China. American reporters have once again succeeded in fixing the world’s image of the once Celestial Kingdom.

Once again American journalists were able to present, not only to this country and the Western world but also to China, the image of what was actually happening. When Americans sit down with representatives of the Chinese government and try to tell them what the attitude toward China is in this country, these officials cannot get it through their heads because they don’t understand the power of the international arena in which the politics of China has been played out. This is more and more the way the politics of the world are going to be played out for everyone. This is where Gorbachev’s case will be made or lost. This is where Bush’s case is made or lost. This is where the dissolution of the Communist movement in Eastern Europe is made or lost. It is done in exactly the same way: it is a new deal, a new era, and the American journalists are in its forefront.

The dilemma of centricity and internationalism in China is of pivotal importance. As events in Tiananmen illustrated, the world has grown so small that we are participant-observers in one another’s affairs, and the media are a key element of participation as well as observation. It is therefore especially important to take seriously the problem of identity and openness in China, to understand the particular features of China’s political personality, and to consider the role of international communication both critically and self-critically. Thus the purpose of this chapter is not to present a particular thesis concerning the Tiananmen events, but to explore the general context of China’s dilemma of internationalism, highlighting the role of both domestic and international media within that dilemma.¹

The problem of national identity, in tension with international openness, is at the same time universal and unique. On the one hand, no nation or group simply considers itself a part of the world, like any other part; every country considers its individuality precious and at times reacts in a literally “self-serving” way to perceived threats and to perceived opportunities for domination or expansion. On the other hand, each of these national personalities is in fact unique. The “City on the Hill” is not the “Third Rome,” and even attempts to copy another culture produce something quite different from the original. Moreover, a country’s political personality is constantly changing as a...
result of its own political experience and as a result of shifts in its international context.

If uniqueness admitted of degrees, then China's political personality would be on the high end of the scale, and it has been further complicated through massive changes. The basic contradiction is that progressive reform in China has been based on the rejection of traditional Chinese culture and on learning from the West; yet traditional values and interests remain very important parts of the Chinese identity, and the West has always posed a threat as well as a model. The media in China also express this dualism: as professional journalists, they are among the most Western social components of modern China, born in the treaty ports and nurtured on foreign models, but as conveyors of orthodoxy they are traditional and closely controlled. Western journalism about China is also perceived in a dual role, on the one hand providing information and on the other representing an antagonistic orthodoxy.

THE CENTRICITY OF TRADITIONAL CHINA

A comprehensive discussion of China's political culture or political personality is beyond the scope of this essay, but one feature is especially important with regard to China's interactions with the rest of the world. This is what I call China's "centricity," which as far as I know is a new term, though what it describes has been noted by foreign visitors since Marco Polo. Centricity refers to a world outlook in which the affairs and concerns of one's own country are assumed to have universal preeminence. Of course any nation (or individual) considers its own interests more important than those of its neighbor's, but a centric perspective assumes that the rest of the world really revolves around it, and hence that its dealings with the rest of the world are not symmetric. Something of this idea is suggested by the terms "ethnocentric" and "xenophobic," but these suggest to me a closing off rather than a structured, weighted world view. Despite the contrary metaphor of the Great Wall, traditional China did not seek to close itself off. As Joseph Levenson has pointed out, Confucian centricity was originally cosmopolitan; it became parochial only under the onslaught of the West. However, it did not see itself as one of a galaxy of cultures, but as "all under Heaven," the sun of a cultural solar system.

The centricity of the Chinese Empire is perhaps best illustrated by the prefatory paragraph of an official letter to Queen Victoria before the first Opium War:

The Way of Heaven is fairness to all; it does not suffer us to harm others in order to benefit ourselves... Our Heavenly Court treats all within the Four Seas as one great family; the goodness of our great Emperor is like Heaven, that covers all things... The Heavenly Court, extending its benevolence to all alike, allows (such as barb, silk, and tea) to be sold and carried away across the seas, not grudging them even to remote domains, its bounty matching the bounty of Heaven and Earth.

Three important aspects of the traditional Chinese world view can be distinguished in this passage: first, that human nature and rationality are universal; secondly, that China occupies the position of the father in the world's natural hierarchy; thirdly, that the benefits of international relationships are unequal. It was an international role accepted by China's closest neighbors, though of course not by Queen Victoria.

The traditional Chinese centricity was quite different from Western nationalism. China did not have to fight for its sovereignty among a number of countries of equal stature. The size of its population, security of its geography, homogeneity of its population, and greatness of its indigenous civilization gave China a complacency that was beyond the feisty competitiveness of Western nations. China's centricity could be compared with the imperialist West as a whole in the 19th century or with the centricity of the contemporary United States.

China's response to the evident superiority of Western military power was to learn techniques from the West in order to preserve China. The famous slogan from that period was zhong xue wei ti, yang xue wei yong (Chinese things as essence, foreign things for utility). The effort to borrow from the West began with military modernization, but there was no natural limit to useful things, and the strength of the West was attributed to such basic and non-Chinese features as democracy and science. The failure of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 demonstrated to even the Empress Dowager's satisfaction that structural reforms were needed rather than compartmentalized borrowings, but progressive political thinking in China outpaced the reform capacities of the Empire.

The fall of China's 2,000-year-old imperial political system in 1911 was symbolic of a total collapse of traditional China. Perhaps because Chinese civilization had grown old and rigid and was so
far-reaching in its pretensions, it seemed easier to abandon it and to begin again in the present, with young China. The remnants of tradition now appealed to Chinese modernizers as mindlessly parochial rather than universal, eccentric rather than centric.

Despite the collapse of traditional China, some aspects of its centricity remain influential. First, centricity is embedded in the unchangeable factors of China’s situation. With a large, ethnically homogeneous population, China is important and cannot stabilize itself in a disunified condition. The great inertia of culture and language imply that a Chinese elite, however antitraditional and cosmopolitan, would remain a national elite rather than become a kind of pale foreign imitation of a metropolitan culture as described in some colonial and postcolonial regimes by Frantz Fanon.5 Secondly, centricity is a posture that is attractive and perhaps even necessary to a central government in China. The default settings of public behavior are imperial. Even a regime founded on a cosmopolitan, Western ideology like Marxism falls into traditional patterns, including that of assuming that essence and utility can be separated.

Thirdly, there are class and regional differences in centricity because of the differential impact of the West. Coastal areas and intellectuals were the first to be shaken by the West and the first to recover and prosper with the opening of China. Traditions persisted longer in the hinterland and among the peasantry. To the extent that China’s modernization is Western oriented and not Sinocentric, the peasantry and the inland areas face a relative disadvantage that is insuperable.6 Such differential effects of modernization fold the contradictions of centricity and openness into the fabric of domestic Chinese politics.

THE REJECTION OF FEUDALISM

Regardless of such lingering influences—or perhaps because of them—modernizing politics in 20th-century China has involved the total rejection of traditional China. This rejection was most graphic in the early part of the century, when Lu Xun accused Confucianism of cannibalism, Chen Duxiu sung the praises of Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy, and stark contrasts were drawn between the characters of China and the West.7 Rejection remains a key part of progressive thought, as can be seen in Li Zezhong’s critical analysis of Chinese tribalism and in the thesis of Su Shaozhi and others that the key problem of Chinese politics is too much feudalism. Although it was awakened by the threat from the West, modernization has been a crusade for learning from the West and against the dead hand of the Chinese past. For most of China’s modernizers, including the Chinese Communist Party, the old slogan might be reversed: Western things as essence, Chinese things for utility.

The period of Chinese intellectual life from 1900 to 1927 was one of compressed intellectual modernization based on learning from the West. In approximately a generation, China’s intellectuals went from almost total ignorance of the West to an engagement with its leading currents. By 1919, Bertrand Russell and John Dewey were giving lectures throughout China at the invitation of their returned Chinese students, and the instant translations of these lectures were hotly debated throughout the intellectual world. Of course, the very rapidity of intellectual development left the countryside far behind, and the actual politics of China was mired in warlordism. But the solutions from the West, from railroads to YMCAs, from Deweyite democracy to Bolshevism, had proven their power elsewhere, and their proponents believed that they had only to be applied to China.

The general cosmopolitanism of the period was especially evident in the Chinese Communist Party. It should be recalled that, for China, communism was a Western influence and, moreover, the most radical of Western political influences. Its ideology was a Western critique of Western imperialism, and it had proven its power in the Russian October Revolution. The linkage of China to world revolution did not conflict with Chinese nationalism; on the contrary, it resonated with the internationalist predilections of China’s traditional outlook. All imported Western solutions were radical in the Chinese context, but communism was self-consciously revolutionary.

As an urban, cosmopolitan movement, Chinese communism was destroyed in 1927, when the alliance between the Communists and the Kuomintang (KMT) broke up amid bloody slaughters of Communists and their supporters. Within a few months the Party lost 90% of its strength and was driven out of the cities. In the struggle to survive in the countryside, however, Mao Zedong reoriented the Party toward rural revolution, thereby bringing into the Party the contradiction between Chinese centricity and internationalist progressivism. The official formula for Mao’s achievement was that he “creatively applied Marxism–Leninism to Chinese conditions,” which was both his intention and a reasonable description of his achievement. But the formula is too tidy. It implies that the ideological essence of Marxism–Leninism remained unaffected by Chinese circumstances, that it was possible to have “Western things for essence, Chinese things for utility.”
THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the relationship of Chinese centricity and international openness became exceptionally complex. The essence of the problem was that the PRC was at the same time the first strong central government in China since the Empire and also a Party-state with a revolutionary program. Therefore, the PRC became the natural heir of the Chinese political identity, but also consciously assumed an ideology-driven, internationalist responsibility of revolutionary transformation. The ultimate expression of this contradiction was Mao's role as "imperial revolutionary" during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, when he relied on the full power, and even the religious mystique, of the emperor's role to push China into a Marxist utopia.

Three broad stages in the development of the PRC's world view can be discerned. In the first, from 1949 to 1957, China's ideological commitment to Marxism-Leninism, and to learning from the Soviet Union, led to a reorientation of China's idea of modernity. Whereas China was very open toward the Soviet Union at this time and eager to copy from its revolutionary elder brother, it also sought to root out, or at least control, the bourgeois influences from the West. China shut one door and opened another. Meanwhile, the goals that the Stalinist model set for China's reconstruction—a strong central government, a state-run economy, no effective citizen control—resonated very strongly with traditional expectations of politics. Although claims that the Communists were simply establishing a "new dynasty" were certainly exaggerated, the fact remains that there were large overlaps between the Stalinist model of the state, as applied in China, and traditional expectations. As Tang Tsou has pointed out, there were important continuities of form despite discontinuities in content.

In the second stage, the period of leftist politics from 1957 to 1977, and especially the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1969, the complexities of the first stage developed into acute contradictions. By 1957, a number of factors had led to the rejection of the Soviet Union as a model for China's development. For the first time since the fall of the Empire, Chinese modernization did not have a more advanced foreign model to follow. But Mao's search for a Chinese road to socialism was still guided by the leftist ideals of Marxism: maximum collectivization of production, reduction of all inequalities, and the pursuit of class struggle against bourgeois tendencies. The last thing Mao wanted to do was to return to feudal Chinese values. China's international posture switched from being a learner of modernization to being a teacher of revolution—a rebirth of Chinese centricity in form, despite a total change of content. China was indeed totally revolutionary; it was antagonistic to its own traditions and closed the door to the Soviet Union without opening the door to the West.

Despite China's isolation during the leftist period, it was not a time when traditional Chinese values flourished. One might view the period as a combination of the worst parts of both centricity and internationalism, a mixture of the solipsism of centricity with the radical inappropriateness of borrowed ideas. Outside influences were internalized, the door was shut, and Chinese society was turned upside down.

In the third phase of Chinese politics, the post-Mao era, the PRC appeared to make an epochal move toward greater openness, and despite the Tiananmen massacre this might well turn out to be true in the long run. But the trend does not imply that centricity has lost or will lose its struggle with internationalism; rather, it indicates a shift in the balance of policy preferences toward material improvement and a maturation of China's international posture.

The defining characteristic of the post-Mao era might be called a "return to normalcy." After the dogmatic struggles and self-denials of the leftist period, tensions have been relaxed, the economy has been decentralized, doors to the West—and now doors to the East—have been opened, initiative has been encouraged, and traditional cultural special treatment has been under less pressure. From the perspective of the West, the most remarkable event is the new international openness, because the open door is the immediate point of contact. But the open door is only part of a general relaxation that has led to massive changes in Chinese society. In reaction to the differentiation and pluralization of Chinese society under the impact of relaxation, there arose a conservative fear of cultural and political dispersion and loss of identity, a fear of "complete Westernization."

Clearly, the conflict between a new Chinese centricity and international openness has not been resolved by the Tiananmen massacre. Both forces are important parts of Chinese reality. Even if the current regime stays in power, it will have to handle carefully the problems of international openness. The tension is apparent in Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin's 1989 National Day speech, in which he stoutly claims, "The Chinese people have never bowed to any foreign pressure, and never will; nor will China give up the road to socialism and national independence in return for other's aims," and moments later says, "We should ... persist all the more in opening to the outside world in order to speed China's socialist modernization." And if the current regime is replaced by a reform regime, the new leadership will have to cope
with the question of what is Chinese about China's future. As with every
culture that remains creative, there will be a tension between the oppor-
uties of world civilization and the threat of losing one's own
uniqueness.

TWO ROLES OF THE CHINESE MEDIA

Chinese journalism has both a long history and a short one. Its long
history is that of an official or semiofficial gazette of government
activity, and the regular exercise of this function dates back to the
tenth century. By contrast, the history of modern journalism in China
is brief and intimately related to Western influence in China. The first
modern newspapers in China were foreign-language ones, and the first
Chinese newspapers were Chinese editions of foreign papers.
Even after the development of autonomous Chinese newspapers,
relations to foreign owners and locations in foreign concessions were
often maintained as protection against censorship.

Because of its function of providing nonofficial communication
and its Western orientation, modern Chinese journalism was in a position
to take a leading role in Chinese politics in the period of com-
pressed intellectual modernization from 1900 to 1927. Although the
medium was not the message, it is difficult to imagine the political
content and effectiveness of Liang Qichao, Li Dazhao, Chen Duxiu, or
any other leader of the period without the simultaneous development
and extreme popularity of the periodical press. The Western-oriented
press in the big cities were the forefront of China's modern culture, the
mouthpiece of the young China, the China with a future.

The KMT's consolidation of power after 1927 brought a tightening
of censorship, leading to Lin Yutang's observation that "the power of
the press in the last four or five years [1931–1936] has dwindled to almost
nothing, and there is less freedom of speech or publication than in
any period from 1900." But Lin himself, and the journalistic tribulations
that he describes, are testimony to an enduring mission and self-
understanding of modern Chinese journalism as the independent pur-
voyor of news and opinion.

In the 1920s, the Communist press was among the most cosmo-
politan and radical, although the necessity of maintaining a Party line
restricted the diversity of viewpoints. For example, in 1927, Chen Duxiu
prevented the publication of Mao Zedong's "Hunan Report" in the
Party newspaper. But a very different approach to media began to
emerge in Yanan in the 1940s, and this approach became dominant after

1949. Until a Communist government was established in the area
under their control in Yanan, the primary mission of Communist jour-
nalism was one of criticism of the KMT government and of capitalism
in general. However, even with an established government to explain and
defend, and with policies that required the whipping up of popular
enthusiasm, the major function of the press began to shift toward providing
official propaganda. This function was modern to the extent that the government relied heavily on the media to reach the masses.
Circulation expanded tremendously and, with the completion of the
wired network in the early 1960s, China became, for the first time, a media country.

The media were emphatically official, the "mouthpiece of the
Party," and there were no independent informational sources. Iron-
cially, the lack of necessary information (and the leadership's own
cosmopolitan tastes) led to the development of a restricted "meitu"
informational system for the leadership, so that the media became the
official word of officials who were themselves reading excerpts from
the world press and frank reports on local conditions. Clearly the media
were not an information system. The situation reached its nadir in
the Cultural Revolution, when most periodicals were suspended, the
remaining ones simply reprinted material from Renmin Ribao (People's
Daily), and the presses were turned over to printing millions of copies of
Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong.

Several developments in the post-Mao era stimulated a major
change in Chinese media. First and most importantly, the Party's atti-
dute toward the informational role of media began to change, al-
though media as an information system remained subordinate to media
as a propaganda system. The new emphasis on information, includ-
ing international news, derived in part from the media needs of the
Party's emphasis on economic modernization. Greater sophistication
and decentralization in the economy required a proliferation of spe-
cialized periodicals and, in general, a freer flow of facts. Secondly,
journalism began, very slowly and cautiously, to reassert itself as an
autonomous profession, reclaiming its modernizing and critical roles of
prerevolutionary times. In some circles there was even a faint but
clearly discernible return of a Westernizing mission. This process of
professional reemergence took its most obvious and tragic step with
the presentation of a petition from journalists for greater autonomy on
May 9, 1989. Thirdly, the greater importance of competition for read-
ership contributed to a more interesting press. The very lively newspa-
paper public of China votes with its feet, and the budgets, bonuses,
and prestige of news organs are influenced by circulation.
In a time of repression, the media can neither run nor hide. They are forced to become the mouthpiece for policies and views that could not be further from their own opinions or from their own professional interests. The regime must seize tight control of the media in order to communicate its repressive message to the rest of society. The absurd official claims made about the Tiananmen massacre show that the communication of an authoritative viewpoint is again not just the chief task of the media, but the only one. One might say that, after the massacre's immediate casualties, the media are the first societal victim of repression.

**WESTERN MEDIA AND CHINA'S SELF-INTERPRETATION**

Since China has looked to the West for its models of modernization, the Western views of China have been and remain important for China's self-image as well as for China's international image. But there is as much miscommunication as communication between China and the West, to some extent founded on different ideologies, but more fundamentally representing a clash of centricities.

For better or for worse, the West has been a participant-observer in modern Chinese politics from the beginning. Imperialist wars played a major if not exclusive role in bringing down the Qing dynasty, and it would be difficult to separate the origins of reform movements in China from missionary activism. In his efforts to establish a modern government in China, Sun Yat-sen certainly played to a Western audience as well as to a Chinese one, although his optimism concerning Western support for a new China proved naive. But even if the relationship to Western governments was critical or even hostile, it was important for Chinese modernizers to be understood by at least a portion of the international press.

I would like to press the point that the importance of journalists like Edgar Snow and Agnes Smedley to Communist leaders before 1949 was more than the public relations value of a sympathetic press. The Communists had embarked on a risky venture to transform China, and the opinions of outsiders on what they were up to, the value of what they were doing, and whether or not they had a chance of success was an important (though of course not final) input into their own self-evaluation. In my opinion, the intimacy of the portrayals given by the journalistic knights-errant of the 1930s and 1940s was allowed because of a willingness to pose for a world-photograph, a willingness that was a mixture of public relations, self-confidence, and curiosity as to how one looked.

After 1949, neither China nor the American media were open to such candid portraits. As we have discussed, China's shift toward the Soviet Union, followed by the ideological introversion of the leftist period, encouraged an attitude of hostile distance toward the West. Meanwhile a different centricity was becoming more firmly established in the United States. As America became comfortable with its role as "free world" leader, it became less interested in truly diverse and challenging views of the world—like those of China presented by Edgar Snow or Jack Belden. It was not simply the anti-Communist hysteria that tuned out such viewpoints. The basic problem was (and remains) that if the United States is in charge of the world, then any report of the world's affairs involved policy approval or critique. Like the old Chinese empire, America's centricity is not the result of shutting itself off, but of spreading itself out. It is a world view heavily weighted toward the middle and filtered through supportive stereotypes.

The practical consequences of American centricity for information about China have shifted with the phases of the U.S.-China relationship. In the 1950s, William Hinton's notes about China were seized by the State Department, delaying the writing of *Fanshen*. In the 1960s, it was considered leftist to have a nonconformatory view of China, an attitude that of course intensified with the Cultural Revolution. Then China was rediscovered with Richard Nixon's visit in 1972, and a world of positive images was unveiled, more fresh but no less superficial than the earlier negative ones. From that time until the massacre a positive framework has prevailed, by and large, with occasional bouts of negative exposure led by such works as Fox Butterfield's 1982 book, *Alive in the Bitter Sea*.

One might describe the underlying skew of the American perspective on China as a political Doppler effect. When China appears to move closer to the United States—either in terms of international relations, as in 1972, or in terms of domestic policy—then the change seems obviously reasonable and natural. We see this as a victory for capitalism and a loss for communism forced by popular interests, and this stokes our complacency and sense of international self-worth. When China appears to move farther from the United States, the change seems irrational and stereotypically totalitarian—a "red shift" occurs. We are distressed but no less complacent when this happens, because it validates our totalitarian stereotype of communism.

The most important distortion caused by this perspective in the 1980s was the tendency to view political and economic reform in China as the victory of capitalism and the defeat of communism. The new
policies did respond to crises and bottlenecks caused by an overly centralized and dogmatic system, but they also built on the accomplishments of the previous 30 years. Moreover, even radical reformers were pushing for changes within the Communist system, not a change from communism to capitalism. The political and ideological flexibility and creativity necessary for such adaptation was seen as a fig leaf for abandoning Marxism and communism. Because the U.S. stereotype of communism was rigid, totalitarian, and antipopular, it was assumed that reform in a Communist country could only mean movement away from communism, regardless of claims to the contrary. Thus when General Secretary Hu Yaobang observed in 1985 that Marx had lived a very long time ago and many new problems had arisen, this was taken as a long-overdue open admission that Marxism was being abandoned. American centricity has in common with the most dogmatic conservatives in Communist countries the convenient inability to abandon a Stalinist stereotype of Marxism and communism. The real possibility of reform, of change within an existing system, is minimized.

The specific effects of American centricity on the interpretation of Chinese politics in 1989 were that anti-Party, anti-Communist aspects of the demonstrations were exaggerated. The demonstrations were a challenge to the Party’s monopoly of political power, but they were a challenge that began with mourning the death of one general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (Hu Yaobang) and ended with the removal of another general secretary (Zhao Ziyang) because of his refusal to condemn the movement. The basic challenge to the Party posed by the demonstrators was whether to accept or suppress spontaneous demonstrations and autonomous organizations, it was not one of “down with the Party, up with the people.” The challenge was a qualitative step beyond previous political reforms, but it built on their momentum and on a sense of frustrated citizenship created by half-measures.

The reformers within the Party, headed by Zhao Ziyang, were willing to accept the challenge and begin a structural reform of the Party’s political power. This would have meant a new era in Chinese politics, probably tamer than perestroika in the Soviet Union but based, like perestroika, on the political rights of citizens. Rather than the end of Communist Party rule, it would probably have led to a political rejuvenation and legitimation of the Party in a broader political framework. Unfortunately, this was too much of a challenge for the old guard, and the challenge could be tarred with being anti-Party, counterrevolutionary, and foreign influenced. I doubt if the reflection of Chinese events in Western media had a decisive influence on the old guard’s sense of crisis, but the American perceptual distortion did have the unfortunate effect of highlighting what in a Chinese context were the political vulnerabilities of the demonstrations.

The totalitarian stereotype would certainly seem appropriate for the postmassacre regime, but it too causes some important distortions. It is accurate in that the regime used the power of the state to terrorize the people, and the Party center continues to consolidate its power. But the totalitarian image downplays two important aspects of the current situation and misses the most important structural political effect of the massacre. First, the age of the old guard and the personal nature of their power has created a succession crisis of the first order. Change in the constellation of power at the top is likely but unpredictable, and there is no credible mechanism of succession in place. Certainly Deng’s naming of Jiang Zemin as his successor is no more conclusive than Mao saying to Hua Guofeng, “With you in charge, I am at ease.” Secondly, the totalitarian stereotype downplays the continuing political significance of reform within the establishment. Although there is little overt opposition to the regime, the fact is that massive personnel shifts toward modernization and reform were made in all political organs, and therefore the interests and preferences of most of the establishment are served better by reform than by repression. This creates a significant drag on enforcement of repressive policy and creates a context favorable for a return to reform.

Ironically, the most important structural effect of the massacre is to damage severely the political future of the Party-state. Had Zhao Ziyang been able to negotiate with the demonstrators, the Party would have renewed its leadership of political reform. By repression, the Party lost its leadership and alienated segments of the population essential to political vitality. In defending the Party as defined by its past, the old guard put at risk the Party’s role in China’s future. Even if Zhao Ziyang himself returns to power, it is hard to imagine the Party regaining reform leadership without a constitutional definition of the Party’s role and concessions to political pluralism as well as societal pluralism.

The demands made by the demonstrators at Tiananmen for the recognition of autonomous student groups and labor unions now will be the minimum demands put to a reform regime. Chinese groups “in exile” are already setting up oppositional political groups, and public opinion in Hong Kong would surely demand explicit concessions on political autonomy from a new reform regime in China. Such political concessions will lead to new and unpredictable tensions in Chinese politics because the existing structure and habits of Chinese politics are those of a monolithic Party-state. But one can anticipate that if political pluralization occurs, the traumas and complexities that it causes will
be underevaluated in the United States because it would be a move toward our familiar political system.

CONCLUSION: THE DILEMMA OF INTERNATIONALISM

It would be hard to imagine two more different relationships of national identity and modernity than those of the United States and China. The United States is a new, frontier country that has always prized innovation; for China, the most successful traditional civilization, modernity has been defined as an "other," both threatening and admired. China's traditional centricity was discredited and abandoned, although it remains influential as a geopolitical, cultural, and regional given; American centricity has not yet been forced to be self-critical, although its actual role in world affairs is increasingly smaller than its posture. China's new centricity was founded by a revolutionary party, with the media as its disciplined voice; despite the two-party system, American centricity evolved on the basis of generally shared assumptions about its role in the world, assumptions that set the stereotypes for its media. Both American and Chinese Communist centricities have proven strong enough to exclude the other in the past, but it is unclear whether either can do so in the future.

What has brought the United States and China together over the past 15 years has been more than an accidental confluence of political interests. By 1970, each had discovered an unexpected limit of power: the United States discovered the limit of its military power in Vietnam, and China discovered the limit of its ideological power in the Cultural Revolution. Given that the United States could not pacify the world and China could not transform it, each had to acknowledge the importance of the other. In the 1980s, the relationship has been driven by the softer but more pervasive influences of technology and trade. The strength of these ties is such that, even at the present time of divisive political pressures, both are loath to break them. The world has become a more permeable if not a more understanding place. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur put it most eloquently:

No one can say what will become of our civilization when it has really met different civilizations by means other than the shock of conquest and domination. But we have to admit that this encounter has not yet taken place at the level of an authentic dialogue. . . . We are in a tunnel, at the twilight of dogmatism and the dawn of real dialogues.21

When Deng Xiaoping set out to undermine the uncritical acceptance of the authority of Mao Zedong's teachings, the "blind faith of our times," he urged his comrades to "seek truth from facts." In the title of this chapter I have tried to suggest that the reporter's challenge is not just to seek the facts but to sift through them in order to come up with an interpretation that will make sense to the reader.

The relationship between the United States and China is a network of almost infinite complexity and variation. The two countries are so populous and so diverse as to defy understanding by themselves; how much more complex the task of understanding one in terms of the other. Yet that is the challenge that the men and women who work in the news media must face every day. As an historian I am more concerned with the problems of cross-cultural understanding than I am with the professional aspects of journalism. For this reason I will consider reporters as a special class of China watchers.

John K. Fairbank, the dean of American China scholars, observed that his phenomenal academic career was largely a function of being in the right place at the right time—between the world's largest revolution and the world's best university. Those Americans who would report on China might hope to position themselves in an equally favorable situation—between the greatest breaking story and the premier media audience. One can quibble about the adjectives of course: Fairbank's claims for Harvard would not go unchallenged.
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Printed in the United States of America

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Last digit is print number: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Voices of China: the interplay of politics and journalism / edited by Chin-Chuan Lee; foreword by John K. Fairbank. 356 p. cm. — (The Guilford communication series)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
PN4748.CSV65 1990 323.445/0951—dc20 90-14003 CIP

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