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Chinese-American Rapport During the President's Visit

The Chinese are masters of style, which they tend to consider as being as important as substance--or at least as being inextricable from substance. They are superb hosts. Western susceptibility to oriental charm is a widely recognized pitfall.

It is recognized that the following observations will not be needed by some of the likely readership. Some of the members of the party, however, may not have had experience in oriental ways. This paper is offered in the belief that the elements of style which it discusses can have considerable influence on the quality of communication achieved with the Chinese. The style of the "advance party" will be crucial in paving the way for a successful Presidential visit.

A. Chinese Etiquette

The more sophisticated Chinese will not expect an American to act like a Chinese, and will show an easy tolerance for differing customs. Chinese not accustomed to Western ways, however, could take offense at some of our habits, where certainly no offense would be intended. And even sophisticated Chinese appreciate the Westerner's attempts to abide by their social customs.

While the Chinese Communists have relaxed some of the traditional forms of social behavior, most of them have carried over into the post-revolutionary period. Where they are not in evidence, this may be an attempt on the Chinese part to make Westerners more comfortable. One cannot go wrong in bearing in mind the following points of etiquette, while taking into account the Chinese lead in possibly altering local custom to accommodate the visitors.

(1) Adherence to the rule that one does not touch one's drink at table without proposing a toast to another, or

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to others, at the table--though only a symbolic sip need be taken except in the case of those of equal or superior rank, when the glass should be drained. (This will require us to formulate in advance toasts appropriate to each member of the Chinese hierarchy present--to omit a ranking Chinese would be interpreted as a serious slight. The Department will suggest toasts appropriate to each official, which can be translated into Chinese conventions.

(2) The Chinese are precise about the use of titles when addressing Chinese at all ranks. They do not use the Chinese equivalent of "Mr." even for low-ranking personnel as a free substitute for "Committee Member Wang," "General Li," "Factory Manager Hsieh," or "Bureau Chief Cheng." (The use of the neutral term "Comrade" is of course not open to us.)

(3) Chinese are very sensitive to problems of precedence at doorways, in automobiles, etc. Even a token gesture of yielding right of way or the seat of honor to a Chinese is very much appreciated; failure to make the gesture when expected would be interpreted as arrogance.

(4) Members of the Presidential party should carry calling cards identifying their position. While there is far less emphasis upon this in present-day Peking than there has been at some points in the past, the Chinese custom of extravagant exchanging of calling cards has not died out.

B. Body Language

American and Chinese behavior patterns of gesticulation and "body language" are in general similar. However, the following should be carefully avoided:

(1) Standing with arms crossed. This pose, which could be interpreted by Americans as a gesture of nervous insecurity or even deference, is universally interpreted by Chinese as arrogance and hauteur. (This gesture has even become a convention with this meaning in Peking Opera.)

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(2) Standing with arms akimbo (hands on hips, elbows out). To Chinese, this is a pugnacious stance, symbolic of angry defiance.

(3) Beckoning with the index finger or with an upward motion of the arm or hand. The index finger is used to call cats and dogs or very small children. It is insulting to beckon to an adult Chinese in this way. To an American, beckoning with an upward sweep of the right arm or half opening and closing the outstretched palm of the hand are the two most common, friendly ways of saying: "come on over here!" This is how Chinese call servants or inferiors; to call an equal in this way is to insult him. The standard Chinese gesture used to beckon an equal is often mistaken by Americans for a wave goodbye. With arm outstretched and the palm of the hand facing downwards, Chinese half open and close the hand (repeatedly drawing the tips of the fingers toward themselves) to call a friend or equal to them.

C. Praise

Chinese are shameless flatterers, and expect to be flattered in return. The most sincere kind of flattery is of course imitation--evidence by the flatterer of a sincere desire to profit by learning from the wisdom of the flattered.

For anti-Communist Americans the necessity of flattering attentive PRC hosts during the President's visit presents problems. To praise many of those aspects of modern Chinese life of which the PRC is most proud would be inappropriate in terms of the US image, and would of course have unfavorable US domestic impact. What is there in PRC practices which the President or his entourage could publicly find admirable? What is there for Americans to learn from China? Some possible answers follow:

(1) Acupuncture: The average American reacts to the idea of acupuncture with a mixture of horror and disbelief

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in its efficacy. Yet, acupuncture (as refined by the Chinese Communists) is said now to incorporate elements of Western as well as traditional Chinese medical theory. Most importantly, it evidently works. The PRC evidences great pride in the achievements of its acupuncture technique. There is already some interest in the US in its study. A request by one or more ranking members of the party to view acupuncture technique, followed by a statement announcing an intention to urge study of acupuncture within the American medical community, would be very well received in the PRC.

(2) Pharmaceuticals and Surgery: The PRC is proud of its practical, scientific application of traditional herbal medicine to the curing of illness and disease. It is also proud of its achievements in surgery, especially the re-grafting of severed limbs; and in pharmacological chemistry, especially the synthesis of insulin. The US could indicate a desire to learn more about PRC discoveries in these fields, and could simultaneously offer to host PRC scientists interested in studying American medicine and pharmacology. Both countries would probably in actual fact gain from this exchange.

(3) Ecology: Out of necessity, the PRC has developed strains of grain and vegetable crops which do well with non-chemical ("organic") fertilizers. The Chinese have developed new techniques of treating human ordure to render it safe for use in the cultivation of vegetables. They have valuable experience to impart to American ecologists in the fields of "organic" gardening and non-chemical pest control. Moreover, they have paid a great deal of attention to the problems of erosion and reforestation of denuded land. In this area also, we probably have something to learn from them. The President could, with justice, hold Chinese achievements in these fields up for study by American environmentalists.

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(As evinced by many newspaper articles recently, herbal medicine and "organic" farming appear to be fields of growing interest in the United States, especially among young people, and public recognition of Chinese accomplishments in these fields would probably be well received not only by the Chinese, but also by important elements in the US.)

(4) Major Construction Projects: Such massive buildings as the Great Hall of the People in Peking and major bridges (as the one across the Yangtze), said to have been built in remarkably short time by the Chinese people, are objects of great national pride in the PRC. Similarly, the Chinese are proud of the many well-publicized technical innovations made by workers and farmers in the course of the PRC's drive for economic self-reliance and self-sufficiency. A Presidential expression of admiration of these creative achievements, or of regret that there was no time personally to study them, would be very appropriate.

(5) Chinese Cuisine: While citizens of many countries regard their native cuisine as the finest in the world, the Chinese have more basis than most for their pride. They react with much pleasure to compliments about the truly remarkable variety of tastes, textures and aromas in Chinese cuisine.

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Your Trip

You already know the agreements reached on the arrangements for your visit through my earlier messages, our conversations, and Dwight Chapin's separate report. Our approach was to scale down our requirements to the minimum in advance, present all technical considerations in writing, let the Chinese come back to us with questions, and not try fruitlessly to squeeze extra mileage out of them once they told us what they would do.

This approach paid off handsomely. The Chinese appreciated our attitude, knew that we were not bargaining in conventional fashion, carefully clarified the issues so that they knew what was involved, and then agreed to the maximum that their technical capabilities would allow. In each case they met our essential requirements in terms of numbers and facilities, and when we left, there remained only a few issues on the itinerary for me to check with you.

At the opening session I outlined our general approach, stressed that we would not let technical issues interfere with the historic thrust of your visit, and then ticked off the major issues to be resolved:

- On the itinerary, I said that we were thinking of a five-day trip with perhaps one other stop besides Peking.
- On communications, I stressed the need for secure and rapid communications for the President at all times and said a ground station was the easiest method. Chou asked when a Vice President could take over some of the responsibilities of a President, and he revealed that he had read extracts of Six Crises which showed that you had restrained yourself when President Eisenhower was incapacitated.
- On security, I said that we would rely on them as host country, that we had reduced our numbers drastically, and that the primary function would be for our men to serve as liaison with the Chinese security people.

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- On the press, I explained the dimensions of the corps on other Presidential visits and how we had cut back the numbers.
- Finally I sketched the outlines of the official (12) and unofficial (16) party.

I then explained the books that we had prepared which showed the dimensions of past Presidential visits, the reduced optimum plan for your visit to China, and then the bare minimum plan that we had finally made. (During this exchange Chou revealed that, after hearing of your liking for it, he had seen the movie Patton and believed that you admired the General because he was one to break through conventions.)

Later in this opening meeting, after I made clear that we would still proceed with the summits in the order that they were announced, Chou moved quickly to indicate that the Chinese preferred the February 21 date. He thus made it clear that there would be no haggling over this issue despite whatever other differences might crop up during the next few days. He also indicated that the Chinese were thinking of a visit lasting seven days instead of the five that I had indicated.

During the first part of our first private meeting the next morning, Chou and I explored further some of the major questions concerning arrangements. We pinned down February 21 as the date for your visit. We agreed to the general concept of meetings during your visit similar to the ones during this one -- a general opening session of the two official parties, followed by private meetings between you and the Chinese leaders and concurrently between the foreign ministers, and perhaps another closing general session. And we confirmed that neither side would say anything to the press during or after your visit which was not first mutually agreed upon.

We then discussed the meeting between you and Chairman Mao. Chou said that the Chairman wanted to meet you early during your visit, after greeting the official party, and again towards the end. I said you wanted to meet alone with Mao. He rejoined that the composition of our side was up to us, but that the Chairman was always accustomed to having the Prime Minister present for specifics, although Mao was of course fully at home on general principles.

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On the itinerary, we agreed that I would come back to Washington with two formulas, one for a five day visit and one for seven days. He said that he would accompany you wherever you went, made clear that they would expect you to travel on a Chinese plane, and introduced the idea of an overnight visit to Hangchow. There was further discussion of these issues during which I made another pitch for the ground station, and said that I would have to consult with you on the question of the aircraft, since an American President had never traveled on another nation's plane.

Meanwhile the Chinese technical personnel were studying for twenty-four hours the books we had given them. On Thursday afternoon they began two days of meetings with our counterparts during which they posed a series of questions to clarify the meaning of our presentations.

After a private meeting on late Thursday afternoon, I took Chou aside and expressed Mrs. Nixon's desire to see his country; he said he would check with Chairman Mao.

During our sightseeing trips to the Great Wall and Summer Palace, the Chinese mentioned Hangchow several times, underlining their hope you could go there. (Mac will probably be there, for in July Chou had said that you might be meeting him outside of Peking. However, an inconsistency arises since Chou has said that you would meet Mao early in the trip and Hangchow would come at the end of it. Since there will be two meetings between you and Mao, there could be one in Peking early in the visit and one at Hangchow at the end.)

At 9:00 p.m. on October 23 Chou came to my sitting room in the Guest House and proceeded to settle the major outstanding technical issues. He first accepted the overall dimensions of the Presidential party and support group, i. e. some 350 personnel. He said the Chinese had accepted these numbers out of respect for our having cut down the figures drastically in advance. (Chinese acceptance included 80 press. This represents a large incursion for them, but they explained on other occasions that their only concern was whether they could properly accommodate all the journalists, including having sufficient interpreters.)

Having heard our preference for a five day visit and that a trip to Hangchow would increase the numbers, Chou began to back away from that suggestion. He said that we could compromise on a six day visit which included five

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days in Peking and one day in Shanghai. Knowing of the intense Chinese interest in Hangchow, I said that I would be prepared to raise this issue with you. He then made clear, in typical Chinese fashion, that Mrs. Nixon would be welcome by saying that once she saw the villa in Hangchow she would not want to spend the night in Shanghai.

Picking up a reference I made to the legal aspects of sovereignty, Chou said they would like to buy the proposed ground station and Boeing 747 processing center, and if not they would rent it. I replied that it would be easier to lease it. As I then acknowledged to Chou, this was clearly an example of their "principled" approach on technical as well as substantive questions. They want to do things themselves and maintain their concepts of sovereignty. Within their capability, they would be as forthcoming as possible. Thus, this equipment was admissible so long as it "belonged" to them.

The only comments on technical matters with an edge to them were Chou's references to security. He made clear that this was the responsibility of the host country and several times noted our requirements with a slight dose of sarcasm. (The Chinese did show some genuine concern about the security problem caused by the large press contingency.)

We settled on the text of the communique for my visit and the October 27 release date and we agreed that the announcement of the date for your visit would be in the latter part of November. After first suggesting that the text of the latter could refer only to "late February," Chou was soon persuaded of the need to be specific about the date.

Chou then was once again very firm on your traveling in a Chinese plane, and I said I would discuss it with you. Chou said that the idea of an occasional U.S. envoy to Peking after your visit could be in the communique, and I made a pitch for Bruce once the Indochina war was behind us. He stipulated there would be two meetings between you and Chairman Mao. After some further discussion, which included agreement on what I would say at my backgrounder and my informing them of the upcoming Cannikin test, we adjourned the session.

This exchange left only a few loose ends which we have since tied up. At the final session, I confirmed that there would be another technical advance party, led by General Haig, after the announcement of the date

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of your visit. Since my return, we have informed the Chinese that Mrs. Nixon will accompany you and that we accept a seven day visit, including an overnight at Hangchow. We have also informed the Chinese that we believe the date for the announcement of your visit should be November 23, 1600 Washington time. On the question of your travel within China, we should take some more time to respond so that the Chinese will realize that this is a major decision for us.

These discussions on arrangements for your visit confirmed both that our somewhat unconventional approach of presenting our minimal requirements at the outset made sense and that the Chinese do not engage in haggling over technical details once agreement in principle has been reached. Their acceptance of our numbers, their leasing of the ground station and 747, and their insistence on a Chinese plane for your travel within their country illustrate their basic attitude on arrangements.

Chou might have engaged in some brinkmanship by raising shadows about your trip while we were wading through some of the difficult substantive issues. He did not do this, partly because this is not his style and partly because he needs the visit as much as we do. In any event, while we had some rough and tough private discussions, there was never any doubt cast by either side on the fact that your visit would proceed as planned.

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Subsidiary Issues

I knew in advance that the Chinese would be cool to proposals in the commercial and exchange program fields. In the Warsaw talks they resisted our approach of focussing on these side issues, and they made the same point in a note this summer. Even now that we are talking about Taiwan and other major issues, they want to keep the emphasis there and away from areas which suggest a "normal" relationship.

I sought to meet this resistance head on in my opening statement by acknowledging their attitude and explaining ours. We considered progress in these fields not as a substitute for fundamental agreements but rather to give impetus to them. It would keep off balance those who wished to see the new U.S. -China dialogue fail. Chou and I agreed that such questions could be discussed by our assistants while we held private talks on the major issues.

These side discussions touched upon three questions: continuing US-PRC contacts; exchanges between the two countries in the fields of science and technology, culture sports, and journalism; and bilateral trade (in brief and low-key fashion).

On continuing contacts, the Chinese reaffirmed their backing of a proposal Chou had made in July - the sending of a high-level U.S. representative to the PRC from time to time. On several separate occasions I emphasized your preference for Ambassador Bruce, whom we hoped would be acceptable to Peking once the Indochina war was over. Chou did not confirm or deny acceptability. The Chinese were not interested in more formal contacts such as "liaison offices" or "interests sections" in friendly Embassies on the grounds that the liaison arrangement they had with Japan was entirely non-governmental and that the presence of a Chiang Kai-shek Embassy in Washington precluded their establishing an interests section here.

Cautious interest in exchanges was displayed by the Chinese. Our side explained the rationale for and outlined a broad spectrum of exchanges in a variety of areas, and the Chinese accepted a representative list of possible programs. They indicated that while there would be exchanges, these would be strictly non-government and limited in number from the Chinese side.

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When we raised the subject of trade and said we were prepared to liberalize our restrictions further, they said bluntly that they had absolutely no interest in the matter. Indeed they were grateful that the USSR and the US had caused them to be self-reliant.

Of possible follow-up interest was a strong statement against hijacking-whatever the motive - by Chou in one of our private meetings.

The Chinese disinterest in these subsidiary issues probably stems partly from a wish to focus more on the fundamental issues in the US-PRC relationship, and partly from a desire to preserve as much ideological purity as feasible by not appearing to rush into a too-active program of contacts and exchanges with the U.S. As for trade, they may not have defined their goals and probably see little immediate potential in any event.

On the other hand, the Chinese appeared to appreciate our rationale for seeking to make some progress on subsidiary issues: that this would help make movement possible on the more fundamental questions and convince detractors of improved relations that gains could, in fact, be made from this course. Thus they included references in the draft communique to sending a periodic envoy to Peking and to facilitating exchanges in various fields.

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