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### China: Retrospect and Prospect (speech)

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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F O R R E L E A S E F R I D A Y P. M.'S

LECTURE BY SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

Sponsored by the  
Maureen and Mike Mansfield Endowment  
(The University of Montana Foundation)  
at the  
University of Montana, Missoula, Montana  
Friday, March 29, 1968, 10:30 a.m., MST

CHINA: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

Viet Nam is heavy on the heart of the nation. The Vietnamese war is a tragedy. It is a tragedy in the American lives which it claims. It is a tragedy in the death and devastation which, in the name of salvation, it has spread throughout Viet Nam.

My views on United States policy respecting Viet Nam are no secret. I have stated them, restated them, and elaborated them many times. I have cautioned against an ever-deepening military involvement in that conflict. I am opposed to any increase in it today. I believe that the way out of a barbarous situation is not to go further into it.

The first step towards peace, in my judgment, is to concentrate and consolidate the U. S. military effort and to escalate the peace-effort, looking towards the negotiation of an honorable end of the conflict.

That, in brief, is the way I feel about Viet Nam. That is the way I have felt about it for a long time. The President knows it. The Senate knows it. Montana knows it.

What I have to say to you, today, touches only indirectly on Viet Nam. My remarks are intended to go beyond Viet Nam to what may well be the roots of the war. In this first lecture of the series on international affairs, I wish to address your attention to what is the great void in the foreign relations of this nation--to the question of China.

As a nation, we have lived through a generation in only heresay association with a third of the entire human race. At the inception of this void, we were engaged in a costly and indecisive conflict in Korea--on China's northeast frontier. Two

decades later, we are engaged once again in a costly and indecisive conflict, this time on China's southeast frontier. These two great military involvements on the Chinese periphery are not unrelated to the absence of relevant contact between China and the United States.

Sooner or later a tenuous truce may be achieved in Viet Nam even as a truce was achieved in Korea. In my judgment, however, there will be no durable peace in Korea, Viet Nam, or anywhere else in Asia unless there is a candid confrontation with the problems of the Sino-U. S. relationship.

China needs peace if the potentials of its culture are to be realized. This nation needs peace for the same reason. In this day and age, the world needs peace for civilized survival. You young people have the greatest stake in peace. For that reason, I ask you to look beyond Viet Nam, behind Korea, to what may well be the core of the failure of peace in Asia--to the U. S.-Chinese estrangement of two decades.

In 1784, Robert Morris, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, sent the first American clipper ship to trade with China. The year that President George Washington took the oath of office, 1789, fourteen American ships were riding at anchor in the Pearl River off Canton in South China.

There are no American ships in Chinese ports today. There have not been for almost twenty years. In twenty years, hardly an American doctor, scientist, businessman, journalist, student, or even a tourist has set foot in China.

Across the Pacific Ocean, we and the Chinese glare at one another, uncomprehendingly, apprehensively, and suspiciously. In the United States, there is fear of the sudden march of Chinese armies into Southeast Asia. In China, there is fear of a tighter American encirclement and American nuclear attack.

We see millions of Chinese soldiers poised on China's frontiers. We see leaders who threaten in a most violent way. We see an internal Chinese turmoil to confirm our fears of

irrationality and recklessness. Finally, we see a growing nuclear power, with the looming spectre of a full-fledged Chinese intercontinental ballistic missile force.

On the other hand, the Chinese see themselves surrounded by massive American military power. They see U. S. naval, ground, and air bases scattered through Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Okinawa, Guam, the Philippines, and Thailand. They see over half a million American troops in neighboring Viet Nam and hundreds of thousands more nearby. They see tremendous nuclear capability with missiles zeroed in on Chinese cities. They see the United States as "occupying" the Chinese island of Taiwan and supporting a Chinese government whose declared aim is the recapture of the mainland. And they see, too, what they describe as a growing collusion between the United States and the Soviet Union, a country which they believe infringes China's borders, threatens to corrupt the Chinese revolution and exercises an unwelcome influence throughout Asia.

We and the Chinese have not always looked at one another with such baleful mistrust. The American images of China have fluctuated and shifted in an almost cyclical way. There has been the image of the China of wisdom, intelligence, industry, piety, stoicism, and strength. This is the China of Marco Polo, Pearl Buck, Charlie Chan, and heroic resistance to the Japanese during World War II.

On the other hand, there has been the image of the China of cruelty, barbarism, violence, and faceless hordes. This is the China of drum-head trials, summary executions, Fu Manchu, and the Boxer Rebellion--the China that is summed up in the phrase "yellow peril."

Throughout our history, these two images have alternated, with first one predominant and then the other. In the eighteenth century, we looked up to China as an ancient civilization--superior in many aspects of technology, culture, and social order and surrounded by an air of splendid mystery.

Respect turned to contempt, however, with China's quick defeat by the British in the Opium War of 1840. There followed acts of humiliation of China such as participation in extra-territorial treaty rights and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Attitudes shifted again in the early twentieth century to one of benevolence largely in consequence of the influence of missionaries. There were more missionaries in China from the United States than from any other country. More American missionaries served in China than anywhere else in the world. The Chinese became, for this nation, a guided, guarded, and adored people.

Chinese resistance to the Japanese invasion in 1937 produced another shift from benevolence to admiration. At the end of the Second World War, admiration was displaced by disappointment and frustration, as the wartime truce between Nationalist and Communist forces collapsed in cataclysmic internal strife. This nation became profoundly disenchanted with China, a disenchantment which was replaced abruptly in 1949 by hostility.



The hostility was largely a reaction, of course, to the coming to power of a Communist regime on the Chinese mainland. We did not interpret this event as a consequence of the massive difficulties and the vast inner weaknesses of a war-torn China. Rather, we saw it almost as an affront to this nation. We saw it as a treacherous extension of the Soviet steam-roller policies which had reduced Eastern and Central Europe to subservience at the end of World War II.

Then, in 1948, came a Communist coup in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet attempt to blockade Berlin. The triumph of a Communist government in China followed immediately after these events in Europe. The nation was shaken to its fingertips.

Still, the press of events continued relentlessly. In June 1950, the North Koreans launched a sudden attack on South Korea. The Chinese forces intervened in the war in November of that year. The United States was brought into a major military confrontation in which, for the first time, the Chinese were enemies and not allies.

After these events, the assumptions of American policy towards China were revised. An effort was made to meet both the concern and outrage respecting China which existed in this nation and the revolutionary militancy of the new Chinese regime in Asia. Policy was cast anew on the premise that the government on the Chinese mainland was an aggressor which, subject to directions from Moscow, would use force to impose international Communism on Asia. Conversely, it was assumed that if the endorsement of the free nations were withheld, this regime which was said to be "alien" to the Chinese people--some sort of overgrown puppet of Moscow--would wither and eventually collapse.

On this basis, recognition was not extended to Peking. The official view was that the National Government, which had retreated to the island of Taiwan, continued to speak for all of China. We cut off all trade with the mainland and did what could be done to encourage other countries to follow suit. In a similar fashion, we led a diplomatic campaign year

after year against the seating of the Chinese People's Republic in the United Nations. We drew an arc of military alliances on the seaward side of China and undergirded them with the deployment of massive American military power in bases throughout the Western Pacific.

Much has happened to call into question the assumptions in which these policies towards China have been rooted. In the first place, the People's Republic has shown itself to be neither a part of a Communist monolith nor a carbon copy of Soviet Russia. The fact is that, of the numerous divisions which have arisen within the Communist world, the differences between Moscow and Peking have been the most significant. They so remain today although the more rasping edges of the conflict appear somewhat tempered by the war in Viet Nam.

At the same time, the government on the mainland has not only survived, it has provided China with a functioning leadership. Under its direction, Chinese society has achieved a

degree of economic and scientific progress, apparently sufficient for survival of an enormous and growing population and sophisticated enough to produce thermo-nuclear explosions.

In the last two years, the so-called Cultural Revolution in China has rekindled what has been a periodic expectation that the Peking government is on the verge of collapse and the way is open for a military return to the mainland of the National Government on Taiwan. There seems to be little doubt that the turmoil in China has caused serious disruptions. What appears in conflict in the cultural revolution, however, is not the Peking structure as such but the adequacy of its ideological content. That would be a far cry from the kind of popular revolution which might be expected to open the doors to a new regime.

In any event, the worst of the upheavals within China appear to have ended months ago, without any irreparable break in the continuity of the government or the operations of the economy. It is the height of folly to envision, in the

present situation, an occasion for the overthrow of the Peking government by external military pressures. Indeed, what would be better calculated to end, overnight, the remaining ferment on the mainland than a plausible threat to the security of China or an actual attack on Chinese territory?

If the People's Republic, then, is here to stay, what of the other assumption on which this nation's policy respecting China has long been based? What of the assumption that the Chinese government is an expanding and aggressive force? That it is restrained from sweeping through Asia because we have elected to meet its challenge along the 17th Parallel which divides the Northern and Southern parts of Viet Nam?

In recent years, the present Chinese government has not shown any great eagerness to use force to spread its  
elsewhere in Asia  
ideology/although Chinese armies have been employed in assertion of the traditional borders of China. To be sure, China has given enthusiastic encouragement and has promised to support wars of

national liberation. However, China has not participated directly in these wars and support, when it has been forthcoming, has been limited and circumspect.

In Viet Nam, for example, there is certainly Chinese encouragement and aid for the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. Chinese involvement, however, has been far more peripheral than our own. The enemy soldiers with whom we are compelled to grapple are all Vietnamese and, in fact, mostly South Vietnamese. At every stage of the war, the assistance we have provided to South Viet Nam has far exceeded the aid from China and from all outside sources to the Viet Cong and North Viet Nam--both in terms of men and materiel. There is Chinese equipment in South Viet Nam but there are no Chinese battalions. Even in North Viet Nam, Chinese manpower is reported to amount, at most, to one-tenth of our forces in Viet Nam, and the great bulk of these Chinese are labor troops, some involved in air-defense but most of them engaged in repairing bomb damage to roads, railroads, bridges, and the like.

Chinese actions in Tibet, and along the Himalayan frontier of India, are often cited as evidence of militant Chinese Communist aggression. The fact is, however, that Tibet has been regarded, for many decades, as falling within China's over-all boundaries. Not only the Peking government but also the Chinese National Government on Taiwan insists that Tibet belongs to China. India also acknowledges such to be the case. Indeed, American policy has never recognized Tibet as other than Chinese territory.

In the case of the border war with India in 1962, the Chinese Communists occupied territories which, again, not only they, but also the Chinese Nationalists, consider to be Chinese. It is not precisely characteristic of a militant expansionism, moreover, for a government to withdraw its military forces from a territory which they have invested. Yet, the Peking government did so from parts of India which were occupied in 1962 as well as from North Korea.

As for indirect aggression through economic means, China has been able to exert only a limited influence, either through aid or trade. In Africa and, indeed, in Southeast Asia, where attempts have been made to use trade and aid for political ends, the results have not been conspicuously successful. The fact is that most of China's trade today rests on a commercial-economic base. It is carried on largely with the non-Communist countries, including, may I add, many of our closest allies.

In short, to speak of China, today, as aggressively expansionist is to respond to Chinese words rather than Chinese actions. That is not to say that China will not pose all manner of threats tomorrow. If there are not enough nightmares already, consider the prospects when China's nuclear capabilities will have been extensively developed, along with a full-fledged inter-continental ballistic missile force.

Of course, there is an immense potential danger in China; but there is also an immense potential danger in every



other powerful nation in a world which has not yet learned how to maintain civilized survival in a nuclear age except on the razor's edge. Insofar as China is concerned, the fundamental question for us is not whether it is a danger, real or potential. The fundamental question is whether our present policies act to alleviate or to exacerbate the danger. Do we forestall the danger by jousting with the shadows and suspicions of the past? Do we help by a continuance in policies which do little if anything to lift the heavy curtain of mutual ignorance and hostility?

Like it or not, the present Chinese government is here to stay. Like it or not, China is a major power in Asia and is on the way to becoming a nuclear power. Is it, therefore, in this nation's interest and in the interest of world peace to put aside, once and for all, what have been the persistent but futile attempts to isolate China? Is it, therefore, in this nation's interest and in the interest of world peace to try conscientiously and consistently to do whatever we can do--and, admittedly, it is

not much--to reshape the relationship with the Chinese along more constructive and stable lines? In short, is it propitious for this nation to try to do what, in fact, the policies of most of the other Western democracies have already long since done regarding their Chinese relationships?

I must say that the deepening of the conflict in Viet Nam makes more difficult adjustments in policies respecting China. Indeed, the present course of events in Viet Nam almost insures that there shall be no changes. It is not easy to contemplate an alleviation with any nation which cheers on those who are engaged in inflicting casualties on Americans. Yet, it may well be that this alleviation is an essential aspect of ending the war and, hence, American casualties. That consideration, alone, it seems to me, makes desirable initiatives towards China at this time.

There are several obvious areas in which these initiatives would have relevance. Discriminatory restriction

on travel to China, for example, is certainly one of these areas. The Chinese may or may not admit Americans to their country, as they choose. But it is difficult to understand why our own government should in any way, shape, or form seek to stand in the way of the attempts of American citizens to breach the great wall of estrangement between the two nations. It is, indeed, ironic that during the past three years there have been more visits of Americans to North Viet Nam, a nation with which we are at war, than to China in the past thirteen years.

On the question of travel, it should be recalled that the Chinese were the first to suggest in 1956 that American journalists visit China. The suggestion was summarily rejected by the then Secretary of State. When, later, it was decided to accept the suggestion, the Chinese had changed their minds. Since that time, this nation has been more inclined to ease the travel barriers, on the basis of official agreement for exchanges of persons, but the Chinese have shown no disposition to enter into agreements or, for that matter, to admit Americans on any basis.

In any event, it seems to me that it is in the positive interest of this nation to encourage Americans, if they can gain entry, to travel to China. May I add, I refer not merely to the travel of selected journalists, doctors, and other specialists, as is now the policy, but to the travel of any responsible American. In the same fashion, it seems to me most appropriate to admit Chinese travelers to the United States under the same conditions that pertain to visitors from other Communist countries.

Trade is another area in which long-standing policies respecting China are open to serious question. Technically, this country still maintains an embargo on all trade with China. The basis for this policy is compliance with a voluntary resolution of the United Nations which was adopted at our behest at the time of the Korean conflict. It is doubtful that the resolution ever carried much weight among the trading nations of the world. In any case, it has long since been forgotten. Today, the principal nations in the China trade in rough order of importance are

the United Kingdom, Japan, the Soviet Union, West Germany, Australia, Canada, Italy, and France. Of all the great maritime nations, the United States alone clings to a total trade embargo with China. Moreover, we are also the only nation in the world which makes an effort to enforce what can best be described as a kind of secondary boycott of re-exported Chinese products.

These policies have had little visible economic impact, but they have had the most serious political repercussions. It is conceivable that, to the Chinese, the policies are something of an irritant. To friendly nations, however, they have been a source of constant friction. Most serious, their continuance over the years has injected unnecessary venom into the atmosphere of U. S.-Chinese relations.

Nor can it be said that the situation in Viet Nam has compelled the pursuit of the embargo and boycott. The fact is that these restrictions were in place before most Americans ever heard of Viet Nam, and, certainly, long before Americans

became involved in the war. If the Vietnamese conflict is now seen as justification for leaving these policies undisturbed, what is to be said of the existing attitude toward trade with other Communist countries?

The fact is that the European Communists are providing North Viet Nam and the Viet Cong with sophisticated military equipment which, from all reports, exceeds in value the assistance which comes from China. On what basis, then, is it meaningful to permit and even to encourage non-strategic trade with the European Communist countries while holding to a closed-door policy on trade with China? What constructive purpose is served by the distinction? Any rationalization of relations with China, it seems to me, will require an adjustment of this dual approach. We need to move in the direction of equal treatment of all Communist nations in trade matters, whatever that treatment may be.

In any event, problems of travel and trade are secondary obstacles in the development of a more stable relationship between China and the United States. There are other far more significant difficulties. I refer, principally, to the question of Taiwan and to the war in Viet Nam.

There is no doubt that the Chinese government seeks in Viet Nam a government which is friendly, if not subservient. Peking has not concealed, moreover, its desire for the withdrawal of American military power from Southeast Asia. It does not follow, however, that the price of peace in Southeast Asia is either Chinese domination or U. S. military intervention. That is a black and white oversimplification of a gray situation. The fact is that neither Burma on China's border nor Cambodia have been "enslaved" by China, despite an association of many years, despite periodic difficulties with the great state to the north and despite an absence of U. S. support, aid, or protection.

These two nations have managed to survive in a state of detachment from the power rivalries of the region. Furthermore, China is a signatory to the settlements which emerged from the Geneva Conferences of 1954 and 1962 and which contain at least a hope for a middle way to peace in Indo-China. So far as I am aware, the Chinese have not been found in direct or unilateral violation of these agreements. It is not impossible that a similar settlement, with Chinese participation, might be reached on Viet Nam.

Indeed, it is to be devoutly hoped that there can be a solution along these lines. Unless it is found, there is a very real danger--as the Korean experience shows--that the prolongation of war on China's frontiers may well bring about another U. S.-Chinese armed confrontation.

Perhaps the most important element in the rebuilding of stable relations with China is to be found in a solution of the problem of Taiwan. It may help to come to grips with this issue, if it is understood at the outset that the island of



Taiwan is Chinese. That is the position of the National Government of the Republic of China. That is the position of the People's Republic of China. For a quarter of a century, this common Chinese position has been reinforced by the policies and actions of the United States government.

Since that is the case, I do not believe that a solution to the Taiwan question is facilitated by its statement in terms of a two-China policy, as has been suggested in some quarters in recent years. The fact is that there is one China which happens to have been divided into two parts by events which occurred a long time ago. Key factors in the maintenance of peace between the separate segments have been the interposition of U. S. military power in the Taiwan straits, and the strengthening of the National Government of China by massive injections of economic and military aid.

This course was followed by the United States for many reasons, not the least of which was that it made possible

a refuge for dedicated allies and associates in the war against Japan. Most of all, however, it was followed because to have permitted the closing of the breach by a military clash of the two opposing Chinese forces would have meant a massive bloodbath and, in the end, the rekindling of another great war in Asia.

However, the situation has changed in the Western Pacific. Taiwan is no longer abjectly dependent for its survival on the United States. Some of the passions of the deep Chinese political division have cooled with the passing of time. Another generation has appeared and new Chinese societies, in effect, have grown up on both sides of the Taiwan straits.

Is there not, then, some better way to confront this problem than threat-and-counter-threat between island Chinese and mainland Chinese? Is there not some better way to live with this situation than by the armed truce which depends, in the last analysis, on the continued presence of the U. S. 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Straits?

The questions cannot be answered until all involved are prepared to take a fresh look at the situation. It seems to me that it might be helpful if there could be, among the Chinese themselves, an examination of the possibilities of improving the climate. As I have already indicated, the proper framework for any such consideration would be an acceptance of the contention of both Chinese groups--that there is only one China and Taiwan is a part of it. In that context, the questions at issue have to do with the dichotomous situation as between mainland and island governments and the possibility of bringing about constructive changes therein by peaceful means.

There is no cause to be sanguine about the prospects of an approach of this kind. One can only hope that time may have helped to ripen the circumstances for settlement. It is apparent, for example, that the concept which held the Chinese government on Taiwan to be the sole hope of China's redemption has grown less relevant with the years. For Taiwan,

therefore, to remain isolated from the mainland is to court the risk that the island will be left once again, as it has been on other occasions, in the backwash of Chinese history.

The removal of the wedge of separation, moreover, would also seem to accord with the interests of the mainland Chinese government. It does have a legitimate concern in the reassertion of the historic connection of Taiwan and China. It does have a concern in ending the hostile division which has been costly and disruptive both within China and in China's international relationships.

From the point of view of the United States, too, there is an interest in seeking a less tenuous situation. Progress in settling the Taiwan question could contribute to a general relaxation of tensions in the Western Pacific and, conceivably, even to resolution of the conflict in Viet Nam. Certainly, it would make possible a reduction in the enormous and costly overall defense burdens which were assumed in Asian waters after World

War II and which, two decades later, still rest on the shoulders of this nation.

To sum up, then, it seems to me that the basic adjustment which is needed in policies respecting China is to make crystal clear that this government does not anticipate, much less does it seek, the overthrow of the government of the Chinese mainland. In addition, there is a need to end the discrimination which consigns China to an inferior status as among the Communist countries in this nation's policies respecting travel and trade. Finally, it ought to be made unequivocal that we are prepared at all times to meet with Chinese representatives--formally or informally--in order to consider differences between China and the United States over Viet Nam or any other question of common concern.

Adjustments of this kind in the policies of the nation, it seems to me, require above all else a fresh perspective. We need to see the situation in Asia as it is today, not

as it appeared twenty years ago in the Himalayan upheaval of the Chinese revolution. We need to see the situation not through the fog of an old and stagnant hostility but in the light of the enduring interests of the United States in the Western Pacific.

In this context we will better be able to find appropriate responses at appropriate times to the specific problems of the Sino-U. S. relationship, whether they have to do with U. N. representation or diplomatic recognition or the off-shore islands or whatever. Without prior adjustment in perspective, however, to seek to deal definitively with these questions would be, to say the least, an exercise in futility.

I should emphasize before concluding that it is unlikely that there will be any eager Chinese responses to initiatives on our part. Nevertheless, I see nothing to be lost for this nation in trying to move along the lines which have been suggested. Chinese intransigence is no license for American

intransigence. Our stake in the situation in the Western Pacific is too large for that sort of infantile indulgence.

I see great relevance in thinking deeply of the issues which divide China and the United States to see if they can be recast in new and uncluttered molds. There is every reason, especially for young people, to examine most closely the premises of policy regarding China which were enshrined almost two decades ago. The fact is that the breakdown in Chinese-U.S. relations was one of the great failures of my generation and it is highly doubtful that its full repair shall be seen in my lifetime. The problem, therefore, will fall largely to you. It is not a particularly happy inheritance, but there is reason to hope that it may fare better in your hands.

Unlike my generation, you know more about Asia. You have a greater awareness of its importance to this nation and to the world. In 1942, four months after Pearl Harbor, for example, an opinion poll found that sixty percent of a national

sample of Americans still could not locate either China or India on an outline map of the world. Certainly that would not be the case today. Furthermore, you have not had the experience of national trauma in moving abruptly from an era marked by an almost fawning benevolence toward China to one of thorough disenchantment. You were spared the fierce hostilities which rent this nation internally, as a sense of warmth, sympathy, and security regarding China gave way to feelings of revulsion, hatred, and insecurity.

Your Chinese counterparts, the young people of today's China--they are called the "Heirs of the Revolution"--have a similar gap to bridge as they look across the Pacific. Your generation in China, too, has been contained and isolated, and its view of the United States has been colored with the hates of another time. It has had no contact with you or, indeed, with much of the world outside China.



On the other hand, those young people have grown up under easier conditions than the older generation of Chinese who lived their youth in years of continuous war and revolution. It may be that they can face you and the rest of the world with greater equanimity and assurance than has been the case at any time in modern Chinese history.

I urge you to think for yourselves about China.

I urge you to approach, with a new objectivity, that vast nation, with its great population of industrious and intelligent people. Bear in mind that the peace of Asia and the world will depend on China as much as it does on this nation, the Soviet Union, or any other, not because China is Communist but because China is China-- among the largest countries in the world and the most populous.

Mao Tse-Tung remarked in an interview several years ago that "future events would be decided by future generations." Insofar as his words involve the relationship of this nation and China, whether they prove to be a prophecy of doom or a forecast of a happier future will depend not so much on us, the "Old China Hands" of yesterday, but on you, the "New American Hands" of tomorrow.