The Fiftieth George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology 1989

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First, the title of this lecture.

What on earth is 'Australia's' China? I think it's a curious one. It contains, is possibly built on, a large measure of illusion. It is therefore not strictly 'on earth'. And the possessive in the title of the lecture refers to a set of Australian views and illusions and not much that is a Chinese reality.

It refers also to the possessive in Australia's approaches to China. The possessive, of course, may be imperialist, and territorial. It may be patronising, and colonial. Or it may be the possessive of the smitten, in the embrace of seduction or of love.

Australia has had all three. And as our nineteenth century attitudes had more to do with attitudes to non-European peoples than with China, and as there was nothing at all possessive about our nineteenth century encounters with Chinese people, I think the possessive for Australia in China begins with this century, at the quelling of the Boxer Rebellion. You will recall that Australia, about to become a (small p) power, sent a military expedition to join the (large P) Powers in lifting the siege of the Legations. Banjo Patterson was there. We arrived too late, of course. But we went ashore for some mopping up. We may not have done much to lift the siege. But as in the territoriality of small dogs after large, we lifted our leg on this patch of territory in North China. A small act of aspiring possession by an aspiring (small p) power.

With a set of very colonial attitudes from the British kennel ('Poor China!' 'Sick China') we later took a more patronising interest, and sent one of our very first, and very few, diplomatic missions to the China of Chiang Kai-shek. Perhaps that is when the love affair began. We certainly behaved with the emotion of the spurned after 1949.

Since 1972, when we established diplomatic relations with the Government whose existence we had for 22 years denied diplomatically, while yet making its existence the very centrepiece of our foreign and

alliance policies, our relations with China, like Alice's Wonderland, have become curiouser and curiouser. We speak of the time since 1972 as the time of normalisation. I wonder if we might not speak of it as the time of abnormalisation. We fell into such a national embrace with China that at times we have seemed to lose all perspective. If the intention in 1972 was to achieve balance in our approach to the region of Asia, we have often seemed to achieve imbalance because of the obeisance we seem to make to China, alone, among Asian countries. Australians have almost competed with each other in doing China things, and often stupid things. And much of what we've done has been done with some kind of illusion of China in mind, some fantasy of our own creation, albeit often fostered by interested parties in China.

Is this not in itself an exaggeration?

I have a commitment to the relationship with China, and few have been more involved in it over the last couple of decades. I have enough documented and anecdotal material to fill at least a couple of theses. Including photographs! Or a dozen novels. I have spent hundreds of recorded days with Australians in China situations, with ministers and other politicians, with people in the arts and education, research and science and technology and sport, in fashion and gastronomy, and in whatever else you care to name; and with perhaps several hundred leading businessmen (I say 'men', for there have been almost no women) from major (and minor) Australian companies. And my taking stock is drawn from this. It's the story of China in Australian minds since 1972, as I see it. But it's there. In my notebooks. And filing cabinets. Any in my mind, some of it waxed there in fantastical batik shapes of what I privately call 'the 100 most embarrassing moments in China!'

And I know it's not exaggerated. And I don't believe you can yet say that June the Fourth has fundamentally disturbed it. And as a believer in the great importance of China in our foreign relations it has been of concern to me, because I think it's wrong, and in the long term damaging to us, and bad for our relations.

I am involved enough in other aspects of Australia's foreign relations to know that this phenomenon is not matched in our relations with any other country. And involved enough with education to know that it is not in any way remotely matched in scale, breadth, depth, enthusiasm, or resources by teaching of the language and society of the country with which we have been so enchanted. Such is our breathtaking insousiance about serious comprehension of the Australian Wonderland which is 'our' China.

Nor is this a phenomenon of the first years after 1972 or even after the Open Door in 1978. It has been a protracted affair on a national scale, and this is partly what has distinguished it from similar phenomena in other countries. Some of you may recall Bettina Arndt observing, in 1977, that in terms of interest and excitement in the Australian popular mind, China had come to equal sex, and that the two together ought to be a winning combination on platforms around the country.

I am sure you have all seen something of this phenomenon. The China phenomenon, I mean. But let me recall for our instruction a few reminders.

Take ministers. China became almost obligatory for government ministers. It wasn't just that they hadn't been there before. Most of them hadn't been to Indonesia either, or anywhere else in Asia, and never did go. In the life of one government, it was joked that all but the Minister for Veterans' Affairs had been to China. Even the Minister for Police had been. Now, ministerial visits require things to talk about. So initiatives were born in China, sometimes for no other reason, which might have served us better in other parts of Asia had we gone there instead.

Over the years, not a few ministers have found it difficult or impossible to say anything unpalatable to Chinese. I have known briefings where it was agreed that difficult issues to be firmly addressed were forgotten when it came to the point in discussion. One former minister went to China and commended the Chinese bureaucracy (all 60 million of them, notorious in China for being obstructive, conservative, inefficient and self-serving), as superior to our own in loyalty, efficiency,

responsiveness and selflessness! Canberra has known as many as 5 or 6 ministers at informal dinners at the Chinese Embassy, when other important Asian countries can't even get one minister to a national day reception.

What indirect influence this has had in the counsels of government is not readily perceived in the formality of government decisions.

In the language of government, also, you can trace a pull towards placing China at the centre of our foreign policy. It usually stops short of saying so precisely, but from where we were before 1972, when China was central as our selected adversary, it is now often ascribed a measure of importance whose centrality is obvious but whose justification is difficult to see, particularly in economic matters.

Take trade. For more than a decade there was actually a government unit set up for the purpose of assisting the Chinese to sell to us! Large amounts of public money have been spent on our own trade efforts in China, for unspectacular returns. We have put almost nothing into economic relations with Taiwan, and yet, in many of the last 17 years, the volume of trade with Taiwan has rivalled or exceeded our trade with the People's Republic of China.

The private sector has not been backward, at least in terms of wanting to have one go. Hundreds of companies which had never set foot outside Australia have chosen China, a vexatious market at the best of times, for their first attempt. Companies which have never joint ventured in Australia have set off to do so in China. We have known Australian firms give to China technology they would not sell elsewhere. Public and private sector interests have sometimes combined in amazing favours to China. There is a well known story of an unprecedented stretching of tax regulations to enable one of the more prominent of Chinese investment deals in Australia to proceed. People have gone to astonishing lengths to find projects in China which would qualify for concessional finance. (The biggest such deal with China is now the subject of a dispute. Involving what? Non-payment of a substantial final amount due from the Chinese side). A major, Government-funded feasibility study, one of our biggest in China to date, and one which was

to bring us rich rewards in subsequent contracts, saw China go off with the study, and the contracts, to other suitors.

This does not seem to deter us. China business seminars have proliferated to the point of hypnosis. When you think there can't be any businesses left to attend such seminars, there's a new flush to complement the parasites of business - the bankers, the lawyers, the accountants, and the consultants.

Even in the early 1970's, before the China Wonderland was truly discovered, one prominent Australian came back and revealed that Mao Zedong was like Jesus Christ. And he wasn't suggesting that the two were ideological demagogues! (Perhaps his observation was a little better than another prominent Australian who, on being introduced to a Mr Hu, a Mr Du and a Mr Lu, shouted across a Stalinist architectural meeting cavern: 'It's Hewey, Dewey and Louie! Donald Duck's nephews'!)

Take academics. All manner of tertiary institutions have signed up for exchanges or institutional links with China on the basis of two-way benefit. We pay, they benefit. At faculty boards which inspect at length and with scepticism the curriculum vitae of a candidate from a reasonable university in India or Taiwan or Indonesia, Ph.D. scholarships have been awarded to people from China with no degree at all. Often an interpreter encountered on a trip.

This is anecdotal. But it is typical. I once started counting the number of people I travelled with in China who express negative views about Japanese, Indians, Pakistanis, Koreans, Indonesians, but particularly Japanese, who have the most extraordinarily glowing things to say about Chinese in general and the most creative positive judgements to offer about particular individuals. The numbers were running at about 9 in every 10.

What kind of Wonderland! What kind of people can be so unflawed! And one wonders what on earth these Australians have in their minds when they think of China, and what effect this has on their decision-making.

Some, mainly in business, have become sceptical. But whether that is from realism about China, or simply from the general sense in Australian business that Asia is too hard and it's easier to do business with America, remains uncertain. But it's certain that this scepticism has not, even since the watershed events of June of this year, yet put China into a more balanced perspective for Australia. That may come. And I will come to that.

After seventeen years of formal relations with China, we seem to be no wiser. As a nation, to a country which is very important, we have given exaggerated importance. To a country which deserves our attention, we have attended in such concentration as often to neglect other, equally or more deserving countries in Asia. To intelligent and tough-minded leaders in a tough political system we have ascribed such qualities of intellect, sophistication and political durability as to blind us to human and political frailties and the inevitability of the passing of individuals from the continuing scene of government. Into a country of significant future economic and trade potential we have put more public and private sector money and effort than into all of the other new growth economies of Asia combined, and we have endowed it with a capacity to respond to and satisfy our economic needs which would be publicly challenged on all fronts if it were held seriously of any other country. To a system which has done its best to reduce one of the great glories of Chinese culture, cuisine, to an undistinguished base for a monosodium glutamate coating, we pay tribute for giving us the world's great culinary experience. To a people truly deserving our friendship and support, we have bent over forwards in indecent enthusiasm. To a government which warrants the respect deserving of a great power and regional neighbour, we have at times been in a posture which a Chinese official once characterised to me as one of 'ke tou', better known in English as 'the kowtow'.

Until the Fourth of June, Australia's China had become possessive in one other sense. Many Australians involved in the relationship had come to believe hints dropped carefully into conversations by Chinese officials that China's relationship with us is qualitatively different from its relations with others. Not exclusive, but somehow special to us in

preference to other countries, often named, such as Japan. To these Australians, China is somehow 'our China'. Ask any New Zealander (or Thai, or British or Filipino) suitor to this same mistress and you will be told that a similar confidence has been slipped to them across the negotiating couch.

Why?

If my assertions are reasonably well-founded, why, as a nation, do we behave like this about China, when we don't do it with other important or culturally seductive societies in Asia?

'Well', you may object, 'this is not just an Australian phenomenon'.

That is true.

But I think it's been more of a national phenomenon here than in many of the countries that spring to mind. It's not that we are quite a nation of Sinophiles (although I did wonder, when we became the third largest in numbers of tourists visiting China). It's that there's been almost no abstaining constituency. (Even the most conservative anti-communists and covert racists could not stay away from China). It's that since the early 1970's no major political party, in government or in opposition, has challenged the centrality of China in official policy. It's that there's been almost no academic or public critical faculty applied to what we were doing with China policy. Even some of those who had a different view of the reality of China, behind the illusion, did not challenge the centrality of China in our policy, and were themselves as much centred on China (a China by which they also felt betrayed) as those they criticised for being still seduced. It's that the preoccupation with China became a preoccupation of all, including government, with the compass of our wavering global and regional concerns drawn constantly to China.

People in Britain indulge in the same enthusiasm as we do. But Britain, government and people, is ultimately far more concerned with Europe, with the Soviet Union, with the United States. And in the United States and Japan, there are other relationships which either balance or subsume

the fascination with China we've seen in both of those countries. And in both of these cases, the titillation of China has never persuaded them to forget their own interests. The touchstone here, of course, is Taiwan, on which Australian governments have pursued markedly different policies from those of Japan and the United States. And outside Japan, whose China fascination is mixed up with some deep-seated urge for exculpation anyway, no other Asian country has been so beguiled.

In the whole of Asia, Australia has probably been the most Sino-friendly, and the closest to being single-mindedly so. Among developed countries, we lack the geographical separation from China of a Britain or a France, the political might of a United States, the financial domination of a Japan. Our tendency to make China a central preoccupation, a surrogate mother for the ones we have lost in Britain and the United States, combined with our geopolitical isolation from other Europe-derived cultures, at the sump end of the engine of Asia, is not seen in any other country, and it makes this set of official and private attitudes towards China a much more dominant factor in foreign policy than in other countries or than it ought to be in ours.

Of course, this still doesn't explain why people all over the world seem to take leave of their senses over China, and I can't explain it altogether. I've debated it with many people over the past couple of decades, and there are many explanations for this Sinophilia. It's certainly the case that, since Marco Polo, Westerners, at least, have been fascinated and seduced by China. And that is important, for those who think it's simply a product of post-1949, or post-1972.

In general, it obviously has something to do with the things that assail the senses, particularly food, and the culinary culture of China; but also Chinese music, and the tonal sounds of Chinese speech; and the impenetrable originality of Chinese writing; and architecture and painting instantly recognisable the world over as Chinese.

And with the 'living fossil' fantasy, in which we see the continuity of Chinese civilization and imagine today's Chinese to have participated in the building of the Great Wall or the invention of printing, or an ignorant Chinese peasant to be some kind of Confucian intellectual.

But it is also carefully fostered, particularly by Chinese in official positions (and just about anyone with a 'position' in China is 'official', even in universities). Chinese have innate skills, and genius, at persuading foreigners how different China is and verbally and fulsomely rewarding them for small steps in understanding. But part of this Chinese psychology is also that foreigners can never understand China! I have known Sinologists of 60 years' experience and great wisdom to be told by Chinese officials, 'Ah, but you do not understand China', a statement delivered with a finality clearly believed to confound all further argument from foreigners. Foreigners, particularly Western foreigners, are thereby drawn to know more, to fully understand. And with all the wiles and wisdom of an experienced seductress, Chinese play upon the mystery, upon a theme about the alleged attributes of all Chinese, the inscrutibility (which is just good acting), the delusion that all Chinese are infinitely patient (which is untrue), never lose their temper (wrong), are culturally superior (often the pretensions of the ignorant), are experienced, wise and temperate in matters of government (witness the Fourth of June). There is still no adequate analysis of this phenomenon, which for the time being we must take as a given, documented but not explained, the syndrome of Marco Polo. (At least someone had the sense to jail him for fantasising over his China mistress).

But I'd like to suggest, in a tentative way, one possible additional explanation for the particular strain of this affliction in Australia.

It seems to me that it has to do with the naivete of ruling elites in Australia, the innocence of the leaders of a New World country, in a kind of Henry James encounter with the countries and cultures of the Old World.

It has always been the case that Australia, white Australia that is, has found it difficult to have an easy relationship with Asian countries and peoples. We all know the unsubtle attitudes and emotions which have characterised national approaches to our neighbours. Fear. Aggression. Condescension. Insecurity. Over-friendliness, in its patronising and its servile forms. Possessive paternalism, and the possessive arm of

'mateship' around an unreciprocating Asian shoulder. We have projected onto Asians images of our creation, categorised them into a few stereotypes of all almost Manichean absurdity.

The stereotypes have broken down in recent years, but Asia is still so little noticed in the Australian classroom that it will take at least another generation for us to develop more discriminating and sophisticated views. And the Asian immigration debate last year illustrated how widespread and deep-rooted these stereotypes are.

It was in fact immigration, or rather the immigration enquiry in which I was involved, which exposed to me some aspects of the behaviour of Australian political elites which seemed to explain something also about their attitudes to Asia. It seemed to me that the history of immigration, and settlement philosophy, for about the last 30 years is a history of Federal and State politicians walking backwards. Of step-by-step-backwards decision-making in reaction to representation, pressure, threat and manipulation by migrant spokespeople. Many of the decisions may have been right ones, but they weren't decisions of initiative, of people in emotional or cultural control, working within some kind of vision or to some forward-thinking plan. And as immigration from the mid-1950's slid to the periphery of government concerns and became more about dealing with migrants than about dealing with a major national policy issue, the interaction with migrant leaders became the most important policy determinant. And through issues of family reunion, sectional pleading, and settlement problems, migration also came to act on all politicians, not just the ministers or spokespeople.

And what happened was that political elites, New World Anglo and Celtic political elites, found it acutely difficult to deal with the people from these old societies. They were of course 'foreign' and that was awkward for the immature and unsophisticated. But they were also wily and manipulative and seemingly duplicitous and insistently undeterred by countless knock-backs, which their self-interest and survival dictated and which in their home societies were part of politics, and untoward. And the naive politicians of the New World spoke perjoratively of them behind hands or closed doors, but were repeatedly manoeuvred, and

mostly, in their innocence, did not understand. But if they did, because in their naivete they were psychologically and culturally out of their depth and therefore often feeling inferior, they also wanted to placate, they wanted to please.

And then, they wanted to be liked. And being liked by migrant groups was what came to dictate immigration, and migrant settlement philosophy.

Our lack of experience of the Old World could have been compensated by education. But there was no education. We did not learn about Calabria or Serbia. We studied, if we studied Europe at all, about British or American Europe. Or we read, and continue to read, about Forster's Italy. Or Hemingway's Spain. Or Olivia Manning's Levant.

In a way, I'm not being critical of politicians. Often inadvertently they did good things. And innocence has been one of the flavours of Australian society, and one of its great appeals. But it's not a mature or balanced or properly self-interested way to run a significant area of national public policy in the cynical and self-interested late twentieth century world.

The very same problem has infected our dealings with Asian countries. It's not the reason why we are besotted with China rather than with other Asian countries. But with China, together with the Marco Polo syndrome, and with the fact that Asia is barely part of our education, and with our particular economic and geopolitical situation, it's been a lethal combination.

When in the 1970's, China ceased being the enemy and became 'our' friend, we leapt into the fantasy, the euphoric expectation and the desire to possess. As the late 1970's and 1980's found us more alone internationally than we had ever been before, we became even more abandoned in our courtship of China. Government thinking was bolstered by public perceptions, and in business, and in academia, we simply did not know how to handle ourselves when confronted close-up with this most ancient and manipulative of societies. We were insecure. We were awkward and often gauche. There was little sense of wisdom

or maturity or simple hard-headedness. And because we wanted to be liked, we tended not to drive a hard bargain, we tended to be soft, to give in, to accept the Chinese proposition about 'equality and mutual benefit' in a relationship that was patently often neither equal nor mutually beneficial.

'They like us!', people actually exclaimed. How distinctive it was to be liked by such distinctive people!

A Most Unequal Relationship

How has this affected our relationship with China?

I must here make an important exclusion from some of the generalisations of this lecture. There are of course very large numbers of very distinctive people in China. Many Chinese friends, and many others I know of but do not know, want, and work hard and selflessly at, having an open and honest and direct and equal relationship with Australia, and at mutual education and cultural and economic and political understanding. And it is time we in Australia stopped writing papers and books about Australia-China relations as though the individual movers were all Australian, and started analysing the equally significant role and contribution of individual players on the Chinese side. These people are as concerned to have balance and perspective in the relationship on both sides as I am, and just as dismayed at some of the attitudes and practices I mention here.

Well, then, what of the relationship? As in immigration, there have been a lot of right decisions, and a lot of good things have happened. And I'm not saying it's wrong to want good relations with China. I've been long enough on that crusade for it not to be in question. And I'm not saying that other countries haven't exhibited similar phenomena in handling their relations with China. I'm saying that much of our expectation about China is unwarranted and illusory, that the attitudes and policies we have had towards China have been foolish.

Some would argue that our huge investment of effort in China has paid off. It's not easy to see how. We have had a good relationship with China, with, until June, no major points at issue such as to cause friction between us. Perhaps we ought to have had. Perhaps on nuclear weapons. Or Hong Kong. Or Tibet. Or Human Rights. I think it's defensible to suggest that our good relationship has been as much due to our placating on sensitive issues, in effect ignoring them. Would we have done the same with Indonesia? Or Fiji? Or France?

We've had an expanding economic relationship and increasing exports. We talk on many matters and sometimes caucus together in international forums. We have often talked constructively about closer political and economic development of the Asian region.

This is all excellent. But does it exceed the normal expectations of a bilateral relationship? Is it commensurate with the weight we have given it and the effort we have expended? I think not. You might say we have been building credit for the future. But we know, from our experience with U.S. in economic matters, that such credit is not always honoured.

You might argue that events post-June, an extremely mild Chinese response to Australia's official and popular outrage, prove that our policies have paid off in terms of a relationship able to withstand such trauma. Well, I think we do have a reasonable underlying relationship. But it's also the case that China's reactions have been strongest where it sees its interests as most affected. In Hong Kong, or the United States, for example, or recently in France. I also wonder, if it were true that China had been less antagonistic towards us over June because of our attitudes in the past, if that is a distinction we would welcome. Do we want to be the lap dogs of China? Indulged, because we are believed to be compliant over the longer term? I recall a senior Chinese tourism official once saying that China preferred Australian tourists because they were so 'obedient'! That is not a judgement I would welcome on Australia as a nation.

I think the most that can be said in justification of the undue weight and prominence we have given to China is that it was necessary to have some measure of correction after 22 years of China as the enemy. But

the time to recover from that correction is long past, and indeed in official thinking it ought to have ended, particularly in respect of Taiwan, shortly after the establishment of relations.

It is not surprising that it was in business that Australians first began to develop some scepticism about China, business having to achieve year-end results, and foot the bill. There has also been concern on the part of a growing number of officials.

But the need is now for a major and long overdue reassessment. Not on the basis of more of the same, or just because of projected Chinese economic might, and certainly not with some new myth of Chinese Confucian superiority.

But unbound by the assumptions of the past decade and a half, freewheeling, self-interested, culturally and intellectually sophisticated, well-informed through proper understanding of Chinese society, and psychologically mature.

This would mean that we would have to start with an examination of the underside of the relationship. This is not the totality. But whereas, in the case of Indonesia, or Japan, the negative aspects of the relationship are dissected and scrutinised and aired, what we are examining here is the part most people don't see with China, or don't talk about.

Have we had a special relationship with China?

No. We don't have a special relationship with any country in Asia, in the sense that we used to have once with Britain or the United States, and China is no exception. We have the Chinese ear on some things. But when it comes to Hong Kong or Taiwan or the Koreas or Japan or Vietnam or Cambodia or the South China Sea or nuclear weapons, or anything close to China's interests and also touching ours, we have no demonstrable influence.

China owes us no favours. And for all the favours we have bestowed on China, we have received none in return, although Chinese acts of self-interest, like their major investments in Australia, have often been greeted with wonderment and acclaim, as though they were favours.

We have in fact developed a relationship which is unequal. It is our doing and not China's. But it has actually encouraged Chinese to take advantage of us. And it is for this reason that we must regard it as dangerous. It is not there all the time. But I have seen it surface in the political and diplomatic relationship, in business, in cultural relations, in aid, in most of our dealings with China.

Let me give one small illustration, which encapsulates some of the problems.

It was decided to establish in China at Australian cost a wool warehouse. The Chinese were enthusiastic. It was originally to serve a number of purposes, including display of Australian wool types, and through demonstration of modern handling and distribution to improve the throughput of wool and thereby to assist in the development of wool use in China, which China wants, and the promotion of Australian wool. It was to be Australian managed.

The negotiations were protracted, even though, as a gift, there ought not to have been too much to negotiate. It's not the fact that the warehouse ended up in Nanjing, instead of Shanghai through which most imported wool is distributed. It's not even the fact that with a shameless greed which Australian taxpayers who paid for this warehouse would find stunning, the Chinese side made outrageous demands, and if we offered one of something, demanded two, or if we offered two, four. It was that when the Chinese concerned did not get their way, the negotiators shouted, ranted, were abusive and insulting. On one occasion, the insults became so bad that the then Chairman of the Australian Wool Corporation, in China for goodwill and not negotiation, had to be extracted from the meeting room and a subsequent apology extracted via the State Economic Commission. On another, a senior Australian official, the redoubtable Dr Jocelyn Chey, rose to the insinuations of the officials with the riposte 'What do you think we are? Spies?!'

The completed warehouse is now carrying mainly non-Australian wool. It is not Australian managed. Australian officials have been denied access to it. This was not the Cultural Revolution. It was not a

commercial deal. It was not in a commodity peripheral to our interests. It was in wool, one of the significant stories in our economic relations.

It may shock, but it ought not to surprise. There have been other discussions, for example between aid officials, in which the Chinese side has derided the amount of Australian aid on offer. The tribute, it seems, was not enough.

I have never been in a Canberra office where Australian officials have shouted abuse at foreign negotiators, but I have seen Chinese do so, and it has not been such a rare occurrence.

When some Chinese interlocutors do not get their way, they may use threats and intimidation, ranging from the blunt to the highly subtle. The latter, at political and diplomatic and economic policy levels, has effectively stalled the proper development of legitimate Australian commercial interests in Taiwan, including the establishment of air links.

If we stand firm, there is no problem. If we comply, we do ourselves a disservice and encourage some Chinese to believe this is how the relationship can be run. If we are thought to be generally compliant and then try occasionally to stand up, this creates tension and hostility..

Politicians do not often see overt manifestations of this phenomenon. But they are just as much the object of it as the business person, or academic, or arts administrator who is openly treated in this way.

Examples of the inequality into which the relationship has slipped abound. For years, Chinese trade officials complained about the trade imbalance as though it were our fault. And we obliged. We did more than a poor Thai or Indonesian or Bangladeshi could have dreamed of to help the Chinese into our market, while they did very little to develop the market themselves. Apart from exploratory missions to the point where trade officials now find it difficult to get private companies to receive such missions. But no serious attention to the market.

Our universities have opened their doors to China in a most generous way, in any field of teaching or research which is of interest to China. We have the most extreme difficulty in gaining access and facilities for

our academics in a number of fields of interest to us, for example in social science research.

Our relationship with China is dangerous not only in its own terms, but also for the way in which it has skewed our relations with the rest of Asia. I believe, for example, that there has been serious neglect of Japan, and during one Japanese Prime Ministerial visit to Australia, Japanese officials could only react with dismay at our apparent 'China preoccupation' and the offhand nature of the Australian reception. Bridges to Indonesia, which have screamed for attention, were until relatively recently barely on anyone's agenda, and the whole relationship was allowed to slide into a state of neglect which was extraordinary given that Indonesia is our closest neighbour, and a very significant country. And Indo-China. Had we not been so susceptible to Chinese influence, would we have found it so difficult to have a close relationship with Hanoi? Would we have so unreservedly condemned what Hanoi did in Cambodia? Would we now so readily be accepting an arrangement in Cambodia which offers the butcher of Phnom Penh a chance to return to power?

We have been blinded to many of the dangers in the way we have conducted the relationship, and therefore blinded also to what kind of China China is likely to be as it gathers economic strength, as it surely will. I have been interested for example, in the tendency of Australian organisations, government and private, to employ people just off the plane from China to handle relations with China, when no one in the employer organisation speaks Chinese, knows China, or has any way of evaluating the performance or business loyalties of the employee. If we are to put the handling of our relations with China into the hands of people newly from China without the management and evaluation and constraints we demand as normal with anyone else, how, then, are we going to be able to handle China when it begins to flex its muscles?

What I have said is only illustrative, but it is where we have to begin, with a critical appraisal of the relationship as it really is. And of ourselves as we are and China as it is. To break the spell.

The Fourth of June

After all this, you might say, is it not the case that the spell was broken on the Fourth of June anyway, and that much of what I've talked about here as current is already history.

I'm not sure. I'd like to think so, but I'm not sure. The themes I discussed at the beginning were certainly all brought to light. The illusions about the nature of Chinese society, about the mentality of the leadership, about the way China is governed, were laid bare, which is manifest by the very surprise with which we reacted.

The possessive was revealed in full measure. 'I feel betrayed', were the words of some of the most senior political and business leaders in the country. Betrayed? Had we so possessed China, to have been then betrayed? What pact of love or commitment on China's part had promised something like this could not happen?

But in our reaction to this 'betrayal', is there not also something of the same centrality, the same favouritism, the same illusion and the same possession that characterised the period of our seduction? For what other countries in turmoil and political oppression have we extended such a mass act of grace as we extended to the 16,000 Chinese who happened to be in Australia at the time? Over the years, Burma, Cambodia, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, for starters, have all seen government directed killings of innocent civilians, and in numbers. Where was our grace? Our mass outrage? No! 'Our' China had gone off. And our protest was more in the nature of an appeal than what we might have to say, for example, about South Africa. Just come back. Don't forsake us. Just return to normal and so will we!

Having been concerned about our approach to the relationship over the period before June, I have argued for continuation of relations on all fronts since June. But there is the very real prospect that unless we do so on the basis of open reassessment, we will drift back into similar

attitudes. Memories are short. Chinese are plausible. And have centuries of experience of how to win tributaries by charm or guile.

My hope is that the events of June will have cut China down to size in our imaginations, so that we can have a normal and healthy and reasonably equal relationship. But it is still too early to tell. When people in China have said to me 'things will be back to normal by early next year', I've replied that, globally, they will never return to normal in terms of the lionising and the special favours of the past. But in the Australian case that is a counsel of hope more than conviction. At times in the past when I have thought everyone could see how impossible things were for foreign business in China, I have found official policy apparently oblivious and few in academia rising up to challenge official intoxication with the China market. And if our trade competitors now go in once more in strength, will we stay behind?

There are one or two things that might help us through into a saner policy. One is that this is possibly the first such foreign episode in Australia's white history in which most of the people in Australian public life have visited the country and know many of the players on top and even some on the receiving end. It wasn't the case for us in any of the East European crackdowns, or in Burma or at Kwangju, or even in the violence against the civil rights movement in the United States. It is just possible that what happened in China may have touched us in a profound and irreversible way. Innocence lost.

Another is the presence of the Chinese students and intellectuals in our midst. They are a new breed. There is, of course, a preponderance of opportunists who will claim the comfort of a foreign haven on the argument of having indulged some idle political ideas. But many care passionately about their country. There are many who will want to go back. They will keep things alive in Australia. And they may succeed in alerting us to the fact that there are many sides to China and to its politics, that, as in any other society, some of these are grubby and unattractive, and some are repugnant and undeserving of anyone's admiration or enchantment.

Some Suggestions

There are then two general problems which have to be addressed if we are to do something different about the relationship.

The first is on our side. Our policy-making and our relations with China have been conducted overwhelmingly by people who have no knowledge of China, who couldn't say 'No, thank you' in Chinese, who wouldn't know the difference between Du Fu and doufu. This is not a criticism of individuals. We are the products of our education. And there are, of course, those without China skills who are extremely able and who have been effective advocates for Australia. And the company of Sinologists has not been without its fair share of poltroons.

But if China is important, why is it still the case that not one member of the national parliament speaks Chinese (or any Asian language)? And why are we still struggling to make people address the problems which derive from the whopping fallacy that English is the language of all Asian people?

We will never have a special relationship with any Asian country while we remain so uneducated, illiterate, and uncultured about their societies. And the problem for us will become acute in the 1990's, as we embark on the most culturally complex process we have ever faced, that of a very close economic association with the countries of Asia.

The second is on the Chinese side. While no one I know of predicted what happened in China in June, the potential for behaviour more appropriate to China of the nineteenth century was there, and if we had known more about China we should not have been so entirely surprised. The last 40 years of the Chinese Communist Party even seem to have inhibited development away from some of the political thinking of Imperial China, to have in some ways reinforced that thinking and simply provided leaders in this mould with the instruments of modern totalitarianism as a means of more efficient control.

In the 1980's, as the rhetoric of communist ideology was set aside and China began to deal more directly with its real problems, the thinness of the modern veneer became apparent. In many forms, and not simply in

mandarin behaviour towards foreigners, which is mostly a marginal concern. As voices of a new kind of politics have been raised since 1978, it has never been apparent that paternalistic, authoritarian and despotic approaches to government had disappeared.

The people these leaders have caused to be trained and educated, however, have not been suspended in time. And as their numbers have swelled so greatly over the past decade, they were able to mount a formidable effort in April and May and early June, which must have come as of much of a surprise to traditionalist leaders as the crackdown did to foreigners.

There will, of course, be recurring internal challenges to this philosophy of government, but I don't believe we can count on it being overturned for some time to come. Nineteenth century mandarin behaviour, coupled with economic growth and increasing regional clout is not going to make China easy to deal with. I think this is what we have already been experiencing in a small way in our own relations with China. And I think that unless we change, a point will come at which we will find China more difficult to deal with than some think is now the case with Japan.

So, in any fresh approach to China, I suggest we have to concentrate, and I mean concentrate, on human resource development.

On both sides of the fence.

For the next decade at least, much of the rest of what we do ought to be related or subordinate to this, including much of what we do in the economic and aid spheres. This is for the long term, and a little slowing down on other fronts will not harm us.

At home, we need a massive increase in education about China and in Chinese language. This is intellectually and pedagogically justified anyway, and we ought to be doing it if only for these reasons. Politicians have lent support to this idea for Asia in general. But I am not arguing here on the familiar economic grounds. I am saying it's for the health of our relations with China, and for the continuing independence and

survival in the next century of the kind of society we have been in this. And I am not saying it out of hostility to China.

For this, we need commitment of resources. If we'd put all the money that went into the China Action Plan into the training of teachers, teacher trainers and other China professionals, we would have had more sanity in our China policy in the 1980's and would have more dollars earned in the 1990's than all the China economic initiatives will ever produce.

We have to understand that this education is a necessary instrument of foreign and foreign economic policy and treat it as an integral part of policy and support it and resource it. We have spent far too much money in China on things which serve no national interest, while critical education needs remained devoid of strategic planning and starved of resources.

We also have to face the problem of what to do about the people who handle the relationship in the meantime, before the products of education move in sufficient numbers through the ranks and into key positions. One way is for us actually to employ the people Australia has already trained, and give them broad work experience, and responsibility, and regard their language and country skills as an asset and not a liability, as is often the case, even in government institutions.

But we need more. We need a new kind of institution that can train people already established in their careers. Not a simple upgrade of existing management institutions. But a new, tough, institution for senior public servants, politicians, and others, with an Asian orientation and a requirement for language skills, and which ought to become obligatory for aspiring leaders. Without such an institution, I believe Australia has reason to be worried about the outcome of the discussions for a new regional association, in the case of all our neighbours, of Japan, and Korea, and Vietnam and the ASEANs, but particularly in the case of China.

The whole of the Australian workforce is supposed to be about the business of skills upgrading and multi-skilling. Astonishingly, political elites are not included! What more pressing need do we have than the

multi-skilling of politicians and the people who have to deal with our international relations?

On the other side, the China side, or our part in it, human resource development ought to be elevated, as an instrument of policy, and in terms of the mechanisms by which we manage the relationship, to a level and prominence which is at least equal to economic policy. We must forget about woolstores and other monuments. We must forget about subsidised loss-leading projects. We must forget about concessions in the aid/trade game altogether unless, as the Japanese do, the concession goes together with the deal and not separately and naively in advance of it, and unless there is an overall net gain for Australia.

We should establish a joint ministerial Human Resource Development Committee with China. All aid, except humanitarian aid and tied concessional financing should be in education and training. We should offer more scholarships and we should ensure that we administer our scholarship funds and not give them to Chinese officials to dispense as favours. We should expand the commercial promotion of Australian education.

The advantage ought to be obvious. The education and training of people is of great benefit to China. And for us, if the woolstore is filled with Argentinian wool, at least some of the corridors of China will be filled with the products of Australian education.

If we have reservations about relations when things happen which are not to our liking, we cannot object to continuing to offer opportunities to Chinese people in our open educational institutions. If we care about the state of the free expression of ideas in China, what better way to express this concern than through education? (I am not talking here about the calculating migrants who make up a large part of the Chinese students currently in Australia, but about serious education exchange).

The same arguments can be made in respect of our dealings with other Asian societies. But in China they are pressing. And it is essential that they be seen as central to policy, and not as secondary or incidental.

There must also be close connection between what we do for our own education and what we do for education and training of Chinese, and we must have some new government mechanism which recognises and exploits the connection between the two. I don't favour the creation of new structures, but if that is what is needed to break out of this mould, then that is what we have to do. It probably requires some rethinking also of the merged structure of the former departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and not just for China.

Some people may dismiss as curious the suggestion that human resource development be given such prominence in our relations with China. Not nearly so curious as the wonderland into which the naive and ill-informed propelled our policy before the Fourth of June.

There are several other respects in which we can make a fresh start with China. One concerns women. Women have been not too much involved in our foreign relations. But I have been repeatedly impressed by the effectiveness of able women in dealing with China. I leave the proper analysis of that to another day. But my observation is that in that most male of political and managerial environments, modern women can see through what is going on because most of what is going on is the archetype of male behaviour, which modern woman has now been educated to analyse and understand, to look for the weakness, to challenge. I think it would be a good thing if our relations with China were run by China-skilled and able women.

The other brings me back to the subject of migrants. People of European migrant background have not played much part in our foreign relations either, particularly in Asia. Where they have been involved, in business, they have often been outstandingly successful, and in Asia some have shown instinctive understanding of how Asian people operate in business. Should we involve more Europeans from the Old World in our relations with Asia? Provided they are open-minded about Asia, and not anti-Asian (some prominent representatives have strongly opposed even the development of Asian Studies in Australia!) then we ought to think about it. Europeans, East and West, have shown quite some strength of mind in dealing with China.

One other respect in which we can make a fresh start concerns Taiwan. I believe Australian ministers bound our hands unnecessarily on the question of Taiwan, from the time we established relations with Beijing. We had taken a right stand on Beijing. Why did we have to be so obdurate on Taiwan? Because we couldn't handle the duality. Our naivete and ineptitude is nowhere more clearly displayed.

Our major allies and trading partners, and most of our Asian neighbours, have had a much more substantial presence in Taiwan and fly their civil aircraft there and their trade has not suffered. Distant Holland sold Taiwan submarines and lived to tell the tale. All of the countries of non-Communist Asia have a substantial economic relationship with Taiwan, with or without diplomatic relations. Lee Kuan Yew, a favourite son in Beijing, is a frequent caller in Taiwan. Taiwan is a major investor around the region. But with the world's second largest reserves, Taiwan has been timid about investing in Australia because of the rigidity of our Taiwan policy and its fear of expropriation under pressure from Beijing.

An upgraded relationship with Taiwan (not a diplomatic relationship but one similar in substance to our friends' and neighbours') would do several things. It would benefit us economically. It would test the maturity of our diplomacy and the real strength of our relations with Beijing. And it would give us a perspective on China which, perhaps more than anything else, would help to break the spell.

These factors together might bring a new age of maturity and sophistication to Australian thinking about China. A terrible irony for it to have happened through June the Fourth. But perhaps the healthiest thing that could have happened since we established diplomatic relations.

THE GEORGE ERNEST MORRISON LECTURE IN ETHNOLOGY

The George Ernest Morrison Lecture was founded by Chinese residents in Australia and others in honour of the late Dr G.E. Morrison, a native of Geelong, Victoria, Australia.

The objects of the foundation of the lectureship were to honour for all time the memory of a great Australian who rendered valuable services to China, and to improve cultural relations between China and Australia. The foundation of the lectureship had the official support of the Chinese Consulate-General and was due in particular to the efforts of Mr William Liu, merchant, of Sydney; Mr William Ah Ket, barrister, of Melbourne; Mr F.J. Quinlan and Sir Colin MacKenzie, of Canberra. From the time of its inception until 1948 the lecture was associated with the Australian Institute of Anatomy, but in the latter year the responsibility for the management of the lectureship was taken over by the Australian National University, and the lectures delivered since that date have been given under the auspices of the University.

The following lectures have been delivered:

Inaugural: W.P. Chen, *The Objects of the Foundation of the Lectureship and a Review of Dr Morrison's Life in China.* 10 May 1932.

Second: W. Ah Ket, *Eastern Thought, with More Particular Reference to Confucius.* 3 May 1933.

Third: J.S. MacDonald, *The History and Development of Chinese Art.* 3 May 1934.

Fourth: W.P. Chen, *The New Culture Movement in China.* 10 May 1935.

Fifth: Wu Lien-teh, *Reminiscences of George E. Morrison; and Chinese Abroad.* 2 September 1936.

Sixth: Chun-jien Pai, *China Today: With Special Reference to Higher Education.* 4 May 1937.

Seventh: A.F. Barker, *The Impact of Western Industrialism on China.* 17 May 1938.

Eighth: S.H. Roberts, *The Gifts of the Old China to the New.* 5 June 1939.

Ninth: Howard Mowll, *West China as Seen Through the Eyes of the Westerner.* 29 May 1949.

Tenth: W.G. Goddard, *The Ming Shen. A Study in Chinese Democracy.* 5 June 1941.

Eleventh: D.B. Copland, *The Chinese Social Structure.* 27 September 1948.

Twelfth: J.K. Rideout, *Politics in Medieval China.* 28 October 1949.

Thirteenth: C.P. FitzGerald, *The Revolutionary Tradition in China.* 19 March 1951.

Fourteenth: H.V. Evatt, *Some Aspects of Morrison's Life and Work.* 4 December 1952.

Fifteenth: Lord Lindsay of Birker, *China and the West.* 20 October 1953.

Sixteenth: M. Titiev, *Chinese Elements in Japanese Culture.* 27 July 1954.

Seventeenth: H. Bielenstein, *Emperor Kuang-Wu (A.D. 25-27) and the Northern Barbarians.* 2 November 1955.*

Eighteenth: Leonard B. Cox, *The Buddhist Temples of Yun-Kang and Lung-Men.* 17 October 1956.

Nineteenth: Otto P.N. Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, *The Chinese Civil Service.* 4 November 1957.

Twentieth: A.R. Davies, *The Narrow Lane: Some Observations on the Recluse in Traditional Chinese Society.* 19 November 1958.

Twenty-first: C.N. Spinks, *The Khmer Temple of Prah Vihar.* 6 October 1959.

Twenty-second: Chen Chih-mai, *Chinese Landscape Painting: The Golden Age.* 5 October 1960.

Twenty-third: L. Carrington Goodrich, *China's Contacts with Other Parts of Asia in Ancient Times*. 1 August 1961.

Twenty-fourth: N.G.D. Malmqvist, *Problems and Methods in Chinese Linguistics*. 22 November 1962.*

Twenty-fifth: H.F. Simon, *Some Motivations of Chinese Foreign Policy*. 3 October 1963.

Twenty-sixth: Wang Ling, *Calender, Cannon and Clock in the Cultural Relations between Europe and China*. 18 November 1964.

Twenty-seventh: A.M. Halpern, *Chinese Foreign Policy – Success or Failure?* 9 August 1966.*

Twenty-eight: J.W. de Jong, *Buddha's Word in China*. 18 October 1967.*

Twenty-ninth: J.D. Frodsham, *New Perspectives in Chinese Literature*. 23 July 1968.*

Thirtieth: E.A. Huck, *The Assimilation of the Chinese in Australia*. 6 November 1969.*

Thirty-first: K.A. Wittfogel, *Agriculture: A Key to the Understanding of Chinese Society, Past and Present*. 6 April 1970.

Thirty-second: I. de Rachewiltz, *Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia*. 3 November 1971.*

Thirty-third: Eugene Kamenka, *Marx, Marxism and China*. 6 September 1972.

Thirty-fourth: Liu Ts'un-yan, *On the Art of Ruling a Big Country: Views of Three Chinese Emperors*. 13 November 1973.

Thirty-fifth: Jerome Ch'en, *Peasant Activism in Contemporary China*. 22 July 1974.

Thirty-sixth: Yi-fu Tuan, *Chinese Attitudes to Nature: Idea and Reality*. 3 September 1975.

Thirty-seventh: Lo Hui-Min, *The Tradition and Prototypes of the China-Watcher*. 27 October 1976.*

Thirty-eighth: Roy Hofheinz, *People, Places and Politics in Modern China*. 17 August 1977.

Thirty-ninth: Mark Elvin, *Self-Liberation and Self-Immolation in Modern Chinese Thought*. 13 September 1978.*

Fortieth: Wang Gungwu, *Power, Right and Duties in Chinese History*. 19 September 1979.*

Forty-first: Dr Fang Chao-ying, *The Great Wall of China: Keeping Out or Keeping In?* 5 June 1980.

Forty-second: Tien Ju-K'ang, *Moslem Rebellion in China: A Yunnan Controversy*. 17 June 1981.*

Forty-third: Alan Thorne, *China and Australia: Forth Thousand Years of Contact*. 4 August 1982.

Forty-fourth: Chan Hok-lam, *Control of Publishing in China, Past and Present*. 24 August 1983.*

Forty-fifth: J.S. Gregory, *The Chinese and Their Revolutions*. 8 August 1984.*

Forty-sixth: Allen S. Whiting, *China and the World: Independence v Dependence*. 31 July 1985.*

Forty-seventh: Pierre Ryckmans, *The Chinese Attitude Towards the Past*. 16 July 1986.*

Forty-eight: Jean Chesneaux, *China in the Eyes of the French Intellectuals*. 24 June 1987.*

Forty-ninth: Ross Garnaut, *China: One Country, Two Systems*. 17 August 1988*

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