1984.

Let me here explain that after a life-time of immersion, as it were, in Chinese literature, in historical writing and philosophy, a sort of composite picture has grown in my mind of this hypothetical Chinese. He is not the Chinese student you may have met in real life, or indeed any particular Chinese, but a personification, if you will, of the Chinese ethos:

the end result of three thousand years of conditioning in the thoughts and values, and the historical experiences of the Chinese people. Although, among individual Chinese, immense variety is found, there is a common denominator of accepted values that characterizes and distinguishes all Chinese.

It is a concept I found useful and put to some effect during the Second World War. The late General Chiang K'ai-shek, at the Cairo Conference, I think recognized this. At one stage he said to me, "Ni shih pan-ko Chung-kuo-jen, ni kei t'a-men chiang." "You are half-Chinese—you explain to them what we mean."

The first reaction to Orwell I imagined my Chinese reader to have would be that *Nineteen Eighty-four* is a quintessentially Western book. It is hardly a book a Chinese could have written. And by that he would mean that the values Orwell in his apocalyptic vision fears will be destroyed are those that have emerged from deep within our own Western history, in short, are peculiarly Western values. If we can sum up, as Croce does, the history of Western civilization as the story of the pursuit of individual liberty, of the emergence, dignity and ultimate supremacy of the individual, it is precisely the deprivation of that liberty that Orwell fears.

My Chinese reader, if he understood Western history sufficiently well, would see how deeply that preoccupation with individualism lies in our culture. He would recognize its beginnings in Greece with its democratic ideals, its legacy from Rome, with the rights of individuals encoded in laws, in the emergence of the sovereign state and the long history of social emancipation that has led to our modern democracy. In short, Orwell fears that we may lose the values that for two thousand years we have sought to realize. It would not surprise my reader—given China's obsession with and the influential part that history plays in the preservation of Chinese viability—to see that Orwell's dictator realizes that his only chance of success will be to have all sense of history eliminated from our memory. If Orwell's fears then are for the fate of Western civilization, would my Chinese reader fear a similar fate for China? I think not.

Let us suppose that a Chinese Orwell were to write a Chinese *Nineteen Eighty-four*. Would he view the revolution of 1949 as the beginning of the obliteration of his cherished individuality? I do not think so. Looking back into his own history he would find that from its seminal period, the Age of the Philosophers, and throughout the long history of dynastic China, the pursuit of the ideal has been towards the virtues of order, of social cohesion, of the apotheosis of the joint-family and the harmonious state—of the collective, rather than the individualistic ideal.

He might well view the emergence of Mao's China as a realization of the classic search for unity and social order, as a modern expression of quintessentially Chinese historical ideals. This is a theme which I developed at great length in my previous lectures. It was Mao's genius to interpret an alien philosophy in familiar and acceptable Chinese terms.

Maoism was superimposed upon a society historically conditioned in a way very differently from our own in the West. The Western response to Marxism is not the same as that of the Chinese. Whatever else one may say of the People's Republic it is the almost unanimous view of countless Western visitors to China that the present régime is acceptable to the Chinese people.

Even the commune—so criticized on doctrinal grounds by the Soviet Union—has recognizable affinities with the ideal community, immortalized by Mencius two thousand years ago. It has even been suggested that Micius (a contemporary of Mencius) rather than Marx, was the first Communist.

What then, would a Chinese Orwell regard as the fate to be feared in 1984? He would, I think, fear the break-down of social and political order leading to the loss of Chinese sovereignty. If the apotheosis of our ideals are the realization of individual liberty, his would be of the ultimate value of social order and harmony.

Chinese political philosophy begins two thousand years ago by addressing itself to the problem of social and political unity. It was born in a period of disunity. The Hundred Schools differed immensely as to the methods by which this unity might be achieved, but are one as to the goal to be reached. China's Periclean Age (6th - 3rd Cent. B.C.) finally ushered in the First Empire and, with it, the promised unification of China. However strange this may appear to us, this period—coterminous in time with the Roman Empire—is the constantly cited historical parallel in Communist China today for its own condition. And if the historical parallel is pursued further, Ch'in ushered in the Han Empire—a golden age, a period of fruitful consolidation after a painful initiation.

After two thousand years of historical debate, a strong and united China has always been its ideal. Its golden periods have been characterized by commanding leaders, served by a Confucian (i.e. educated) elite, the scholar-administrators. The latter are one of China's treasured legacies. It has two thousand years of experience in the art of large-scale administration. The concentration of power at the summit has never been questioned—the Imperial succession, the Mandate of Heaven, never challenged. In form if not in expression this has con-

tinued to the present. In one sense the Emperor and the Confucian elite and the Leader and the Party (whether of the Kuo-min-tang or of the Communists) differ more in expression and nomenclature than in substance or structure.

The mechanism of protest has never been directed at monolithic rule, but to question the benevolence or otherwise of those who dictated it. A dynasty collapses when its rulers "lose virtue." The sanctions for change are, to use a classic Chinese phrase, "when the sufferings of the common people become unendurable." The criterion of the virtue of the dynasty is that "the common people prosper." Under periods of harsh repression local leaders emerge, and break-down at the centre follows. China, as the Chinese expression goes, "shatters like a broken tile." Regionalism, in modern terms "war-lord-ism", replaces the strong centre. The country thus weakened becomes prey to external intervention.

China's traumatic periods, not only under the inroads of Western imperialism as in the 19th century, but under Tartar, Mongol and Manchu occupation, have been those periods of loss of sovereignty. For half of Imperial history, China has been under some form of alien occupation.

Of such, I think, would our Chinese Orwell, in the light of his history, see as the dangers of the future: a breakdown of centralized power, internal disorder and the consequent vulnerability to external intrusion.

Is China then, heading towards Orwell's 1984? If by that is meant a fear, which I imagine all we in the West have of the destruction of our own inalienable rights as individuals (and I for my part hope that we in the West heed Orwell's warnings) the answer must be "no." This is not the central thrust of the Chinese tradition. My Chinese Orwell rather would find traumatic the breakdown of national and social cohesion, the reversion to chaos, historically marking the end of all Chinese dynasties and the loss of sovereignty.

Thinking of China in Orwellian terms is a useful exercise in understanding China. It is a salutary reminder, at this stage in the 20th century when other and alien civilizations are once again in the ascendant—those of Islam, of India, of China and Japan—that we must not make the mistake of thinking Western ideals and aspirations as being somehow a projection of the universal aspirations of all mankind. Neither should we rely too much upon the models of social and economic behavior, evolved from and appropriate to Western experience, as useful measures of Chinese realities. It is precisely for these reasons that Professor John Fairbank, the ranking American sinologist, recently in an article in the *New York Review of Books* took serious issue with President Carter's introduction of Human Rights as a universal goal and as a

factor in U.S. foreign policy. The inalienable rights of Americans, he argued, might appear to the Chinese as inalienable wrongs. In the Chinese tradition, the emphasis is upon inalienable duties rather than upon inalienable rights. Where inalienable rights run counter to the common good, the common good should take precedence.

Let us turn back then to my first thesis. If China's present can best be understood by extrapolation from its past, can a further extrapolation suggest its course in the future? I think it can, not merely because such extrapolation has proved revealing in the recent past, but because historical extrapolation is part of the very decision-making process in contemporary China.

I can best illustrate this by quoting from a slightly different context the observations of the ranking Professor of Sino-Vietnamese, until recently, in the United States:

Vietnam is probably one of the contemporary world's purest examples of a history-dependent, history-obsessed society, in which even the most routine day-by-day political decision-making seems practically unimaginable without some reference to history. The United States is probably the world's purest example of a society which is perpetually trying to abolish history, to avoid thinking in historical terms, to associate dynamism with premeditated amnesia.

What is true of Vietnam—an outspur of the Sino-cultural sphere—is even truer of China. History there is a decision-making process.

During the 19th century, China's dynastic fortunes were at the low ebb of a cycle. It was a period when China was particularly vulnerable to external exploitation. The intrusion of the West at this particular time of China's troubles greatly coloured Western ideas about China. These ideas were a cruel caricature that persisted throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. In China's mind, however, cognisant of its past greatness, it was more an unhappy interlude. But it was also the period of the apogee of Western Imperial expansion. The Western powers were able to impose upon China humiliating treaties and unconscionable concessions. Shaken under this challenge, the response of Chinese intellectuals was two-fold: one a backward-looking one to restore China's historic role as the cultural and political centre of the Sino-cultural sphere in Asia—to restore in Chinese minds, the Middle Kingdom to the middle again—a role its historically minded thinkers saw as one hitherto unchallenged for two thousand years; and a forward-looking one, to learn from its invaders the technology and political techniques that had given the West its temporary ascendancy. Both approaches—the conser-

vative one of not surrendering the traditional values of Chinese civilization (and much from the West, the Chinese thought was not worthy of emulation) and the innovating one, of learning from the West the technology, the lack of which had kept China at a disadvantage—evoked challenge and response. Given these two very broad generalizations the progress of China from 1884 - 1984 can be seen in perspective.

First the road to modernization.

It is difficult to convey to a Western audience the extent of the affront to Chinese sensibilities in the late 19th century with the discovery that its intellectual heritage, hitherto assumed to be superior to all others, was not sufficient in itself to protect its empire. Scholarship had been supreme in Chinese values and esteem for two thousand years. Learning had been the road to political preferment. The governing elite, for two millennia, had been selected by competitive examination in classical learning. The prestige of education had been supreme. The challenge of Western science and technology, however, had shaken China's confidence in the sufficiency of its own traditions. Its response under challenge was to seek somehow to preserve its own traditions while at the same time supplementing them with science and technology. From 1880 onwards Chinese students have gone abroad in a concerted effort to make good that deficiency. The process continues to the present. Recently the Peking Government has announced that it proposes to send 25,000 more students abroad for just such a purpose.

One challenge then to the tradition was an intellectual one; the response was to acquire selectively those elements thought to be absent in the tradition, science and technology. Readers of Needham's *Science and Civilisation in China* will know that China's scientific heritage is by no means negligible. Printing and papermaking, gunpowder and the magnetic compass are its more familiar accomplishments. But those accomplishments arose more from the empirical tradition, from artisans rather than from scholars. Modernization meant raising science to the prestigious sphere of scholarship, a position it currently holds in China.

To the raising of the prestige of scientific learning must be added the movement to broaden the base of intellectual endeavour from an elite, which preserved its autonomy by the use of Classical Chinese, to a wider constituency by giving prestige to the vernacular language. The clear speech movement of the twenties broadened the base, as it were, of the prestige of learning.

One aberration in the tradition was the period, now referred to by the Chinese as the "five lost years," when the universities and schools were upended by the Cultural Revolution. By relegating that to the machina-



tions of the Gang of Four, today the universities are reverting to their traditional roles and curricula.

Looking forward then to 1984, I should expect that the wealth of the Chinese learned tradition, its impressive accomplishments in the forming of the Chinese ethos, its traditional prestige in the Chinese value system—after the vicissitudes it has suffered in the early part of this century and its acceptance now of the respectability of science and to some extent of Western medicine—will produce impressive results. Its prestige, at all events, seems secure under the present régime.

I do not want to appear too provincial about this, but in the society in which I presently work—where the value of formal education is constantly downplayed and where our research is suffering from severe financial restraints—I see, with some alarm, that all the indications are that the Chinese are proceeding in quite the opposite direction. The consequences, if this trend continues, for 1984 must be frighteningly obvious.

In its quest for sovereignty, order and security, in serious jeopardy in 1884, China in the last hundred years has made considerable progress. Its traditional institutions so seriously challenged then have evolved a response both innovative and traditional. In 1911 China made a brief experiment in Republicanism with very unprofitable results, except that it achieved the overthrow of an alien dynasty and prepared the way for a Chinese one. In 1927 China reverted to the monolithic state—both Leader and Party modelled ostensibly on the Russian experiment, but with features only too clearly deriving from the dynastic past. The *kuo-min-tang* achieved at least one of China's historical rôles, the regaining of Chinese sovereignty from Japan. But it was to its rival, led by Mao, that the other historical ideal—the well-ordered state—was restored, after the near anarchy of the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War. Thus has been fulfilled another cycle in the long history of Cathay. I have already spoken of the history of China subsequent to 1949, where historical parallels suggest that the cycle is continuing to follow its predestined course.

It seems to me, looking forward to 1984, that all the indications point to a period of political stability and economic growth. Under Hua Kuo-feng and Teng Hsiao-ping, the benefits of the revolution are being retained, while its harshnesses are being softened. The Han Dynasty (and contemporary Chinese writers like to refer to themselves as “Men of Han”) reaped the benefits of Ch'in's reforms, while repudiating its excesses, and ushered in a period of stability and prosperity.

It would have been difficult to foresee in 1884 that the traditional role of China in Asia—that of cultural hegemony, “suzerainty” is the Chinese term, so long cherished—might ever be restored. Looking forward to 1984 one sees, however, the historical role not only reasserted but considerably reinforced. China is not only emerging as the dominant power in Asia, but as a Third World Power.

But I must explain precisely what I mean by this.

The era of the supremacy of the two “super-powers”, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., is passing and is giving way to a trilateral balance. In this balance China, as it were, provides the third leg of a tripod. This I think may make in the overall for greater stability. The options open to the smaller powers are greater. No longer, in the final resort, will they need to align inexorably with Moscow or Washington. The appearance of Peking holds out a third alternative. The area for independent manoeuvre will be greater.

Mao Tse-tung would have expressed this somewhat differently. Describing the rise of Soviet and American power upon the ashes of the erstwhile colonial powers, he saw the role of “super-power” as one in which the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were attempting to reassert colonial domination under a different guise. This role for China and therefore the role of “super-power” he repudiated. In the Sino-centric world view, China stood, in Mao’s view, as the champion of what he called the “two intermediate zones”: the first, the developed countries, which, each in varying degrees, he saw as being under Soviet or American hegemony; and the second, the developing world, the former colonies, each of which he alleged to be the object of super-power rivalry. As champion, China envisaged itself as apart from but an equal of the other two super-powers.

Whatever the Chairman’s interpretation of this may be, he saw, as clearly as did Mr. Henry Kissinger, that the realities of the focus of power now lie, not solely with Moscow and Washington, but too with Peking.

But, it seems to me, the Chairman’s view of China’s role in the world, does not fully explain the trends of Chinese foreign policy and the directions it has in fact taken and is likely to take. In this, as recent events have shown, the Chairman’s writings are not an infallible guide. I prefer—and the explanation fits the facts more precisely—an older and more historically based view.

Under the Han Empire, a long and sustained debate on foreign policy took place, the results of which have informed the whole of Imperial history since. If I can summarize that debate briefly: from the hitherto

tacit assumption that all barbarians were subjects of the Empire, the reality of Hunnish military invasions of Han China brought the recognition that there might, after all, be "two suns in the sky." In short, foreign sovereignty had to be recognized. Two schools of thought competed thereafter for acceptance. The "forward school" believed in the reduction by military might and occupation, in short, a policy of conquest and colonization. At horrendous cost this policy was, for a time, pursued and ultimately discredited. Instead a conception arose of ensuring security, by creating around China a protective glacis, an outer ring of independent powers, offering nominal allegiance (i.e. recognizing Chinese suzerainty) in exchange for non-interference in their domestic affairs. Rather than military intervention, it was thought policy should be aimed at "setting barbarian against barbarian." This policy in broad principle has governed Chinese relations with its neighbours ever since. Chinese sensitivities are, however, acutely touched if any external power usurps "suzerainty" in these areas.

I would not care to oversimplify this, but Chinese foreign policy since 1949 is better understood in this traditional light, rather than in the light of a policy pursued from Marxist doctrinaire premises alone. China has supported a military dictatorship in Pakistan and opposed a socialist democracy in India. It has consistently supported the Royal House of Cambodia, but feels hostility to Communist North Vietnam. It is presently courting the Royal Family of Thailand. It reacts violently to the assumption of suzerainty by external powers in its defensive rim. It views the U.S. intervention in Korea and Taiwan and the Soviet intervention in Vietnam in this light. It has pre-empted Soviet power in Tibet, and is highly sensitive to Russian inroads in Central Asia, and, more recently, an event of very great importance, Peking has signed a Peace Treaty with, of all Asian Powers, Imperial Japan. Thus, at least as seen from Peking, the main thrust of Chinese foreign policy is to pursue its time-honoured goal of securing China with a defensive ring of friendly powers owing suzerainty (little more than ritual acknowledgement) in exchange for the recognizing of the legitimacy of the régimes of its client-states, but reacting sharply to the assumption by any external power, of influence in them.

At one time during the Vietnam War the "domino theory" gained some credence. Had China then embarked (even if that were feasible) on military adventures in South East Asia in the name of Communism, it would have been running counter to two thousand years of traditional dealings with these countries.

Apart from defence, the Sino-cultural sphere has further historical justification. Almost all of the client-states regard China, in some sense, as cultural mentors, and this includes Japan. So, it seems to me likely that in 1984 China will continue to pursue the goals of Asian stability, in the terms in which it has traditionally always sought them.

To summarize. China is a world apart. Just as we in the West have our seminal roots deep in our own history, so too has China roots in hers. Taking the long view, "China's Destiny", as Chiang K'ai-shek once called it, is not only a historical one, but its pursuit is deliberately conditioned by history. If from that historical tradition we can extrapolate explanations of China's present from the past, so too, presumably, it is not unreasonable to extrapolate from the present to the future. In that view I see in 1984 China reaping the benefits of another cataclysmic dynastic change, modifying its excesses and reverting increasingly to less alien and more Chinese norms. And that norm is a highly civilized and humane one. If China restores its pre-eminence in Asia, it promises an area of stability not only in Asia itself, but for the whole world.

## POSTSCRIPT

The views that I have expressed are those of a scholar *en chambre*. My ivory tower is hemmed in by Chinese books, and to those beyond the ivory tower might seem to be obscured by them. I am all too aware that the practical man of affairs may view my ideas of China much as Marco Polo's compatriots viewed his fabulous account of Cathay. Let me then cite two men of affairs, both Canadian Ambassadors to the Republic of China.

The first, a one-time student of mine, took from me a course in the origins of Chinese foreign policy. He was kind enough, recently in addressing the Canadian Club, to confess that the ideas I first suggested to him struck him at the time as highly fanciful, but that after years of service in China and seeing Chinese foreign policy in the Chinese context those ideas were closer to reality than his own prior pre-conceptions. And, in speaking of the present Ambassador in China, John Fraser said in the *Globe and Mail*, "He gives primary importance to an almost metaphysical concept that is caught up with his own attitudes towards the country." Anyone, I might add, with insight into the Chinese ethos is in danger of the accusation of being 'metaphysical.' But quoting the Ambassador he continues, "China is a great country with an extraordinary future potential. It is a future that is crucial to Asia and of major importance to the world and it is in the Canadian interest to keep informed and involved."