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Remarks of Maureen Mansfield before St. Mary's College Alumni - Dunbarton College

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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It has been my good fortune to participate in these gatherings since my graduation from Saint Mary's many years ago. Each is a kind of homecoming and provides me with a sense of intellectual renewal.

Some of my happiest years were spent at Saint Mary's. I remember very vividly what it was like then. The contrast with how it is for today's students seems very sharp. Yet, in perspective, it is not so sharp. Over the years there is change but there is also continuity in change. Women in the colleges and universities, today,—men and women—seek a sense of fulfillment, a sense of well-being and a sense of worthwhileness in their lives and, if we remember our own sentiments at that time, so it has always been.

The theme of continuity in change has been very much on my mind for several weeks because of my recent visit to China where continuity in change is the key note in the lives of 850 million people. For 16 days, I had the rare opportunity of immersing myself in the atmosphere of that, once, remote
land. Let me share with you, step-by-step, the journey which I made together
with my husband and the Minority Leader and Mrs. Scott in an effort to open
a little further the doors which the President entered a few months ago.

We left Washington in mid-April and flew many hours directly to
Honolulu. On arrival, we were greeted with the grim news that North Viet Nam's
principal cities--Hanoi and Haiphong--had been subject to renewed bombing.
As you may know, my husband has some strong views about the wrongness of the
war in Indochina and the need to bring the tragic blood-letting to a close
forthwith.

The news of the re-escalation of the war, therefore, came as some-
thing of a shock. There was, at that time, no way of knowing what the Chinese
reaction would be. For the moment, it was touch and go as to whether we could
or should proceed to our ultimate destination.

The two leaders decided to go ahead as planned. So we continued
to Guam where we were awakened at dawn from our last night's sleep on American
soil by the deadly drone of bomber after bomber returning from the night raids
over Indochina. Still, there was no word from the Chinese regarding our journey.
We left for the last leg of the Pacific crossing. Chinese radar
drew our plane, on course, to the great industrial and commercial center of
Shanghai. We found the airport of this largest of Chinese cities, up-to-date,
immense and quite empty. Our footsteps seemed to echo as we entered the terminal
to be welcomed by a small party of Chinese officials. This first contact came
off with some hesitancy but, certainly, with courtesy and propriety.

We were on the ground only long enough to have our first taste of
Chinese tea and of what was to be a procession of magnificent Chinese food
that eventually included four styles of regional cooking and, among many many
others, all the most famous of Chinese dishes—Peking Duck, Shanghai Shark’s
Fins and Cantonese Bird’s Nest’s Soup. Our baggage was transferred to a waiting
Chinese plane. The jet-prop Vicount which was operated by an outstanding crew,
was to be our magic carpet throughout China. It proved to be both very efficient
and very comfortable.

We flew over the Yangtze River to Peking and into another modern
airport to be greeted by another official delegation. From the moment the
Chinese limousines—the Red Flags, as they are called—moved out of the terminal,
I had the feeling that Peking would live up to the advance billing which had first been given to it by Marco Polo as long ago as the 13th Century. For 15 miles we drove through a spectacular man-made forest of hand-planted trees stretching back row after row until out of sight, on both sides of the road.

We entered a city of inherited splendor which was in the process of being reborn as a modern metropolis. The old China was there, enhanced by careful and conscientious restoration, as I discovered in the ensuing days, in visits to the Great Wall, the Ming Tombs, the Imperial Palace, the Temple of Heaven, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, and the Summer Palace.

One could sense in the midst of this magnificent heritage, a new life emerging in an atmosphere of energy and innovation. Everywhere there was a bustle of purposeful activity. Buildings were going up.
Factories were operating at full blast. Tens of thousands of bicycles kept a steady rhythm in the traffic, as trucks and other heavy vehicles moved in and out with horns blaring. The schools and universities, the day-care centers and hospitals and the theater, moreover, made clear that while the accent was on economics, other matters were not being neglected.

One of the newer buildings in Peking is the Great Hall of the People. It is a enormous edifice which was built after the revolution in nine months. It serves to display in separate rooms the work and artistry of each of the Chinese provinces. It is also the office of the Chinese Premier, Mr. Chou En-lai. The Majority and Minority Leaders had many hours of discussion with Mr. Chou. He also served as host to the entire party at dinner so that all of us had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of the man who, after Mao Tse-tung, has done the most to mold the People's Republic of China. He is almost seventy-five years old but he gives the impression—as Chinese often do—of having the energy and the acuity of a man many years younger. As did President Nixon before us, we found him to be a gracious, charming and highly urbane host.
After Peking, the days became a kaleidoscope of experiences, as we moved rapidly from place to place. In Shanghai, we visited the Ma Lu Commune where thousands of families—over 25,000 people—are joined together in an immense and highly productive enterprise. It began on a base of agriculture on which it still rests but its production is now supplemented by small industries. It has its own schools, hospitals and dispensaries. In Shanghai, we also went to factories and a major industrial exhibit. Some of the finest acrobatics in the world were offered and the going price for a ticket of admission to any performance, as with a movie, is about 15 cents. A most charming interlude was spent in what is called the Children's Palace where the atmosphere of tenderness and warmth made it very evident that the traditional Chinese love of children is intact.

Then, there was the city of Hangchow which we visited briefly after five days in Peking. In ancient times this charming resort was already famous all over China for the placid beauty of the West Lake and the surrounding mountains where some of China's finest green tea is grown. Hangchow is still famous for the same reasons. To spend a few hours in this setting makes it easy to understand why the writers of the Tang Dynasty
used to come to Hangchow a thousand years ago, to write some of the finest poems in classic Chinese literature and, not infrequently, to drink too much wine, about which they also wrote. As in the past, Hangchow is still famous for its silks and tees and the beauty of its arts and crafts.

We flew next, north and west of Hangchow to Sian. In so doing, we passed from the green coastal regions to the semi-arid plateaus on the edge of the great deserts of the west. Sian was once a famous junction on the old silk road which ran through Central Asia. It is still a great junction, only now railroad trains rather than camels, pass through this gateway to Mongolia. Sian is one of the new industrial complexes which the Chinese have been developing on a regional basis over the past few years. At the same time, the city is also a center of archeological excavation. At one time it was a Chinese dynastic capital and, before that, a center of neolithic culture. The excavations, to date, have yielded an enormous amount of priceless tomb pieces and other artifacts.

From Sian we headed south to Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province. Mao Tse-tung was born in that province. He began his revolutionary involvement—as a teacher—in and around Changsha. The city is filled,
therefore, with the Chinese equivalent of "George Washington slept here" memorabilia. We visited a normal school where Mao taught and the house where he lived with his wife and two children until he had to flee for his safety. His wife who remained behind was executed for revolutionary activity by one of the militarists of that day.

The final phase of the journey found us in Canton, the commercial center of the south. By that time, mutual respect and confidence had grown with our hosts to the point where we were permitted to enter an area which had previously been off-limits to foreigners. For the first time, at the Canton Fair, we saw in one place the great virtuosity of contemporary Chinese skills. Thousands of products, ranging from rice and tea, to handcrafts such as silk embroidery and rugs, all the way to tools and tractors were being offered for sale to foreign buyers.

Of all the experiences in China, the most personally moving came at a School for the Deaf in Canton. Boys and girls were being given acupuncture therapy in an effort to open up some auditory sensitivity. The school officials asserted that, with 3 to 6 months of acupuncture treatment, they were having success in restoring hearing to a large percentage of the
younger children. Once some hearing was established by this method, we were told, it was followed by intensive speech-training and general education. However effective the treatment may have been, it was clear that a great enthusiasm existed among the children for the effort and there was deep dedication on the part of the teachers. The intimate rapport between the two was very obvious. To have experienced it, even as an observer, provided me with the warmest memory of the journey.

There came from this experience, a revealing insight into the strong sense of service to others which has emerged among the Chinese today. It finds particular expression in the development of the so-called "barefoot doctor" movement. Literally, hundreds of thousands of young people are taking basic training in healing and then going out to villages and towns which have been without medical services of any kind, in an effort to assist the sick and afflicted.
After a farewell dinner with the Chinese hosts who had become our friends, we left Canton for Hong Kong. The last few hours in China were spent in an old but immaculately maintained and serviced railroad car. The shimmering rice paddies and the green hills of China passed by the windows of the train in a kind of final review.

At the border, we debarked and walked the few hundred feet towards a covered bridge. The bridge spans the stream that separates the tiny British colony from the immensity of China. Our Chinese hosts accompanied us as far as they could go. We watched their figures, each with a hand upraised in farewell, recede as we walked over the bridge, turning every now and then to look back. On the other side, we could see the U. S. Consul-General at Hong Kong who had been permitted by the British authorities to come that close to the border for the first time, in order to welcome us.

In those few moments of transition from the world of China back into more familiar surroundings, we all seemed to be thinking our respective thoughts. For me, the thought was the one I mentioned at the outset in
connection with Saint Mary's or change and of the continuity in change.

I found myself hoping that, in some way, by the days which we had spent in China, by the thousands of words which we had spoken to hundreds of Chinese in all walks of life, by the smile or the wave or any of the many gestures by which human beings express their respect and affection for one another—I found myself praying that what we had done would be helpful in bringing about a restoration of the ties between the Chinese and American people.

We need that so much. The younger generation in both countries, in particular, need it so much, for the sake of human decency in the world and for peace in the years to come.