Tainted perceptions: Liberal-democracy and American popular images of China

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TAINTED PERCEPTIONS: LIBERAL-DEMOCRACY AND
AMERICAN POPULAR IMAGES OF CHINA

by

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ABSTRACT

Tainted Perceptions: Liberal-Democracy and American Popular Images of China

by

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The primary thesis of this study is that beginning with the pre-Tiananmen Square incident of 1989, American popular and institutional images of China focused on the reformist nature the government, but following the military crackdown in June 1989, this optimism dwindled and resulted in the creation of an ambivalent cross-cultural atmosphere toward the Chinese for the next half decade. When Chinese leaders decided to undertake military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in mid-1995, America’s perception of the PRC swung even further in a distinctly negative direction; an event that marked the outset of a three year period during which Chinese military modernization and economic expansion were viewed as a direct threat to the international political hegemony of the United States. Although cultural depictions of China cast an unsavory light over Beijing’s long-term intentions, the liberal-democratic philosophy that guided the formulation of these stereotypes was culturally reconfigured to meet the demands of a
global economy. Hence, America's ideological structure acquired a dynamic of international applicability; a development that reaffirmed the political superiority and validity of liberal-democracy and the free-market system.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, METHODOLOGY, AND
THE NATURE OF IMAGES

Since global communication, direct access, and more frequent media coverage characterize the international milieu of cultural exchange, the importance of accurate and detailed information concerning developments in the People's Republic of China is even more pertinent, because greater cross-cultural contact requires realistic depictions of foreign peoples. In the coming decades, China's international position as an economic powerhouse is expected to substantially increase. The recent growth of large-scale foreign investment in the PRC reflects this general trend toward Chinese economic expansion. However, cross-cultural exchange and high level contact between the United States and China remain constrained. When compared to the 9.9%¹ annual growth rate average China has enjoyed for the past seventeen years (partially due to direct foreign investment), the expected relaxation of Cold-War animosities have not fared as well. American popular attitudes of Chinese society, especially since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, have exhibited a distinct ambivalence about the fundamental nature of the Chinese communist government and its socio-political evolution. For the last decade, unfortunately, the less than objective formulation of cross-cultural images by the American popular press has resulted in the dissemination of highly negative images and
impressionistic stereotypes about the socio-political evolution of China. As the supposed normalization of Sino-American relations proceeds at an even greater rate, American cultural assumptions about China are bound to become more culturally biased, if current trends continue.

In China and the American Dream, sociologist Richard Madsen argued that Americans have interpreted the evolution of Chinese history since the Second World War through their liberal democratic assumptions about human socio-political development. Madsen concluded his study after the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 and claimed that this tumultuous event marked an end to the era of American idealism with regard to American expectations of political and social liberalization in the PRC. In the 1990s, this idealization that Madsen interestingly referred to has reemerged, but this time the issues and concepts that characterized the images presented in the popular press are emotionally more aggressive and ideologically contemptuous.

More often than not, these reports were based on superficial interpretations of recent Chinese history, a perpetuation of myths regarding the nature of Chinese culture, and a tendency on the part of journalists/columnists to predict future patterns of social evolution founded on impressionistic and vague images of the Chinese past. In terms of their specific development, the progressive creation of these assumptions in America took place through the gradual internalization of press reports, magazine articles, and television presentations. In addition, popular American interpretations of political and economic events in modern China also coincide with America’s political and economic interests. The emotional overtone of many magazine articles, in this regard, are often highly critical of selective aspects of the Chinese domestic environment, particularly
when domestic circumstances that emerge in China conflict with American cultural principles of individual liberty, democracy, and human rights. More than simply a group of facts presented in a sequential manner, the treatment of events by the mainstream media are carefully arranged, in order to convey specific and well-defined pictures of modern China; in terms of their emotive and ideological quality. Moreover, the notion of America as a missionary of its cultural, economic, and political standards (otherwise known as the "white man’s burden") with universal applicability, still pervades the American media’s coverage of the PRC. Thus, the actual process of image formulation is an exercise in altering and redefining our deeply held beliefs/values regarding China; values that are, in part, determined by ongoing changes in the sphere of international economics and domestic socio-political ideals. As this procedure in image manufacturing functions in the realm of popular culture, throughout time, these images ultimately result in the creation of a fictional history of Chinese society, that serves to reinforce the overall misperceptions of the modern Chinese historical experience.

While American foreign policy interests underwent severe redefinitions after the June 1989 Tiananmen incident, they have also maintained tremendous continuity regarding the issue of commerce and investment in China. In the past decade — which is roughly the scope of this project — the core of America’s China policy has centered on the fundamental financial benefits that Sino-American commercial contact has offered American businesses. Beginning in the late 1970s as Cold War tensions between Washington and Beijing were significantly thawing, America looked to a policy of increased contact based on trade negotiations. Although the democratic aspirations of America were definitely part of Washington’s China policy package, human rights, non-
proliferation, and the issue of Taiwan were secondary concerns when compared with the prospective monetary gains offered by heightened commercial contact with Beijing. For the most part, the ideological rhetoric and the images of China reinforced this notion of positive trade relations and the idea that economic liberalization in China would eventually lead to political reform.

In 1989, however, this foreign policy toward China underwent a radical reevaluation. The sanguine vision of a democratic utopia for future China came tumbling down and was replaced by a more critical assessment of the PRC as an emerging economic power operating under an authoritarian political system. Following the crisis and bloodshed in Tiananmen Square on June 4 and 5, American policy makers quickly revised their strategy for dealing with the Chinese government and brought to the forefront of the China debate the importance of, at least in strictly a rhetorical fashion, democracy, Taiwan, and human rights, to mention but a few. As the post-Cold War era began to unfold, the various presidential administrations addressed these concerns in different ways, while hoping that the slow diffusion of capitalism in China would ultimately lead to the infusion of liberal-democratic ideals within the populace.

Similarly, the plethora of images constructed by the American press throughout this period was founded on an ideological footing not unlike that of America's policy administrators. Since the liberal-democratic social philosophy is present within the institutions of both the American political machine and the corporate media, their ideological reactions to the situations in China were in many ways identical. Essentially, as the objective concentrations of governmental policy shifted throughout time, the images that stemmed from the mass media, especially popular news magazines, largely
coincided with these sudden shifts. Accordingly, these images reinforce dramatic and subtle modifications in American foreign policy, because both of these cultural institutions, for the most part, share the socio-philosophical viewpoint that liberal democracy, representative government, freedom of speech, free trade, and the importance of personal expression are universal human rights, are not simply social ideals bound within the borders of the United States.

Methodology

When analyzing the history of cross-cultural stereotypes and images at the national level, the makeup of a given culture must be taken into consideration. The individual, in terms of his/her personal contribution to the culture at large, is the foundational element within any society. In recent years, increased attention in the academic community has been given to the theory of cultural deconstructionism. The deconstructionist school of thought has spawned a new scholarly emphasis on the examination of societies and various cultures from a particularistic perspective, especially within the sub-discipline of cultural studies and multicultural analysis; therefore, an added significance has been placed on the micro-elemental differences among peoples, rather than a focus upon the similarities that bind humans culturally.

Already by the late 1970s, acclaimed labor historian Herbert Gutman criticized a growing trend in labor studies toward this end. With regard to this methodological drift, Gutman concluded that overspecialization and particularization in historical studies, without a firm foundation or reference to the greater societal forces at work (macro-history), often led to a narrow and over-specialized method of evaluation. More
importantly, this approach ran the risk of not contributing to situational patterns that form the historical experience of a society at the national level. Gutman further argued that “[s]omething is learned from such specialized studies, but in themselves such works often substitute classification for meaning and wash out the wholeness that is essential to understanding human behavior.” Even though Gutman was referring to the over-specialization that enveloped American social history, his insights into the difficulties that can arise from such a methodology are applicable to the emergence of cultural history in the contemporary era and the strain of particularization that currently dominates this academic field. An over-concentration on the fine points and intricate specifics of societies and cultures, therefore, can lead to a methodological evasion of the macro-picture and the greater commonalities that bind societies under similar socio-philosophical ideals and values.

Today cultural historians are divided between two dominant interpretive strategies. The more traditional methodological approach applied by cultural historians is founded on the interpretive systems of anthropologist Clifford Geertz. With a contextual focus on what French historian Robert Darnton described as “history in the ethnographic grain,” Geertzian cultural analysis seeks to decipher the “meaning inscribed by contemporaries,” within a specific socio-historical environment. Moreover, this mode of examination deciphers the simple parochialism of traditional (cause and effect) history in greater cultural detail, and unearths the symbolic meanings that shared ideas and values can create. For the study of image formulation and how a cultural institution — in this case the media — transmits its interpretations to the culture at large, the Geertzian system of cultural analysis, with its attention on meaning, is highly useful.
Without unnecessarily lauding the academic achievements of Geertz, certain problems are endemic to any perspective that seeks to draw an umbrella of meaning over an entire society. Roger Chartier, well known critic and opponent of the Geertzian perspective, argues that searching for "symbolic forms" in a cultural milieu tends to downplay the human conflicts and strife that underlie the experiences of humans in all societies. In other words, when a researcher places added weight on the importance of shared assumptions (and their meaning), deeply rooted problems and differences are glossed over that foster intra-social alienation. Therefore, it is absolutely crucial to realize that actual ethnic, religious, and value bound differences shape the complexity of events that generate social politics at the internal level, but intra-cultural similarities and shared systems of value nevertheless bind the national tapestry of culture in most post-modern societies, including the United States.

When examining the historical evolution of popular images, a conceptual paradigm through which the culture of mass media can be examined is absolutely necessary. Jim McGuigan argues that in relation to popular culture, "the intellectual assumptions, made by some students of popular culture, that symbolic experiences and practices of ordinary people are more important analytically and politically than Culture with a capital C" is valid. As a complementary note to the above statement, Stuart Hall suggests that the environment where the interaction of these ideas occurs is actually a forum in which "collective social understandings are created." When taken as a compilation of shared ideas with common themes that underscore their emotive and intellectual qualities, cross-cultural stereotypes, over time, are shaped into important assumptions that assist in the perpetuation of the "politics of significance." For the vast majority of Americans who
are exposed solely to the influence of the mass media as a source of data on developments in China (as opposed to the more objective literature available in academic journals), an entire worldview about a given topic might rest completely on images found in the realm of mass-media culture — with a lowercase “c.”

In every society, the complex of impressions produced by image formulators, in the words of philosopher Michel Foucault, are linked ideologically and politically to that particular nation’s “regime of truth” and its political culture. Societies operate in accepted modes of discourse, where incoming information and situations, for example the interpretations of politics in foreign governments, are filtered through a culturally accepted set of values that reinforce proper behavior and concepts of truth. Notwithstanding Foucault’s philosophical inclination toward cultural relativism, the notion of a “regime of truth” sheds much needed light on the nature of culturally bound values and ideals, without resorting to the extremities of absolute relativism. Therefore, through a combined use of Geertzian cultural theory and Foucault’s argument regarding the relationship between power and established cultural norms, an inquiry into the recent history of American images of China can yield a more holistic understanding of their nature and function, with respect to the socio-political philosophy that binds America’s national psyche.

With regard to the above material, three periodicals that form the core of American popular (media) culture will be examined in this study. Since Time, U.S. News & World Report, and Newsweek all review issues, events, and matters of public concern on a weekly basis and form the core of popular press reports on many international developments, these three periodicals will serve as the methodological basis from which
popular images will be systematically extracted. Moreover, these magazines comprise a genre of popular literature that is distinct from the more insightful and critically written daily publications; hence, they deserve separate analytical treatment from other forms of popular literature such as the New York Times and Los Angeles Times. The politics and issues covered by these three magazines, in general, tend to be rather similar, and the emotive tone and ideological slant (not political) found within these text are also common to all three. Rigorous inquiry into the articles and editorials that focus on aspects of China and will be augmented by government documents such as the presidential papers, State Department documents, bulletins, and briefings. These documents will be examined as the primary source material for the foreign policy aspect of the project. In addition, secondary literature also will be brought in to reinforce and elucidate the significance and meaning of primary documents. In each chapter, a chronological and topical format separates policy initiatives and related images into distinct periods, beginning with the international political crisis sparked by the 1989 military crackdown of student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square. In summary, the pattern of development in diplomatic, political, and ideological motivations that guided American political assessments of ongoing changes in China hopefully will substantiate the thesis that cultural and ideological motivations were at work in foreign policy and image construction. More importantly, their common liberal-democratic philosophical root has caused a misrepresentation of developments in Chinese society, since China is seemingly headed in a politically/economically divergent direction when compared to western democracies such as the United States.
The Psychology of Image Creation

Before examining the nature of American popular perceptions of China, a brief examination of images and their construction is appropriate. Historian Stuart Creighton Miller conducted one of the first major analyses of nineteenth-century American cultural attitudes and their connection to xenophobia in his book *The Unwelcome Immigrant*. In terms of its contemporary applicability, Miller's methodological perspective offers a clear picture into the process of image construction and its psychological tendency for self-perpetuation. In quoting Walter Lippman, Miller suggests:

> Obviously, the interaction of these events on an older image is crucial. The human mind does not see an object or situation and then define what it has observed. Rather, it brings to any situation or object a definition and then sees what it has already defined. “In... the confusion of the outer world,” Walter Lippman states, “we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.” There is, of course, great economy in such a process. We are bombarded with far too many stimuli to see everything freshly and in great detail, but must perceive in categories, types, generalities, or stereotypes. Indeed, such attitudes, categories, and stereotypes make up a cognitive map in the human mind which is a powerful determinant of public opinion. Essentially, this more stable, less conscious, less rational, and more generalized substrata of public opinion is what the historian frequently calls a “climate of opinion” or “image.”

In light of the above statement, image construction and subsequent climates of opinion, therefore, manifest in the empirical world as a plethora of impressions that combine to form a set generalization. Geertz described these generalizations as “webs of significance” that compose important elements within the overall mosaic of meaning in a given culture. Meaning, in this sense, can refer to the basic source of these generalities, since human reaction (mental reaction based on culturally laden ideas) generates from fundamental opinions and beliefs about moral, proper, and correct behavior. Thus,
human beings are not clean slates through which external stimuli (empirical processes) pass in a purely objective fashion.

By examining the climate of opinion and the multitude of images that contribute to its development, we attain additional knowledge regarding the core beliefs of a society by viewing the nature of image dissemination. In an article from Anthropology Today, anthropologist Terence Turner argued that in order to accurately acquire knowledge about a particular culture, rather than entering a field study with preconceived ideas and hypothesis that might compromise the viewer's level of objectivity, researchers should allow the experimental group to pose questions and discuss matters of significance that are essential to their day-to-day lives. This method, by limiting the amount of outside interference from the researcher — especially when dealing with the production of cultural opinions and images — magnifies the aspects of life that are culturally and ideologically relevant to the group. For example, in relation to images and their importance, by scanning the coverage of another culture in American popular literature, the analyst may ascertain those components of Chinese society that are culturally acceptable or deplorable to Americans.

In some cases, however, problems can arise from a methodological standpoint that overemphasize the meaning found within bulky generalizations. In the Chan's Great Continent, Chinese historian Jonathan Spence notes that "[i]t is my implicit belief that bold generalizations are usually wide of the mark, and that the individual experience rarely matches the allegedly universal trend." With respect to the infinite amount of variation that characterizes the individual experiences of people, Spence is ultimately correct. But at the national or cultural level, there are more to images and stereotypes

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than unique individual specifics. Strong continuities unite these personal, or in our case journalistic, impressions, that otherwise might not bear any resemblance to one another. The patterns visible in the specific articles that form the basis of this project, in sociologist Max Weber's words, can construct "a complex of elements associated with historical reality which we unite into a conceptual whole from the standpoint of their cultural significance." The climate of opinion, when viewing it from the Weberian standpoint, "must be gradually put together out of the individual parts which are taken from historical reality to make it up."\textsuperscript{13}

In sum, the forthcoming study brings together the most useful aspects of the above methodological systems, to illuminate the understudied link that exists between American socio-political values, foreign policy objectives in China, and media images that ultimately reinforce policy initiatives at different points in time.
CHAPTER 2

LIBERAL-DEMOCRACY AND AMERICAN SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL IDEALS

A brief treatment and explanation of ideology in American society is necessary since the controversy in academia over this issue is still unresolved. Traditionally and contemporarily, Americans have not thought of themselves as a nation with strong ideological underpinnings. Soviet communism and German fascism, more often than not, are the two political systems that Americans normally point to, when asked to identify political philosophies steeped in strong “ideology.” In fact, sociologist Richard Madsen maintains that “[m]ost Americans think of themselves as having no ideology — only the freedom to believe whatever they wish.” Historically, this attitude toward freedom of thought and action has sustained the notion that the United States is, and has always been, an ideologically neutral land where freedom of expression is paramount, and the repressive dogmatism of communism and fascism are nonexistent. “Most Americans would probably agree with this sentiment,” adds Madsen, and “would regard the openness of mind, the absence of dogmatism, the tolerance of diverse opinions as self-evidently good.” These individuals would also probably argue that America’s concentration on personal freedoms is precisely the factor that protects citizens from the tyranny of a state-induced ideology.
When applying the term *ideology* to the socio-political culture and philosophy of the United States, one must begin to look beyond the historically narrow use of this term. First, American socio-political values contain a definite element of rationalism. Mike Cormack claims that “beliefs which are held consciously” and composed of the principles of rational thought, can also be viewed as forms of ideology.\(^3\) Moreover, ideology should not be seen as an “aberration” in the historical development of a nation, but rather as a functional tool that reinforces the cultural or socio-political condition of a society.\(^4\) As Graeme Turner has persuasively argued in *British Cultural Studies*, individuals are usually unaware of their socio-ideological dispositions that become internalized in the human psyche over time, because its application to external stimuli is primarily an “unconscious”\(^5\) process of reactions to practices and habits. Therefore, when observed as the manifestation of ideas that maintain a system of order for an entire nation, ideology is nothing more than a value structure that perpetuates the life-ways of a people; when its values are confronted with contradictory systems of thought from an internal or external source.

Contemporarily speaking, American society, in terms of its racial, ethnic, and religious composition, is increasingly becoming more and more diverse. The pluralistic makeup of America naturally creates a roadblock for the cultural historian who seeks to understand nations in homogeneous terms, hence any suggestion in that regard would prove methodologically fatal for a researcher. Inasmuch as America is not a culturally homogeneous political entity, alternative perspectives are required to make sense of the modern American cultural condition. With this in mind, Madsen suggests that underneath the many ethnic dissimilarities and sub-cultures that divide the nation, the
majority of people who reside in America subscribe to a set of basic assumptions — that Americans understand as universal truths. For example, John Hall observes that most industrial societies “are based upon historically high levels of geographic and social mobility, and these increase the ‘life chances’ of individuals.” Hall’s statement makes complete sense when viewed in terms of a socio-philosophical ethic, an ethic that Madsen argues forms the core of the nation’s social philosophy. Surpassing all other common notions of the human experience, Americans adhere to the ideal that freedom, democracy and the “good life,” are accepted truths by all cultures throughout the world since they are founded on the axiom of human reason. Furthermore, the conceptual arena where these ideas are combined by a common thread is the realm of reason and science.

Madsen essentially concludes:

Among liberalism’s main assumptions is the notion that what is most distinctively human is the capacity for instrumental reason, which finds its fulfillment in modern science and technology. Another assumption is that the application of such rationality will lead to constant and universal progress in which the increasing economic abundance produced by a society of diverse and independent individuals is complemented by forms of governance that respect the autonomy and privacy of all people. A final key assumption is that individual autonomy and freedom from all external constraints is an ultimate, universal value. Americans are used to seeing these liberal assumptions as not culturally determined or socially constructed but as self-evident, universally applicable truths about the world.

The ideological footing, therefore, that runs through the American psyche is the assumption that our cherished belief in liberal-democracy is not a cultural construct with limited applicability inside the boarders of the United States. Rather, American socio-political ideals, by the very nature of their supposed universality, seek to convert foreign peoples with opposing belief systems concerning proper government, ethics, and economics.
Another American conviction stems from the fundamental principles of philosopher John Locke and his notion of government based on human contract. Founded on the concept that governmental power should reside in a body of citizens, American political thought and social philosophy adheres to the standard that civil and political rights can be secured only through a republican form of government. "Many other interdependent principles and values embellish the liberal tradition," explains Jie Chen, such as "limited government, individual liberty, due process of law, self-determination, capitalism, free enterprise, [and] inalienable (natural) rights." With regard to image formulation, this traditional outlook has had a tremendously negative impact on the manner in which Americans view China. Since this liberal-democratic tradition is in direct conflict with the more authoritarian thought patterns of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the PRC, America’s China policy has suffered from a socio-philosophical incompatibility with the current regime in Beijing. Throughout this study, articles from the mainstream press will serve to substantiate the argument that this heritage of liberalism runs through the media’s depiction of occurrences in China, in addition to the claim that liberalism forms the primary motivation (economic and political) for US policy toward China.

Many scholars, including policy critic Noam Chomsky, have commented upon the role of the media in portraying specific cultural images. Arguing from an extremely critical standpoint, Chomsky suggests that the modern-day media, as an institution that belongs to the network of corporate enterprises in the American economy, is directly tied to ideological presuppositions that permeate the “control pyramids” of the economic system. In his view, the institution of the corporate media is not an independent entity that is politically and culturally unrelated to the greater ideological powers at work in
modern America. Instead, because the media adhere to the principles of freedom and liberal-democratic thought in much the same way as the majority of the populace, they have similar interests in maintaining America’s socio-political system as it operates today. Chomsky argues that “[a]s state capitalism developed into the modern era, economic, political, and ideological systems have increasingly been taken over by vast institutions of private tyranny that are about as close to the totalitarian ideal as any that humans have so far constructed.”\textsuperscript{12} Notwithstanding the harsh cynicism of Chomsky, he addressed an important point in terms of the nature of economics and the corporate superstructure that supports this base of power. Elsewhere, Chomsky suggests that at an extreme level, especially in “free”\textsuperscript{13} societies, public opinion is crucial to the survival of the political regime in power. In this case, power may simply refer to the socio-philosophical values of business and public interests (democracy and freedom), so the function of the media, as an institution with similar ideological convictions toward these ends, assists the power-base of interests in furthering the web of value-bound propaganda that legitimates the validity of the American way of life.

Many scholars, however, altogether reject the proposition that a hegemonic structure of ideas encompasses the national psyche. Sociologist Mark Gottdiener counters the above argument by attacking its innate simplicity. Mass culture, according to Gottdiener, “implies that structural or institutional practices are automatically transformed into deep-level psychological ones through the agency of media control.”\textsuperscript{14} Because of its reductionism into a purely economic and profit-seeking thesis, critics maintain that hegemony theory and Chomsky’s criticism of neo-liberalism neglects to take into consideration the dissenting individuals in society who do not adhere to the precepts of
liberal-democracy. This counter argument, in opposition to the hegemonist camp, nevertheless has to recognize that an overwhelming system of power — liberalism — dictates the actions and mindset of individuals that comprise the body of journalists who staff the American press. Even though a minority of non-adherents reject the fundamental ideals of liberalism, the traditional concept of politics in contemporary American society is based upon a history of liberal-democratic thought; a history of thought that forms one component within the program of socialization and assimilation.

Other aspects of the media culture also contribute to the manner in which stories and international events are interpreted by the journalistic community. The media’s "emphasis on drama thus leads to journalists’ preference for news about current happenings."15 Stories are chosen for publication in many instances simply because they contain sensationalistic and dramatic elements. Done to grab the attention of the reader, this mode of journalism tends to dilute any objectivity that may be contained in the report. More importantly, because most journalists covering happenings that take place in foreign countries are not extensively trained in anthropology, history, political science, or cross-cultural studies, interpretations are simplified and the content of the stories often lack the level of complexity that is necessary to properly convey the event. The proper political and cultural context is sacrificed in many instances, either because the story is visually or emotionally dramatic, or because the journalist lacks the background knowledge in cultural studies required for accurate reporting. In addition, distant countries are sometimes dealt with in a haphazard or elementary methodological fashion (covered only in times of crisis), so more intriguing stories usually outweigh less dramatic day-to-day events.16 “Violence and disaster” fill the pages of the mainstream
press, and as a result, an impression can arise in the mind of the reader that the level of socio-political turmoil in foreign lands is more common than in actuality. Therefore, an "exaggerated" emphasis on news items with a component of sensationalism dominates the media in the United States, and its interpretation of the political climate abroad, especially in China. These problems in foreign news reporting are most visible in the case of America's popular reaction to the political strife that enveloped China in May and June of 1989. Beginning with the events that led to the ultimate military crackdown by Beijing authorities in the first week of June, the foreign policy position of the United States will be analyzed in the following chapter, with the concomitant depiction of the crisis in the American press.
American foreign policy during the Cold War toward the Communist block was based on the notion of strategic containment. When communist forces led by Mao Zedong seized territorial control of mainland China in 1949, American policy makers were confronted with an additional communist giant in East Asia. At this time, growing political pressure in the United States, fostered by a domestic need to explain the political victory of the Chinese Communist Party, eventually led to a political witch-hunt within the upper echelons of the State Department. Beginning with the administration of Harry Truman, America sought, at all cost, to contain the growing influence of Soviet communism throughout the globe, but particularly in the third world. Political opportunists, especially Senator Joseph McCarthy, accused the Far Eastern Division of the State Department for the "loss of China." Anti-communism was not confined to a few shrewd politicians, however. For the next twenty years, American political attitudes and policy toward Communist China was founded on the premise that containment was imperative to halt the advance of Maoist communism. In this era, Washington inaccurately viewed the political motivations of Moscow and Beijing as virtually
synonymous, hence an image developed where the Chinese and Soviet forms of communism were viewed as basically the same in terms of international recognition. The United States also refused to recognize the Communist regime in Beijing as the legitimate government of China. Until the administration of President Richard Nixon and his subsequent visit to China in 1972, low and high-level contact between the two powers was nonexistent. To remedy the basic antagonism that pitted the two nations against one another politically and militarily, Nixon sought to renew dialogue at the diplomatic level with Communist China, while laying the groundwork for future economic and cultural interchange. Hence, beginning in 1972, a fragile but optimistic relationship was constructed that would last until the outbreak of violence in Tiananmen Square during the summer of 1989. What exactly were the motivating forces that encouraged administrators in Washington to reestablish contact with the People’s Republic?

The strategic containment of Soviet influence in Asia and the political split between the Chinese and Russians in the mid 1950s motivated America to renew diplomatic exchanges with Beijing in the following decade. More importantly, Robert S. Ross argues that a “shared perception” by both nations that a decrease in the political influence of the Soviet Union was necessary for geopolitical balance, prompted dialogue between the two countries.\(^2\) Nixon saw a political benefit in seeking strategic relations with Communist China, and many Americans were delighted at the prospect that renewed relations could possibly increase commercial contacts in East Asia. For more than twenty years, American commercial dealings in China were nonexistent. But with Nixon’s visit and subsequent political events such as the death of Chairman Mao Zedong and the ascent of the more economically \textit{pragmatic} leader Deng Xiaoping, commercial exchange,
mostly in the form of small consumer goods and textile exports, began to rapidly increase. By the early 1980s, the nineteenth-century vision of a vast China market had reemerged.

Contrary to the liberal opinion that there are more pertinent aspects to American foreign policy toward China than mere trade concerns, historian Jacques M. Downs maintains that the basis for American diplomatic contact with China in the previous century rested on the economic need for market expansion. "In fact," Downs argues, "down to the first World War, the United States’ primary interest in relations with most other countries was commerce." During the Cold War, the prospective market that China had offered in the past was temporarily placed on hold, for the immediate need to contain communism in Asia overshadowed commercial diplomacy. But as the fear of Soviet communism gradually waned and the financial influence of all other industrial nations was eclipsed by the United States as the most technologically and economically advanced nation in the world, trade concerns once again emerged as a primary motivation to reestablish contact with the PRC.

The United States was not the only beneficiary in this new strategic partnership. Although economic and ideological inspirations formed the core of America’s future dealings in the Far East, the advantages for China were many. As Brookings Institute Fellow Harry Harding explains, the long-term benefits provided the Chinese with a vast market for exports, while at the same time scientific techniques were acquired from the United States to modernize the domestic economy.

Both Chinese and Americans pointed to mutual economic interests as an alternative basis for their bilateral relationship. Natural complementarity existed, it was said, between the world’s largest developed country and the world’s largest developing nation. Americans wanted more foreign markets for their exports, more sites for
overseas investment, and more inexpensive consumer goods, and they could find all of those things in China. China wanted access to the vast American market, advanced American technology, and American financial and investment capital. That, along with the two societies' common desire for expanded cultural, scientific, and academic exchange, might sustain Sino-American relations even without a Soviet threat.  

Since the ideological motivations of America were founded on the principles of individual freedom, representative government, and a belief that capitalism was superior to the cultural and economic stagnancy of communism, the underlying thrust of U.S. policy abroad sought the proliferation of these ideals. Janet Wolff aptly describes the connection between a people's ideology and a nation's mode of production when stating, "the theory of ideology states that the ideas and beliefs people have are related to their actual and material conditions of existence." As renewed exchanges (cultural and financial) with the PRC gave hope to many Americans for future political liberalization on the part of communist leaders, policy makers were concerned mostly with the commercial benefits that growing trade with China could bring to American businesses. The "myth of the China market" was advertised by the press and many analysts envisioned the Chinese masses as potential consumers "of a vast emerging market." Most importantly, many Americans deeply believed that once China opened its doors to the United States and liberal thinking, the system of Maoism and central economic planning would slowly wither away. Instead of socialism, Americans wished to see China as a "land of liberty, pluralism, private ownership, and free markets." An optimism of gradual modification, therefore, fostered an image of China as a country that would, in time, incorporate these values into its socio-political structure.  

American apprehensions about human rights were definitely a component of Washington's official policy as late as 1987, but the supposed cultural revolution that
economic liberalization would bring to China was believed to be the force or reform with the most potential. Hence, human rights and other moral anxieties that Washington may have had with regard to the Chinese government were not readily addressed. As we shall see later, the manner in which the mainstream press reacted to the Tiananmen incident reinforced the policy shift that President George Bush undertook after peaceful hopes for democratization and economic liberalization were temporarily shattered.

A brief summary of American foreign policy in the years prior to 1989 is crucial in order substantiate the claim that market access was America's paramount concern in the late 1980s. In the eyes of Washington policy formulators, the reciprocal tradeoffs that commercial interaction presented helped cement a policy of high-level engagement under the assumption that liberalization in China would gradually follow. Succinctly, this was the core of America's China policy in 1987. Cultural problems and ethnic self-determination, well before their popularization in the 1990s, were issues of importance during the second Reagan administration. The tone of policy makers was sanguine, however, so human rights, non-proliferation, and the Sino-Taiwanese issue of reunification shaped policy only in a marginal manner.

American Foreign Policy and China: Interests

Prior to Tiananmen Square

The nucleus of Ronald Reagan's China policy in 1987 was shaped by prospects for future trade. In March of that year, Secretary of State George Shultz expressed this optimism at the Dalian Management Training Center in China. In this speech, he outlined current and forthcoming opportunities that could substantially enhance the
bilateral relationship between the two nations. The fundamental theme that underscored the entire presentation was the need to increase Chinese-American prosperity in the coming years. "As the leaders of China and the United States confront the problems of how to ensure greater security and prosperity for their peoples," Shultz declared, "we both face important economic decisions." He continued by stating that increased technological trade was imperative for both the future success of China and the United States, in terms of technological advancement:

For China, for the United States... this new information age will require, above all else, that we continue to open our doors to one another. When such doors are open — when people, goods, and ideas can flow freely between us — both Chinese and Americans can learn from each other.... But much more can and should be done. The People's Republic and the United States have only begun to tap our rich potential for mutually beneficial trade. An expanded exchange in goods, services, technologies, and investments will be important both to your country's modernization effort and to my country's economic well-being.

Notwithstanding the positive tone of the above statement, Shultz argued that for a healthy economy with a solid foundation in law to emerge, China must take steps to enact legislation "toward protecting intellectual property." In this sense, the question of basic commercial exchange was considered by Shultz to be a given, but America was apprehensive about trading extensively in an economic milieu with minimal regard for the rule of law.

The trade question reappeared once again when Chinese Foreign Minister Xueqian Wu visited the United States in 1988. This time, the focus was centered on the viewpoint of the Chinese government, regarding the issue of Sino-American trade. In a similar tone of optimism as Shultz, a spokesperson suggested that Wu concentrated on an "expanding relationship" with foreign nations. "The Foreign Minister emphasized China's continued openness to foreign investment, particularly in the coastal regions." Additional mention
was given to commerce by Under Secretary of State Michael H. Armacost in 1988, when he said that in the foreseeable future he was confident that market exchange with China would continue to grow, given the Chinese "priority [for] market development and reform." As far as any strategic threats that might exist that may hamper this burgeoning relationship, Armacost argued that Beijing realized that the United States welcomed China "as a major player on the world scene."  

America also realized by the end of the decade that China had made considerable strides in modernization since Deng Xiaoping rose to power. American policy makers, historically, viewed Deng as the original architect of this growing partnership, an assessment echoed by Secretary Shultz in December of 1988:

The groundbreaking Shanghai communiqué of 1972 anticipated a time of "important changes and great upheavals" in global affairs. We have now witnessed more than 16 years of profound changes in the international environment. The process of normalizing Sino-American relations helped to launch a worldwide trend of greater reliance on political means to resolve serious international differences... The reforms in China embarked upon 10 years ago under Deng Xiaoping's farsighted leadership have fostered a decade of impressive domestic growth and a remarkable expansion of U.S.-China trade. Thus, in the economic sphere as well, China has been a pacesetter.

As 1988 drew to a close, the pace of normalization and further commercial exchange that began more than a decade prior appeared bright for the future. Shultz summed up America's sense of where the world economy was moving by concluding that "on the trade front, China and the United States must strive to keep the international trading system as open as possible, in order to ensure our growth and competitiveness in the years ahead." More than any other topic of concern, the evolution of the Chinese domestic economy in a market oriented direction excited American business leaders and policy makers. By 1989, as noted by Kenneth Lieberthal, the bilateral trade deficit...
between the United States and China "mushroomed during these years" to $6.235 billion. If no other tangible benefits could be seen on other fronts such as human rights, America was nonetheless pleased at the bilateral system of trade that had developed. Even in the coming decade, the omnipresent position of commercial interests in America's China policy would maintain its importance as a key concern. This raises some unnerving question about the politics and the power of American businesses. If finance and business held so much weight in the overall program, what happened to America's principal beliefs in human rights, democracy, and self-determination within the scheme of this policy?

When engaging in this type of exercise, a researcher always runs the risk of falling into the trap of economic (Marxist) reductionism. To answer the above question, the American stance on the human rights issue was certainly present in the comprehensive policy. Differences on human rights surfaced at many junctures in both the Reagan and Bush administrations, but more than anything, it seems clear that human rights added an element of moral justification (rationalization) to the fact that America's burgeoning trade relationship had become extensive with the PRC. As a means to divert public attention away from the monetary contact with China, the need for greater political freedom in China was constantly used by America, if for no other reason than to pay lip service to American ideals in human liberty. Also, as mentioned before, there was an implicit belief in the transformative power of capitalism, hence the issue of human rights was not incredibly crucial in the short term. As Richard Madsen has noted, the course of socio-economic development in China was misperceived by most Americans and the government. A cause and effect relationship was thought to naturally exist between
greater economic liberty and political reform. Hence, the developmental paradigm of world-wide modernization as a set methodical and linear process was applied to the Chinese situation. No deliberate effort was made to place human rights on top of the agenda, for economic freedom was sequentially equated with political reform and a decrease in authoritarianism.

Probably the most obvious and definitive example of this is the publication of a 1989 State Department document that lists major and minor human rights violators throughout the world. Out of the nineteen federations and nations registered on the document (presented by U.S. Representative to the United Nations Vernon A. Walter), strikingly enough, China was absent from the list. The majority of nations mentioned in the document were in some manner affiliated with the Soviet Union, or were politically uncooperative to the United States and other democratic governments. Since the Chinese government was left unscathed by this bulletin, it is arguable that before the Tiananmen incident, U.S. administrators were more willing to ignore the less reputable actions that China had taken against ethnic minorities and political dissenters in previous years.

During this period, it would be incorrect to suggest that U.S. human rights issues were altogether cast aside by policy makers. Even though the policy stance of America, in conjunction with these problems, was quite mild, America was not unaware of the long-term hurdle that Chinese authoritarianism presented to political reform. In 1987, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Stapleton J. Roy declared that "the stress on social discipline in both communism and Chinese tradition will place limitations on how far liberalization may go." Secretary Roy added that progressive gains in other areas,
namely trade, were moving on the right path; a development he hoped would bring about
“positive effect[s]” in other aspects of Chinese society.\(^{19}\) In another statement, Roy
addressed the issue of Chinese military suppression of protesters in the remote province
of Tibet. The testimony focused heavily on the abuses of power by the Communists in
the Tibetan province, but Secretary Roy commented that China, with its long and
tumultuous history, was partially justified in its current actions:

> Many circumstances led up to the recent developments in Tibet.... The story of
depredations and massive violations of basic human rights perpetrated against the
Tibetan people... has been exhaustively reported and documented.... China’s leaders
are determined to maintain domestic stability. Their aversion to demonstrations and
unguided mass expressions of popular sentiment, and to public comments on such
matters from abroad by bodies like the Congress and the administration, are
characteristics of ruling Communist parties. To effect changes in China’s attitudes
toward human rights, we need to stand firm by our principles while recognizing that
as China has moved into closer relations with countries like our own, as it has
opened its doors to the outside world, it has given greater attention to human rights
concerns.\(^{20}\)

Therefore, the awareness of problems on the human rights front stemmed from the
cultural tradition of the United States against forms of government censorship and
political oppression. The philosophical nature of unalienable human rights gave rise in
America to a presumption that America’s notion of political freedoms were not mere
cultural constructs, but complete, universal truths in themselves. Even with this emotive
baggage stamped on China policy, an overwhelming optimism (regarding trade and
future liberalization) drove policy makers to lessen the political rhetoric against
authoritarianism in China. Not until after the Tiananmen incident would the rhetoric
become more inflamed. In the wake of these heated developments, the American popular
press would methodically reinforce America’s ideological predisposition toward liberal-
democracy.
Lastly, the two topics of interest that would take center stage in the policy debate a decade later were only secondary concerns for the United States at this time. After the victory of the Communist forces on the mainland in 1949, the Chinese Nationalists led by Generalissimo Jiang Jishi were forced to flee to the island of Taiwan (then called Formosa). Notwithstanding the inter-strait military disputes that separated the mainland and Taiwan, there existed an inclination on the part of many Chinese to reunify the two opposing sides. However, actual political dialogue was minimal and the necessary steps for reunification were even slower to develop. With respect to this political debacle, President Reagan took the position that “[the United States] welcome[s] the interchanges that have taken place between China and Taiwan over the past year. We hope that progress will continue in a climate of relaxed tensions. We will continue to seek to foster such a climate.”

As a marginal item that was not at the forefront of policy initiatives in the late 1980s, the Taiwan question was eclipsed by a greater problem that involved weapons sales and non-proliferation:

Unresolved disputes on the Korean Peninsula, in Indochina, and in the Middle East require our consultation and cooperation to promote the political resolution of dangerous threats to stability.... China and the United States, joining together with all nations, must address the challenge posed by the proliferation of advanced weaponry — especially chemical and biological agents and high-tech delivery systems.

Therefore, in the years before the Tiananmen Square crisis, these issues — Taiwan, human rights, and non-proliferation — were secondary ones in the administration’s China policy.

In light of the above material, it is safe to suggest that American interests in China during the second Reagan and early Bush administrations were trade-oriented. Policy makers viewed the coming years in what historian Paul Cohen has termed the fallacy of
“modernization theory.” A highly parochial and ethnocentric paradigm for viewing history, this approach presumes that China has developed along a path to modernization that was not unlike the road taken by western industrial nations, like the United States. Modernization theory uncritically assumes that economic modernization occurs at a set pace, and in certain pre-defined stages. The idea that economic reform led to political reform was one of these hasty presumptions. After the dream for Chinese political liberalization came tumbling down in the summer of 1989, a dramatic reevaluation in policy forced many Americans and the press to rethink this hasty assessment of Chinese politics. In terms of the media coverage that reflected this monumental crisis, the mainstream press painted a multifaceted picture of Chinese domestic unrest that helped reinforce the policy alterations formulated by the Bush administration. In essence, the negative images that flowed from the pages of various magazines, in emotional tone and content, coincided with the changing direction of foreign policy.

Images of Tiananmen

The road to modernization for China was difficult. Deng Xiaoping, upon coming to power after the death of Mao Zedong, enacted unprecedented reforms in the economic sector that brought China into the international commercial market. Gradually, Deng moved to decentralize many state owned enterprises, in order to allow these companies to have private decision-making power over profits and planning. Deng realized that the rapid development of coastal regions and the urban environment in locales such as Shanghai were imperative, if China was to undergo any major reforms. Accordingly, the leadership ordered the creation of “special economic zones” (SEZs) as a means of
attracting foreign investment. By the middle of the 1980s, much of the necessary restructuring had already taken place, and as Harry Harding notes, “overall, the Chinese economy experienced the greatest vibrancy of any period since 1949.” The farming communities benefited the most from this economic restructuring, because farms were returned to private ownership and market incentives were reintroduced to rural areas across China. However, the situation in the major coastal cities where much of China’s basic industry was concentrated did not fare so well.

By 1986, the urban sector began to show signs of mass unemployment and dislocation. In this period, due to the radical decentralization program enacted by the Communist leadership a decade prior, governmental revenues began to stagnate substantially. Moreover, inflation, a development that was completely foreign to a populace that had known 0% inflation for nearly thirty years, also skyrocketed at this time. Consequently, a plethora of “serious social problem[s]” readily grew, which eventually affected the heretofore economic boom in the rural sector. In the three years prior to the Tiananmen demonstrations, the “transient” population of China’s cities increased to nearly fifty million. In many cases, nearly one-fifth of the urban population had fallen below the poverty line. In response to these developments, many laborers, intellectuals, and state employees looked to non-governmental means to address these problems.

The Tiananmen demonstrations grew out of the crisis that materialized from decentralization and economic dislocation. As early as 1986, student unrest and a general sense of dissatisfaction with the regime led to a small demonstration that resulted in the removal of General Secretary Hu Yaobang from his position as head of the Chinese
Communist Party. Known for his reform mindedness, Hu was accused by Deng and the Central Committee, the ruling body of the Chinese Communist Party, of being too soft on the students, an act that many conservatives viewed as disloyalty to the state and the party. Hu was quickly replaced by another Deng protégé named Zhao Ziyang, but unfortunately for the leadership, the student demonstrators reappeared in 1989.

Sparked by the death of former secretary Hu Yaobang on April 15, 1989, university students from Beijing University (Beida) and Beijing Normal University organized to protest Hu’s 1987 dismissal, while calling for greater political freedom and political democratization. In the early days of the movement, a high percentage of students dominated the crowds, but as the weeks passed, the social composition of the crowds began to change radically. Historian Nan Lin notes that as “the movement gathered momentum, the participation level reached its height in mid-May, when demonstrations involved over a million participants and visitor. For example, on May 16, over a million people visited Tiananmen Square and the hunger strikers.” Urban workers protested the massive dislocation and corruption that Deng’s “four modernizations” created, whereas students were considerably more interested in the political aspects of reform; hence, they called for freedom of the press, multi-party elections, and an end to the abuse of power by party officials. Harry Harding maintains that the sheer size of these weekly demonstrations caused a crisis within the party:

Of particular concern was the participation of large numbers of industrial workers in the protests, and the emergence of independent labor unions. An alliance of workers and students, each with autonomous organizations, raised the specter of a popular uprising similar to what has occurred in Poland in 1980. And like the leaders of the Polish Communist Party, China’s gerontocrats believed that the only solution was to impose martial law.
When the news about the demonstrations reached the American press in the middle of May, the initial interpretation of the situation in Tiananmen was quite positive. The press saw the growth of student and popular discontent as a sign of the increasing weakness of the Communist Party and Deng Xiaoping, so the press became emotionally sympathetic to the student cause. The philosophical aspects of the student's demands were habitually stressed, in addition to the portrayal of the "democracy" demonstrators as the next generation of leaders in China. The American media created a picture of an enlightened literati (the students) who sought to overturn the "mandate of heaven." Deng and the revolutionary generation were described as adherents of an anachronistic philosophy (Leninism-Maoism), that lacked legitimacy in a free-market environment. As Mei-ling Wang notes, the ideological position of the media was fundamentally unbalanced since "coverage of the student demonstrations in Beijing stressed ideological vigilance against communism... [and the] good fought evil in the pursuit of American-style democracy." Therefore, the images presented in the earlier non-violent stages of the demonstrations in many ways resembles the non-aggressive and gradual approach that policy makers subscribed to in the previous section. Although the bellicose rhetoric was at times antagonistic, a belief in the natural progression of democracy against the forces of communist tyranny was not unlike the policy of gradualism outlined by the Reagan and Bush administrations.

Well before the violence erupted on June 4, the media was on the scene to ascertain the nature of the political unrest. First impressions of public and student solidarity led the press to conclude that the nation was in a state of mass hysteria. Approximately one week before the outbreak of violence, *Time* ran a full-length article that detailed the
developments in the square. Referring to the historic visit of Mikhail Gorbachev to the PRC in the previous week, columnist Daniel Benjamin said that instead of the world focusing on the monumental visit of Gorbachev, the attention of the world was on “Tiananmen Square, where a hunger strike by 3,000 students swelled to a demonstration of more than a million Chinese expressing the inexpressible — a longing for freedom and prosperity.” Even more emotive and powerful was the sub-title of the article that read “With Tiananmen Square the epicenter, a political quake convulses China.” The cause of the crisis was pinned by one reporter on the idea that conservatives were fearful that rising unemployment and inflation in urban China might lead to “social unrest.”

Another article claimed that the historical turning point this demonstration represented was beyond the power of human action:

There is no turning back today, any more than there was in 1911, when Sun Yat-sen overthrew the last Emperor; in 1928, when Chiang Kai-shek won control; in 1949, when Mao Tse-tung’s Communists triumphed; or in 1977, when the reformer Deng Xiaoping succeeded the ideologue Mao. Deng’s economic reforms have sparked a revolution of rising expectations in China, and those expectations include political participation as well as prosperity. China, which built the world’s greatest wall to keep out foreign hordes, cannot keep out Western culture and ideas, borne like a virus on radio waves and jet airplanes and carried home like influenza by students sent abroad to learn engineering and economics.

The author went on to add that the democracy demonstrators brought China to a national paralysis. All combined, the mainstream press popularized the image that the force of student protests transcended the physical boundaries of the square and enveloped the country.

In response to the unrest, the nerves of the leadership were tested in the press to see how they responded to the public cries for democracy. *Newsweek* quoted Deng Xiaoping as saying that “I had hoped that we wouldn’t have to spill blood. But if we have to do so,
then we will." A subsequent issue succinctly summed up the extent to which the demonstrators had ignited a national crisis, in a cover entitled "UPHEVAL IN CHINA." In line with the overall policy of the United States government that a gradual incorporation of free-market ideas (liberal thinking) and prosperity would eventually break down the authoritarian structure of the CCP, journalists formulated an image of China as an oppressed nation on the verge of a political breakdown. Richard Madsen's study of the American reaction to this situation suggests that a political crisis of this magnitude is generally understood as a time of negative chaos, so this case was an anomaly. Tiananmen was a historic drama where the forces of freedom, morality, and liberty were essentially recreating their society. Rather than viewing this drama as an insignificant occurrence in a distant land, America's ideological stance toward the infectious power of liberty and democracy led the media to analyze the demonstrations from the philosophical framework of social liberation and freedom of thought.

Not only did the image of a national crisis place an ethnocentric twist upon the events, it also cemented an impression within the mind of the American public that the CCP's handle on power was in decline. Dusko Doder described the dilemma that the leadership faced by stating that to the conservatives in the party, Prime Minister Li Peng was the most desirable choice for maintaining the status quo of authoritarianism. Zhao Ziyang, on the other hand, was the more favorable choice for those who wanted to pursue marketization and "greater freedom of expression;" hence the party was caught between a return to stagnation or reform. In comparison to the economic and political rigidity of Deng, Zhao became the new pragmatic alternative who could subdue the power of the "old [and] feeble" Deng. Hence, the struggle for democracy was presented not only as a
social conflict, but an internal party conflict as well. The forces of “pragmat[ism]”
battling against the “hard liners” were portrayed as crusaders who sought to dethrone the revolutionary guard that was interested in social “order above all else.” The notion that the conservative faction wanted to restrain the process of inevitable social reform became a central theme in the media. The inevitable victory of prosperity, capitalism, and democracy were viewed in a deterministic fashion as virtually predetermined for China.
At least to the uncritical viewer, the demonstrators seemed to embody the genuine values of democratic freedom and liberty.

The manner in which the demands of the demonstrators were outlined by the American media exemplifies the tendency on the part of the media to view democracy as the ultimate goal of the demonstrations, when in reality most of the demonstrators came out in protest to support social reform, increased economic opportunity, and an end to governmental corruption. The popular term used to describe the fundamental demand of the students was “democracy.” *Time* declared that “a profound seriousness pervaded Tiananmen, born of the knowledge that people were prepared to die for democracy.” In addition to being the guardians of liberty, they were prepared to lay their lives on the line for reform and freedom. Protesters accused the leadership of “nepotism,” so democracy became the “rallying cry of the demonstrators.” It must be mentioned that *Time* commented on the ambiguous nature of the demands, because many students only had a superficial knowledge of western liberalism. The more common image of the movement can be summed up by Sandra Burton’s statements regarding the Tiananmen sit-in. She concluded that the students yearned for “the opposite of everything associated with Communist Party rule.” A brief excerpt from the same article fittingly characterized the
western interpretation of the protests as simply a revulsion against communism and party rule:

The demands may be amorphous, but these can be no doubt about the passion, as evidenced by the willingness of ordinary people to obstruct tanks and of hunger strikers to court death. If anything, the absence of an ideology, with specific long-range aims indicates just how powerful is the public revulsion at the party and the entire status quo.44

The tone of militancy entered the picture when a statement from a poster was quoted as having read “Chinese rulers have given democracy and freedom as gifts... we have to seize them.” A bold statement quoted from a student suggested that the type of democracy the demonstrators desired was specifically “democracy on the American model.”45 In virtually every possible case, media sources attempted to locate signs of an ideological link between western liberal thought and the demands of the students. Although some sources argued that the student’s were devoid of a comprehensive ideology, statements of the above variety painted an image of the demonstrations as an upsurge of anger that desperately wanted to overturn the stagnancy of communism. The reports were thus tainted by an ethnocentric belief that China had chosen the natural alternative to communism in its wholesale adoption of liberal-democracy.

One of the most telling pieces of commentary to appear in the press during the crisis were the comments of a student leader (Wuerkaixi) who addressed a crowd in the square. The young man cried out to a gathering, “Chinese people still have a slave mentality. They don’t believe their life is in their own control.”46 Clearly the message in this quotation refers to the control and power that communism had over the populace, but there is a deeper message in this statement; the notion that by reaching out to the democratic ideas of the west through political protest, the Chinese can overcome their
slavish mentality through liberal thinking and democracy. Therefore, the backward mentality of the Chinese can be rejuvenated if the people engage in further political expression. Leadership under the system of communism, according to this utterance, binds the individual into a cultural rigidity that is synonymous with slavery.

Placing the protests into historical perspective for the western viewer was also difficult. Naturally there was an element of ethnocentrism in the interpretation. Traditionally, the role of the Chinese scholar-official in criticizing the actions of the emperor was extensive. Criticism was a morally expected act on the part of officials, so the Confucian literati played an active part in uncovering/exposing the flaws of a ruling dynasty. In the tradition of the Confucian scholar-official, the press depicted the students in Tiananmen as a class of officials that sought to unveil the dictatorial and corrupt nature of the communist party. James Wallace argued that “widespread regard for students and scholarship has not changed,” when referring to similarities from the imperial age and the modern-day. An earlier article mentioned that protesters were influenced by progressive western literature and as a result, they wanted to replace “China’s traditional one-man rule” with a structure based on direct democracy. The obvious connection in this statement is that Deng and Mao were both essentially contemporary emperors who ruled with an iron fist. Political scientist Thomas Bernstein explained the relationship between history and the duty of scholars to act in the interest of society as such:

The students have struck and ancient chord in Chinese history.... It is the idea of the scholar-official who remonstrates with the emperor about some evil in the kingdom the ruler should put right. The emperor won’t listen, and the scholar-official takes his own life as a witness, or sacrifice, to the higher good.
On the whole, Deng was portrayed as a ruler in whom the populace had lost faith. Moreover, this image complemented the more important perception that China was moving into a new era toward democracy, headed by the valiant student demonstrators.

Americans generally think of themselves as progressive, forward looking people. The pace of the consumer economy habitually reinforces within American society the ideal of innovation and technological progress. On a socio-philosophical level, societies that have not developed such a future oriented outlook are often shunned by the American press as backward, stagnant, or retrogressive. Foreign policy in the late 1980s, as mentioned previously, concentrated on the need for the gradual integration of market economics into Chinese society, and the progressive outlook that is essential for such an economy to properly function, namely liberal-democracy. As the youthful students began to look to the west for more support in their quest for political reform, the mainstream media rationalized these developments as the birth of vibrant progressivism battling the forces of stagnant socialism. A statement on one student banner read, "Deng Xiaoping, your mind is muddled, step down and go play bridge," while another banner declared, "End rule by old men;" clearly a sign that China desired a socio-political rejuvenation based on western concepts of progressivism. Other derogatory comments from Tiananmen banners included the call for Deng's resignation which jokingly stated, "a good cat knows when to retire." The ideological divide that separated the role of elders from the youth was masterfully presented in an article by James Wallace. "China reveres age," declared Wallace, "but worships children. For centuries, it was the youth's duty to respect the established order of elders; now, the obligation is to overturn it." Hence, America was confronted with an assessment of contemporary Chinese social
philosophy that maintained the path to reform the students had chosen was founded on western-style, forward looking principles.

For the most part, the gradualist tone of many of these images, prior to the military crackdown, complimented the non-antagonistic stance toward reform that American foreign policy embodied at this time. The gradual incorporation of market economics and greater freedom in business were viewed as the paramount forces that unleashed a cathartic tide of democratic thinking in China. The sanguine perspective taken by the press in the months of April and May would soon change. Following the crackdown by the military on June 4, America swiftly reacted with a staunch condemnation of the government’s actions. After the regime moved to suppress the demonstrations, American policy makers began to emphasize the unpredictable nature of the Communist leadership.

The Image of the Massacre in Policy and the Press

Beginning with the military suppression on the night of June 3, America’s image of the Tiananmen demonstration turned into a nightmare. A wholesale condemnation of the government’s decision to use violence on the part of the government pervaded the images that the press perpetuated. The hopeful situation that journalists solicited in May now degenerated into a deep cynicism.

No one can forget the historic photograph of the lonely demonstrator standing in front of the row of moving tanks, ready to sacrifice his life for his fellow comrades. In response to the military’s involvement in the situation, George Bush immediately cited the example of the lone demonstrator as an image that would haunt China for many years.
to come. Without hesitancy, President Bush stated that the United States deplored the use of force against the students and called on the Chinese government to exercise restraint in dealing with the incident. Bush added that “the demonstrators in Tiananmen Square were advocating basic human rights, including the freedom of expression, freedom of the press, [and] freedom of association. These goals we support around the world.” In a statement of moral support for the student cause, Bush declared:

Throughout the world we stand with those who seek greater freedom and democracy. This is the strongly felt view of my administration, of our Congress, and most important, of the American people.53

As a consolation to the democratic elements in China who looked to the west for moral encouragement, Bush said that America was completely in favor of the “budding of democracy” that overtook Beijing in the weeks prior. The Washington administration now seemed more restrained about the process of democratization, so policy changes were made that reflected America’s growing unease with the Communists in Beijing. Although some measures were taken to show American displeasure for the sudden bloodshed, the most essential aspect of the previous policy was left unaltered. Hence, a number of initiatives of lesser significance were enacted, but economic exchange and basic commerce was left untouched. In his June 5 press conference, George Bush outlined the steps that the administration had taken to protest China’s brutal measures. A review of student visas for extended stays of residency, suspension of high level military contact, and a halt to all commercial weapons exports, was essentially Bush’s response to the Tiananmen crackdown. On the more pertinent issue of possible sanctions against China, Bush eloquently answered:

On the commercial side, I don’t want to hurt the Chinese people. I happen to believe that the commercial contacts have led, in essence, to this quest for more freedom. I
think as people have commercial incentive, whether it’s in China or in other totalitarian systems, the move to democracy becomes more inexorable.54

Consequently, Bush was not willing to renege on the policy of economic engagement that brought prosperity to China, and of course the Untied States. Minor variations in policy was the extent to which the administration was willing to move on the China issue.

In subsequent weeks, the focus of the administration shifted to a concentration on human rights and its suppression in contemporary China. On June 8, at a press conference regarding the turbulent situation in the PRC, the President commented that “we [America] aren’t going to remake the world, but we should stand for something.”55 In this statement, Bush spoke of the notion that human rights need to become more of a central issue in America’s dealings with China. Moreover, on the question of how this tension in contact with China can be eased in the future, Bush simply answered “it will take a recognition of human rights of individuals and a respect for the right of those who disagree [with the government].”56 These amendments to the current policy brought the more critical aspects of America’s image of China to the forefront of the policy debate, but the economic basis for relations with the PRC were left unchanged.

In light of these policy changes, a clear pattern of image formulation began to reinforce the new set of ideological alterations that underscored the administration’s move to place human rights violations at the center of its reconstructed policy, while maintaining commercial relations as normal. A Time article mentioned that although the United States deplored the use of force in quelling the protests, it was unwilling to “jeopardize” the decade-long “strategic relationship” that the two nations had painfully constructed.57 A further report argued that continued economic relations with China, even after the incident in Tiananmen, was expected eventually/soon to contribute even
further toward the democratization of Chinese society. In the coming years, disaffected Chinese citizens might once again collectively bring pressure upon the government for reform in the political and economic spheres. No small mention was made of this possibility by journalist George J. Church when he wrote:

Even after the Tiananmen Square massacre, Bush and his aides still hope that continued American trade and investment will help maintain economic freedom and that the dynamic force of a liberalized economy may yet renew the pressure for political reform. Corporate executives would like nothing better. Western businessmen have dreamed of immense markets in China since the days of Marco Polo; for American corporations in the past few years, the dream started to come true. From a mere $1.2 billion ten years earlier, U.S. trade with China rocketed to $13.4 billion last year, including almost $5 billion of U.S. exports.

Concerning the image of human rights and the atrocities committed by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) at Tiananmen, Bush’s spokesperson was cited by Newsweek as having said that the Communist “government has murdered many of its own citizens.” In a subsequent article the memories of a Harvard University graduate student recalled:

It was like a dream. From where I was, the sound of crying was louder than the gunfire, but I kept seeing people falling. One line of students would stand up and get shot down and then another line of student would stand and the same thing would happen. There was gunfire from all directions. The soldiers were shooting everyone. I don’t often cry. I went through the Cultural Revolution. I was sent to a remote region of China, on the border between China and Vietnam, and I have gone through a lot. But I couldn’t help crying. I just cannot believe what I saw in Beijing. My worst memory, the strongest impression, was that I saw a tank run over a man and I heard a kind of noise, like a pong. And after that we saw his head, and it was crushed… Later I saw four or five students hiding behind a low brick wall. They were all crushed by a tank. The tank went to that wall because they were hiding there. They shot students out of the trees. What I saw is bodies, bodies, bodies.

A dramatic condemnation of the military crackdown ensued in the weeks following the event, which reinforced the notion in the mind of the American public that the Communists were definitely human rights violators of the worst kind; tyrants willing to suppress unarmed demonstrators seeking nothing but the unalienable rights of democracy
and freedom. President Bush had responded in kind with a call for restraint and political recognition of those seeking freedom the day after the incident, hence the press masterfully constructed an incredibly horrific scenario of the events that coincided with the revised policy of the administration.

In summary, after the Tiananmen Square “massacre,” the American government began to focus intensively on the highly negative and unpredictable nature of the regime in China. In addition, the possibility that China in the coming years could very well become an aggressive economic and military giant in the region, was also another factor that moved to the forefront of the policy debate. Even though the economic stance of the United States remained much the same after the incident, emphasis was increasingly placed on non-proliferation, the nature of the communist regime, human rights, Chinese expansionism, and relations with Hong Kong and Taiwan. Because the images that the press produced were so volatile and culturally biased, the first chapter of a fictional history regarding the socio-political evolution of China was created in the media. Because American institutions such as the government and the press have a unique missionary nature, in terms of propagating American ideals abroad, the returned images about the socio-political climate in China were tainted with an ethnocentric negativity. Policy makers and the media refused to look past the blood that had been spilled in Beijing to ascertain the true nature of the incident, therefore, a skewed impression of these two tumultuous months was presented to the public, with only minimal information about the deeper political, social, and cultural elements of the Tiananmen fiasco.
CHAPTER 4

IMAGES IN THE AFTERMATH OF TIANANMEN:
THE ERA OF UNCERTAINTY

In the wake of the Tiananmen incident, American foreign policy toward China underwent a thorough reevaluation. Formerly held assumptions, of which the trajectory of Chinese political and economic reform were the most pertinent, were cast aside while policy makers scrambled to digest the unexpected steps the CCP had taken to quell a possible social revolution. The policy of overt optimism that carried American foreign policy through both the Reagan and Bush administrations effectively disappeared. The notion that ongoing economic reform with the introduction of market incentives would steer China toward the path of enhanced political freedom did not altogether vanish, but a mood of gradual uncertainty and apprehension regarding the nature of Chinese politics/economics replaced the optimism of the previous period. For two decades prior to the Tiananmen incident, observers in the United States witnessed an unprecedented relaxation in the totalitarian socio-political policies of the PRC. In the aftermath of the 1989 military crackdown, popular images and policy initiatives were culturally adapted to meet the needs of the post-Cold War political climate. In effect, popular and administrative conceptions centered on the unpredictable nature of the PRC and the Chinese political machine, in terms of its adoption of an unorthodox socialist-market...
economy, coupled with its emergence as a regional power. The American expectation for future liberalization remained an intricate aspect of America’s vision of China, but reports in government and the press increasingly stressed the tyrannical nature of Chinese politics, since religious, ethnic, and political dissent were repeatedly suppressed by Chinese authorities during this period.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the foundation of Sino-American relations throughout the 1980s was based on a desire for enhanced commercial exchange. Accordingly, issues pertaining to human rights, non-proliferation, and Taiwan were relegated to second-class positions of concern, because the prospective gains of trade outweighed any moral hesitations that policy makers had about the continued suppression of religious and political dissent in China. As the events following 1989 unfolded, even though presidents Bush and William Clinton reaffirmed the necessity of intensive commercial contact with China, concerns regarding human rights, Taiwan, and Beijing’s military capabilities came to the fore of the policy debate. In essence, between 1990 and 1996, administrative appeals for a reaffirmation of Sino-American trade continued as they had in the years preceding Tiananmen, but the moral and strategic aspects of the previous policy began to receive more public attention. Ultimately, the American desire to construct a China market based on free-market, democratic principles drove the Bush and Clinton administrations to engage the PRC from a dualistic perspective. For one, policy specifics concentrated on the image that China was quickly becoming a major trading ally of the United States, and that access to its markets offered enormous trading opportunities for potential investors. Secondly, China, with the memories of the Tiananmen crackdown still fresh in the minds of American officials, was increasingly
viewed as a nation that exhibited characteristics of political unpredictability; a nation that periodically violated international standards of human rights, economic modernization, and regional political interaction.

A Policy of Ambivalence

In examining this policy of ambivalence undertaken by the United States, its uniqueness becomes apparent almost immediately when compared to other nations that do not maintain extensive commercial ties with American businesses. For example, American condemnation of North Korean totalitarianism is not only rhetorically tied to its policy of political and economic isolation, it also forms the core of a rigid policy that virtually excluded the Stalinist state from economic interaction with the international community. Chinese communism receives a similar degree of moral/political criticism from the US, but American commercial investment in China, according to Julia Chang Bloch, has increased by approximately 620 percent between the years of 1990 and 1995. Moreover, American capital in 1995 accounted for 9.6 percent of "total foreign investment" in that year, and the financial interaction of American companies with Chinese enterprises has swelled within the last decade as well. Additional research conducted by Bloch suggests that the vast majority of American businesses operating in China are satisfied with their overseas ventures, given that most western companies are profiting heavily from the benefits of low manufacturing costs in the PRC. Hence, when juxtaposed with the North Korean situation and the apparent absence of economic links between the two nations, it becomes clear that although American ideological motivations regarding communism initially repel even the staunchest conservative
politicians from advocating improved bilateral relations with Beijing, the material rewards of a expanding market are difficult to ignore politically. Since business access retained its preeminent position as the center-piece of America’s China policy even after the Tiananmen crackdown, moral aversion toward the repressive and stifling nature of communism collided with the allure of monetary gain in a policy of economic-moral dualism.

For the purpose of image analysis, the following paragraphs detail the combined policy initiatives of the Bush and Clinton administrations. Given that the official policy of both presidents exhibited tremendous continuity in their respective approaches toward managing China policy, the forthcoming section examines primary source material between 1989 and 1996. Thus, the presentation of data will not necessarily follow a time order sequence. Instead, the material is compiled and formatted in a manner that reflects the level of importance of each issue in the era of uncertainty.

Beginning with the Tiananmen incident and ending with the Taiwan strait crisis of 1995-96, America’s foreign policy stance on China was characterized by a moral-economic dualism. In this period, administrators were caught between a desire to enhance American trade with the PRC, and coming to terms with the perceived direction of Chinese socio-political developments. The conservative oligarchy, led by Deng Xiaoping, speedily shored up military and bureaucratic support for their program in 1990. The reform minded elite in the CCP were effectively removed from power after the military crackdown in the square, but the party was, nevertheless, forced to make minimal concessions in the name of enhanced democracy and political pluralism. Hence, Deng’s faction, now the only group with majority power in the ranks of the party, called
on the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) to offer additional constructive criticism pertaining to corruption and greater democracy. Although this was definitely a step in the direction of reform for Beijing leaders, the political supremacy of Marxism and the CCP were simultaneously reaffirmed. All measures in the avenue of democratic entitlements relegated to extra-party bodies, such as the CPPCC, required the tacit approval of the party, if suggestions and recommendations were implemented. As the Bush administration witnessed these happenings, officials concluded that authoritarianism had once again become victorious in China. The realization that radical communists had secured their position in Beijing fostered a sense of unease in American government, but the commercial linkage that had evolved through a decade of vigorous Sino-American bilateral contact was left intact.

With this in mind, policy makers publicly reaffirmed American trade commitments to the PRC. Officials repeatedly turned to a description of the post-Cold War era as one in which the global community had become increasingly interdependent. Since the pace of global economic interaction substantially increased after the fall of the Soviet Union, officials saw a certain futility in excluding China from the global marketplace. The ascent of the multinational corporation, a political entity that demanded open access to markets world-wide, drove American trade policy by its insistence on enhanced profitability, via a right of entry to the PRC. In a politically empirical sense, the multinational corporation had replaced the ideologically divided superpowers of the Cold War, as a collective set of interests with the ability to exert political weight of immense proportions.
Even before the fall of communism, as Kenneth Mason has observed, multinational companies were becoming the most important political-economic institutions of the late twentieth century. Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard H. Solomon described the global setting similarly by stating, "[t]he dominant trends of this new era, which will shape the world of the 21st century, are an increasingly integrated global economy sparked by spectacular technological change; the bankruptcy of communism as an economic and political alternative, and a world-wide trend toward democracy and free enterprise." In addition, Solomon maintained that in relation to the economy, America had a stake in sustaining current levels of growth, because engagement with East Asia partially accounted for the dynamics of the burgeoning American economy. "U.S. trade with East Asia," Solomon declared, "now accounts for more than one-third of our total foreign commerce, and our exports to East Asia now exceed those to Europe." In sum, globalization, with China as an intricate part of the multinational puzzle, influenced the trajectory of foreign policy, because the unimpeded flow of capital to export markets, even to nations with questionable political systems, was a prerequisite for success in post-communist economics.

Although not as rhetorically secure in their assertion as before the Tiananmen crisis, administrators stressed their belief in the reformist nature of economic liberalization, and its direct impact on the political climate of a nation. In a 1996 interview, President Bill Clinton summed up this argument when stating, "I believe they’re more likely to become democratic if they progress economically...[because] economic development and democracy will go hand in hand." In actuality, given the tone of the above statement,
the core of the pre-Tiananmen policy initiatives were carried into the next decade by subsequent administrations.

Prior to Tiananmen, human rights, the issue of Taiwan, and China's military capabilities, for the most part, were divorced from the issue of bilateral commerce. These facets of policy were relegated to positions of marginal concern and were overshadowed by the administrative yearnings for open access to the Chinese economy. These previously diffused aspects of international relations merged in the era of uncertainty with the issue of China trade, which advanced the idea that moral considerations and tangible gains for America were necessary in order to continue the current import-export relationship.

One area in which the fusion of economic and moral imperatives collided was on the question of public benefits that bilateral relations presented for average Americans. Ambassador Charlene Barshefsky, in a 1996 testimony presented to the House Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee, testified that Americans owed much to bilateral commerce with the PRC, because the existence of as many as 160,000 jobs in the United States were associated with American exports to China. The pre-Tiananmen justifications offered by administrative officials differed greatly from the above statement. Before, lucrative benefits for business in China stood as the primary reason for a need to further commercial interaction, but in the early 1990s, appeals to popular support became more numerous by claiming that bilateral trade was profitable for average citizens in the form of growing employment opportunities associated with exports to East Asia.

Scholars who study the periodic alterations of policy in relation to domestic factors and political variables site the growing influence of American populism for this shift in
attitudes. In the United States, political constituents, in the form of patriotic citizens who view globalism as a threat to American sovereignty, form a substantial portion of the domestic voting block. Many Americans, particularly farmers from the Midwest and other agriculturally productive regions, perceive the political affluence of multinational corporations and the relocation of production facilities as a process that will ultimately undermine America's political sovereignty and economic security. David M. Lampton argues that these nationalistic sentiments contributed to the amplification of nationalistic populism in the early 1990s, as politicians, namely Pat Buchanan, sought to harness the political weight of these disenchanted elements within the American body politic.9

Within the post-Tiananmen socio-political milieu, outright appeals for corporate market fortification became insufficient, so policy makers presented the public with greater assurance that commercial contact with China was morally and nationally beneficial to average Americans, many of whom were under the distinct impression that American jobs were being transplanted to a nation that functioned under questionable economic, social, and political principles.

The unpredictable nature of Chinese culture was another variable that contributed to the proliferation of the image that China operated under unorthodox modes of political-economic advancement. Notwithstanding the positive tone of Clinton's prediction that commercial liberalization fostered political reform, the expectations of a smooth transition to wholesale capitalism and democracy were generally more reserved in this period. In 1990, the State Department announced that within the Chinese heritage, an adherence to tradition and custom prevented reform from occurring at a rapid pace. A tradition of centralized authority, communal security, and elite political conflict in
decision making were barriers to modernization that needed international recognition. For functional relations to move forward, Secretary Lawrence Eagleburger maintained that these time-honored customs were deeply imbedded in the Chinese, and America needed to bridle any unrealistic expectations for overnight reform in China. Additional images of Chinese cultural anachronism appeared in 1996 as well, when Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Peter Tamoff commented that the Chinese nation, as an important component of international politics, had yet to comply with internationally recognized norms and behavioral standards, in terms of the regime’s political behavior. With regard to economic restructuring, Jan Prybyla noted that a “gradualist and relatively pragmatic approach to institutional reform” had been the trademark of Chinese restructuring since 1978, when Deng Xiaoping enacted his program for national modernization. More importantly, the 1989 ascent of the conservative oligarchy stalled the abandonment of these moderate policies, a process the United States hoped would progressively quicken. For this reason, Tarnoff explained, “China [was] at a critical juncture,” and the United States needed to act as an “encouraging” agent for the Chinese people. Therefore, if China was to become an equal player in multinational commerce, the overarching hand of government regulation and political rigidity required jettisoning. In summary, the image of China from these various government publications suggests that a dualistic ambivalence of market engagement and political uncertainty battled for preeminence in this phase of Sino-American relations.

The most fiercely debated aspect of the cross-cultural ambivalence discussed above is the annual congressional renewal of Most Favored Nation (MFN) status for the PRC.
To avoid an international confrontation with Beijing, President Bush resisted congressional appeals for a revocation of MFN following the Tiananmen crackdown. Under the provisions of MFN, nations with vibrant market economies and democratic systems of government are awarded the status permanently, however, non-market economies, due to the Jackson-Vanik amendment in the Trade Act of 1974, are granted MFN on an annual basis only. As a tool for leverage against the human rights practices of China, MFN became the yearly centerpiece of debate among proponents and opponents of China trade. As an issue of contention, the granting of MFN to a regime that stifled democratic outpourings and suppressed anti-communist dissent has, at times, strained Sino-American relations.

Interestingly enough, since Tiananmen, a presidential-congressional rift has materialized regarding the MFN issue; a conflict pitting congressional hard-liners who denounce Chinese authoritarianism against proponents of free-trade and intensive marketization. Congress views the clause of annual renewal as a yearly monitoring mechanism that functions as an incentive for the Chinese government in improving its human rights record. The Bush and Clinton administrations claimed that by granting China MFN, the liberalizing effect of intensive market expansion would assist the cause of human rights advocates in prying China open to western values and standards of conduct. Even though Bush insisted on separating the issue of trade and human rights with regard to this issue, Clinton however, upon having been elected, pledged that America’s commitment to freedom could only be demonstrated by linking the MFN debate with improvements in the treatment of dissident voices in China. The Clinton strategy for extracting political concessions from Beijing was in part only rhetorical,
because his bellicose tone became more conciliatory after several months into the new administration. In terms of the socio-political image created by the MFN debate, the conflict in government clearly exemplified the moral ambivalence that American politicians suffered from in the aftermath of Tiananmen.

The argument offered by the administrations for granting China the measure was based primarily on the conjecture that a revocation of MFN would lead to economic tensions in China, and an abandonment of American ideals. In a 1991 commencement ceremony at Yale University, Bush stood firm in his position that a denial of MFN could exacerbate tensions in an already fragile program for economic reform. The president added that withholding approval was counterproductive for American interests because it thwarted efforts at encouraging privatization and increasing respect for “human rights” in China. “The most compelling reason to renew MFN and remain engaged in China,” declared Bush, “is not economic, is not strategic, but moral. It is right to export the ideals of freedom and democracy to China.”¹⁶ Moreover, in opposition to those who sought to deny MFN to China, Bush argued that “[c]ritics who attack MFN today act as if the point is to punish China, as if hurting China’s economy will somehow help the cause of privatization and human rights.”¹⁷ The use of the measure, therefore, served a dual purpose. For one, it allowed for the advancement of American socio-philosophical ideals abroad, and second, it furthered the well being of the Chinese populace by promoting the interests of privatization and individual proprietorship.

While Bush steadfastly backed this policy for the remainder of his second term through a policy of “engagement,” Clinton reassured Americans that he planned a similar course of action. Termed “comprehensive engagement,” the Clinton policy sought an
expansion of commercial relations with the PRC because China was quickly emerging as the next economic powerhouse in East Asia. The image of China as “a vital source of export revenues and jobs” took shape at this time, with the concomitant image of moral-political ambivalence attached to the former image. Officials reiterated claims that extending MFN was imperative, if America wanted to continue a “constructive relationship with China now and in the future.” In summary, the lucrative opportunities that China trade offered American businesses and average citizens in the form of employment became the hallmark of the comprehensive engagement policy, but anxiety about the treatment of Chinese dissidents and their imprisonment was repeatedly attached to this political-economic dialogue.

In the early 1990s, the Tiananmen incident became the rallying cry for American human rights advocates within the ranks of government. The sporadic mention of communist repression was not uncommon in the circles of government and the mass media prior to 1989, but Tiananmen served as a galvanizing force that cemented the opinion among many Americans that China operated outside of the boundaries of universal human rights standards.

Definitionally, the concept of human rights has become a controversial terms in recent years. At the center of the debate is the question of whether a western definition of human rights is applicable to the Chinese cultural experience, or is the notion of universality in the concept an ethnocentric fallacy. From a purely western-based perspective, the apparent nonexistence of individualism and the historical de-emphasis on individual human motivations in China have been points of contention between China and the United States since these civilizations came into contact with one another. In the
Euro-American tradition, the concept of the self has served as the point of origin for philosophical claims concerning the idea of human universality and cross-cultural standards of morality.

It would be a misconception, however, to suggest that limited-personalism is not a venue for the cultivation of philosophical and individual morality in Chinese culture. As William Theodore de Bary has argued, even during the Maoist regime, the Communist Party appealed to the Confucian tradition of self-cultivation as a means of improving the socio-moral bonds of socialism. Unfortunately for the government, the appeals of party elite in this admirable endeavor proved unsuccessful, since the political confines of communism prevented the genuine growth of human virtue on a personal level.

After the tumultuous decade of the Cultural Revolution and the political chaos of the 1970s, Jing Lin maintains that a growing number of Chinese students turned to the western conception of human rights and freedom, as a means of locating a sense of personal identity within the modern world. Disenchanted with the radicalism of Marxism-Maoism, these students looked to the west as a guide for constructing the basis of civil society in post-Mao China. Notwithstanding the desire for the wholesale incorporation of western liberalism into China, the intellectual adaptations of this era blended communitarian elements of the Chinese intellectual tradition with western liberalism. In effect, the essence of western individualism and a genuine respect for the power of individual human abilities received minimal treatment by these scholars, for the individual self, as a historically reemerging concept in Chinese culture, has often been misinterpreted as egotism and selfishness. As Tu Wei-ming explains:

The Enlightenment assertion, implicit in virtually all declarations of human rights, that the individual has inalienable rights, and that individualism as the doctrine of
protecting the dignity, autonomy, and independence of the private person is a hallmark of the liberation of the human spirit, has never been fully appreciated by the Chinese intelligentsia. The Confucian idea that selfhood, as a center of relationships, realizes itself in communal participation has so much dominated the Chinese discourse on self and society that individualism is often misunderstood as self-centeredness. Therefore, two avenues of misunderstanding and ambiguity exist in the America-Chinese understandings of human rights. First, conservatives and liberals alike in the United States assert that the communist government’s notion of human rights — emphasis on order, community, social stability, and a duty to society and state — is actually the antithesis of human individuality. Second, the Chinese intelligentsia’s adaptation of certain aspects of western liberalism is a cross-cultural aberration in the minds of many, because the western scientific definition of human rights is universally valid in its entirety. For these reasons, the post-Tiananmen period witnessed a systematic attempt on the part of the United States to discredit the political program of the CCP as an exercise in tyranny and authoritarianism.

This definitional conflict is best exemplified in the Bush administrations comments about the self-evident validity of personal freedom and libertarian values. In a 1989 address before the annual meeting of the World Bank/IMF, Bush clarified this position when stating, “[w]e know what works. Freedom works…. We know how to secure a more just and prosperous life for man on earth — through free markets, free speech, free elections, and the exercise of free will unhampered by the state.” In this utterance, the president not only commented on the importance of national governments in guaranteeing individual freedoms as a universal value in itself, he also tied capitalism and free-market enterprise into the complex of variables that contribute to human prosperity and self-determination. The following year, the administration reaffirmed the stance
outlined by Bush in the previous year. American judgments of human rights in China, according to State Department personnel, were not culturally determined condemnations rooted in cultural traditions and norms. Rather, "universally recognized principles" of human decency and standards of morality were at the core of presidential policies related to China. Hence, market forces were viewed as the most effective mechanism for opening the PRC to unorthodox ideas, and an image of China materialized from these statements that its political culture violated international norms of proper behavior.

This cross-cultural perception becomes crystal clear in the perpetual references made by government concerning the Tibetan people's yearning for independence, and the alleged atrocities committed by the communists in the remote province. Communist authorities, since the promulgation of Tibet as an autonomous region of the PRC in 1951, have actively sought the incorporation of ethnic Tibetans into the cultural milieu of greater China. Currently, a process of steady acculturation characterizes the Han Chinese policy toward ethnic Tibetans. During the mid 1980s, the Chinese central government enacted a policy of modernization and cosmopolitanization for the province, by providing large government subsidies for companies that invested in Tibet. Aimed at slowly incorporating the region into the overall plan for national modernization, the CCP sought the development of the local infrastructure as a means of "increasing their income and reducing their isolation" from the rest of China. The nationalistic elements within Tibet, particularly the Dalai Lama and patriotic Buddhists, view the communist policy not as a gesture of benevolent modernization, but as the systematic eradication of their traditional culture. Hence, nationalists in Tibet resent the presence of the Han as an
unwanted horde of foreigners who have little or no regard for the cultural integrity of the Tibetan people.

As a symbol of international pride and territorial integrity for Beijing, Tibet is a crucial area of contention for communist leaders who seek to dislodge the weight of separatist and nationalistic elements in China. In Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, as Zheng Yongnian suggests, a growing ethnic separatist movement has surfaced within the past decade. In Xinjiang province alone, some thirty bombing incidents were reported in 1994. Perpetrated by militant separatists, the terrorists demanded the creation of an independent east Turkestan and autonomy from communist China. In similar outbursts of violence, Buddhist monks and Tibetan extremists have periodically attacked government and PLA assets, which has resulted in public rioting in Lhasa and swift military intervention by Chinese authorities. Taken as a legitimate part of greater China, the central government has stood firm on the independence issue, because the maintenance of Tibet is now viewed as an illustration of the central government’s ability to wield power and suppress dissent on a national level.

Naturally, the above issue, at least within the American government and media, became associated with the Chinese disregard for human rights and ethnic pluralism. In 1990, a State Department spokesperson declared that “we believe firmly that Tibetans should not be prosecuted by Chinese authorities for peacefully expressing their views and also for their religious beliefs.” The Clinton administration continued this tradition of moral outrage against Beijing when it claimed that reports from the province suggested that continued suppression of religious freedom and public association were ongoing in Tibet. In fact, arbitrary arrests, torture, and criminal conviction without due process
characterized Beijing’s unofficial policy toward the local populace. In certain cases, the MFN question was juxtaposed with the alleged abuse of Tibetans. Nevertheless, the United States government reassured the public that additional privatization and capitalism were the solutions in assisting the dire situation of ethnic dissidents and political prisoners.

In the era of ambivalence, the climactic event that triggered public and government opinion in an aggressively anti-Chinese direction was the Taiwan Strait incident. As a sufficient example for Americans in affirming the potentially belligerent motivations of the PRC toward its neighbors, the military exercises and live missile tests conducted by the mainland galvanized government and public opinion against China. Before 1995, the actual viciousness of the Chinese Communist Party, other than with regard to the Tiananmen crackdown, were addressed only in brief. However, beginning with the military exercises undertaken by the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the Taiwan Strait prior to the presidential elections in Taiwan, American images of political uncertainty and Chinese aggressiveness came to the fore of the policy debate.

The United States wasted no time in presenting Taiwan with military assistance to deter a prospective communist invasion. Ambassador Winston Lord, following the tactical operations conducted by the PLAN, warned that the region had witnessed a momentary period of instability as the Chinese test-fired missiles within just miles of the island. Two months prior to this statement, President Clinton warned that the United States supported the “one China policy,” and it was in the best interest of the region if both parties, namely China and Taiwan, “clearly understood” America’s commitment to bilateral peace. This stance of involvement, as Clinton knew all too well, directly
brought the PRC and the United States Navy into a position of possible conflict, if tensions between the parties flared. As Li Ziaobing has commented, a “duel strategy” was combined by the late Mao Zedong on the question of Taiwan that utilized diplomacy and “militancy.” In the tradition of Mao, the opinions expressed by Beijing nearly two decades later followed a similar path; for the CCP applied militant diplomacy toward Taiwan when the strategy was in its own geo-political interest. The United States, however, rejected the PRC approach as “saber rattling” and as an act of cross-strait militancy. Thus, Clinton pledged American diplomatic intervention in the dispute, and adamantly called for a peaceful settlement to the crisis. Secretary of State Warren Christopher echoed this posture in a 1996 press briefing when he declared:

The United States strongly believes that the resolution of the issues between the PRC and Taiwan must be peaceful. We were gravely concerned when China’s military exercises two months ago raised tensions in the Taiwan Strait. Our deployment of naval forces to the region was meant to avert any dangerous miscalculations. We are encouraged that both sides have now taken steps to reduce tensions.

In all, American fears of Chinese expansionism, notwithstanding the fact that the PRC considers the resolution of the Taiwan issue a domestic predicament, were confirmed by Beijing’s show of force in the region.

As the transitional event that sparked American interest about the possibility of Chinese expansionism in the region, the Taiwan crisis cemented fears in the minds of Americans that China might become the successor to the Soviet Union as the next major international adversary of the United States. The situation marked the beginning of a new era in which American diplomatic and cultural images of China focused on the notion that China was a rising power in Asia, and a likely threat to international stability and peace. The image of a positive-negative duality was cast aside after the T'aiwan
debacle, and Americans increasingly perceived communist China as an Asian adversary with hostile intentions toward the international community.

Popular Images of China: The Era of Confusion

The post-Tiananmen assumption, ideas, and stereotypes of American policy makers mirrored the cultural inclinations of the popular press. In much the same manner as policy makers, journalists repeatedly detailed political, economic, and social developments in China from a rabidly anti-communist perspective. The once sanguine and positive images of a modernizing nation coming to terms with a market-oriented world were replaced with much harsher criticisms of China’s political-economic structure. However, a faith in the politically reconstructive power of commerce and the Chinese people’s yearning for freedom were depicted in the press as domestic forces that could not be ignored permanently by communist hardliners. Still, the general tone of media coverage was critical of Chinese human rights standards, regional expansionism, and the political unpredictability of the CCP. Although the image of an open Chinese market for American exports filled the pages of magazines in the former half of the 1990s, the previously marginalized concerns of human rights and political belligerence moved to the fore of media coverage. This genuine ambivalence created a dualistic picture of China as a land of economic plenty and a possible menace in the years to come.

In the wake of the Tiananmen incident, the American press recanted its previously held position that the democracy demonstrations had reshaped the political landscape of the country. Because the ideological strength of liberal-democracy and the desire for freedom manifested with tremendous popular support in 1989, the press reluctantly clung
to the idea that although freedom had been contained in the short term, capitalism and consumerism were embryonic forces that no totalitarian regime, regardless of its level of oppressiveness, could effectively stifle. In this regard, media correspondents depicted the Chinese populace as a mass of individuals caught between traditional notions of communitarian dedication and consumerist freedom.

The media endorsed the idea that Chinese industriousness and hard work were better suited for capitalist economic systems, that would make more efficient use of the Chinese work ethic. In support of this proposal, Time columnist Michael Kramer wrote, "the people seem energetic, if fitful; a fifth of the world's population in a cage. Good, hardworking people who deserve better than the suffocating Communism that limits their enterprise."\(^{32}\) Also, the existence of a powerful market culture that cast aside communist ideology and central-government directives was depicted as the future of an economically maturing nation. Guangdong, one of China's most financially prosperous provinces, was said to have "[m]ore than 2 million residents work for foreign joint ventures, making small fortunes by Chinese standards. Evidence of Guangdong's fast-lane corporate culture is everywhere at hand. The parking lot at the Aide Electronic Rice Cooker plant overflows with Mercedes-Benz cars."\(^{33}\) The article went on to add that state ideology was of little or no importance to these entrepreneurally minded individuals. Apparently, the locals were more interested in technical training and "practicality" than the ideological dogmatism of Marxism and Maoism.\(^{34}\) These report, from a cross-cultural perspective, reacted to the legacy of what historian Lucian Pye has termed the "ritualistic symbolism" of Chinese political culture.\(^{35}\) In order to maintain political cohesiveness, a principle tradition of social order in China has dogmatically affirmed the power of the
central government in manufacturing political unity. Viewed as a symbol of retrogressiveness and political stagnancy, western journalists depicted this tradition in the most negative of terms. Therefore, as the new driving force behind reform and laissez-faire capitalism, the culture of the market was portrayed as transforming a backward land into a technologically advanced society.

Another cultural assumption that was fostered by the media at this time was the notion of Chinese consumerism. Chinese contact with foreign firms and products has progressively increased since Deng enacted the “four modernizations” program. Soon after the announcement of the plan, western consumer goods from Europe and the United States began flowing into the PRC, as a result of heightened commercial contact between China and the west. Within a decade, according to press reports, a consumer culture that craved western made merchandise had emerged. A 1994 *Newsweek* article quickly concluded that “[t]here is no longer any doubt: China cares about its athlete’s foot problem. Johnson & Johnson subsidiary made sure of that.” Author Steven Strasser added that the populace has a fascination with anything foreign, so “Maxwell House coffee commercials [gave] China’s tea-drinking proletariat an otherworldly scene of elegant Westerners on an Italian terrace.” The source of marketization and the current social revolution, interestingly enough, was not completely of foreign influence because a deep-seated pragmatism was imbedded in the Chinese psyche.

The media image of China in the last decade of the millennium was of a nation that had been reborn; a populace that was collectively liberating itself from the socio-economic limitations of socialism/utopianism. This pragmatism was described by the Shenyang Toyota parts chairman when stating, “don’t waste your time on theory... if the
company is making money, then we’re successful.” In response to this statement, the author predicted that chairman Zhao Xiyu “may yet be on his way to becoming China’s Henry Ford.” The private sector was not the only influential group in society that was spearheading change. Many high-level officials within the communist hierarchy were characterized as advocates of market reform and privatization. The top families in the communist network were already heavily involved in free-market investment, and they had the potential of leading the country in a commercially oriented direction. In combination with pragmatic leaders from the coastal provinces, they “represented the most powerful emerging Chinese faction; those who want to go full speed ahead… without any rules or regulations to limit the greed, power, and connections of the insiders.” In essence, a fundamentally ingrained pragmatism or culture of practicality presented China with a vision of freedom and prosperity for the future.

Not entirely absent from this picture was the enormous benefit that the Chinese marketplace offered for American corporate interests. The exaltation of the China market was not a new inter-cultural phenomena born in this period. Historian David L. Anderson has noted that as far back as the late nineteenth century, American diplomats and merchants fantasized about the prospects of opening up China to the outside world. In furthering the interest of American commerce, Presidents Reagan and Bush were committed to a prosperous bilateral trade relationship with China. The expected downfall or steady collapse of communism, however, did not manifest in midst of the Tiananmen demonstrations. Nevertheless, policy makers haphazardly clung to their original thesis that commercialization would eventually bring about the destruction of authoritarianism. In conjunction with the American economy, press reports tied the prospective growth of
the domestic economy with the fortunes that could be amassed from accessing a nation of 1.2 billion consumers. "The government’s call [for communications technology] has been answered by U.S. and foreign giants like Alcatel, AT&T, Ericsson, Motorola... all hooked by a seemingly boundless market of 1.2 billion Chinese."^^

The juxtaposition of human rights with commerce was another key feature of many articles that addressed bilateral economic relations. An article of brief length in Time succinctly summarized the administration’s policy on this issue by stating, “the question... is not whether the U.S. should pressure Beijing to improve its human rights record. The question is how best to do it while ensuring that America gets a piece of the action in the world’s fastest growing economy. The two interests seem antithetical, but they are not.”^^ Other than the ability for foreign companies to tap into a virgin market, the inherent paradox of burgeoning capitalism in an officially communist country was commented on by media personnel as well. When the Soviet system crumbled under the pressure of financial stagnation and internal political chaos, both the political and the economic structures of Russian Federation were reconfigured along liberal-democratic lines of operation. The fact that state communism had survived the outpouring of criticism in Tiananmen baffled many journalists, so an actual understanding of how Chinese market-socialism functioned was difficult for many to comprehend. The apparent ambiguity present within the nature of the new economic system is observable in John Rothchild’s article on this question:

As you no doubt have heard, China is the world’s biggest emerging market: 1.2 billion potential consumers for cars, TV sets, patio furniture, all the stuff we’ve already got. This is the era of global investing, it is said, and the sophisticated investor can’t afford to ignore China, an exciting economy with a great future, because the most ardent capitalists you’ll ever meet are the Chinese communists."^^
In much the same fashion as policy makers, the popular press concentrated extensively on prying open the Chinese market to foreign access and material consumption. But just as administrators were quick to realize that large-scale reform provided not only for foreign investment but domestic financial prosperity as well, the media also began to view the boom in the Chinese economy with a certain degree of hesitancy.

Politically, the Chinese military demonstrated its capacity for social repression in 1989. Even though privatization of state enterprises proceeded at a steady pace in the years following the Tiananmen crackdown, American investors, public officials, and media personnel feared that Chinese marketization would result in the creation of an East Asian economic giant with malevolent intentions. During the 1980s, Japan held the preeminent position as the economic success story of East Asia. By the early years of the next decade, a *Time* article speculated that "relations between China and the U.S. will shape the world in the 21st century." Therefore, the media caught onto the notion that China, not Japan, was becoming the rising economic power in the East, an image echoed by journalist Joe Klein in an article entitled "Why China Does It Better." According to Klein's observation, the absence of a strong control mechanism, namely the state, allowed Chinese business the requisite freedom for healthy innovation and growth. In addition, this relative autonomy from control mechanisms contributed to the hitherto unexpected increase in China's gross national product.

Klein did not neglect to mention the idea that capitalism and the merchant ethic ran through the cultural heritage of the Chinese. In citing the impressions of one Japanese diplomat who commented upon the phenomena, the official concluded that the "Chinese are a nation of merchants." This fear of Chinese economic expansionism and its
possible long-term ramifications fueled a sense of unease in the voice of the diplomat, who predicted that the “Chinese brand of commerce eventually could overwhelm the more controlled Japanese model.”⁴⁸ A significantly negative aspect of this model of commerce was its lack of governmental oversight, since Beijing retained only minimal economic control over the actions and political/economic decisions of local entrepreneurs and business moguls. Relaxation of central planning provided for expeditious planning and opportunities at the village and township levels, but the downsizing of the state sector left local official-merchants out of the reach of government authorities. British China scholar Gerald Segal, in a 1994 Newsweek article sub-titled “The Central Government is Losing Control,”⁴⁹ argued that Beijing’s insistence that it maintain control over provincial enterprise, politics, and planning was simply a façade, because provincial official-merchants operated autonomously; outside of central planning directives.

Another set of images that clearly dovetails the previous section concerning the economic prowess of China is the notion that China sought to join the international commercial/political community under its own terms or political guidelines — that is, a rogue nation among more responsible nations. Mortimer Zuckerman, in commenting upon the incremental pace at which reform in China is moving, described the nature of Chinese modernization as “pragmatic” and “ad hoc” capitalism.⁵⁰ After having received advice from American economists and political tacticians, in Zuckerman’s view, China opted for an unorthodox approach to restructuring its antiquated system of socialism. With regard to the trajectory of Chinese economic policy, Zuckerman wrote “China has listened but is going its own way... groping across the river by feeling the stones.”⁵¹ Because Americans had encountered a nation where resource facilitation/allocation and

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investment decisions were simultaneously socialist and capitalist, a general sense of unease characterized the tone of many press reports at this time. The socialist market economy of China, in the opinion of Steven Butler, was described cynically by China’s East Asian neighbors as a “Chinese brand of swashbuckling capitalism.”

American businesses and investors world-wide expected that a culture of fair trade and the rule of law would eventually develop in China, so the clear absence of these regulatory forces fostered a sense of hesitancy about foreign involvement in the Chinese domestic economy.

In relation to their anachronistic system of central economic planning, the Chinese mode of commercial exchange became an additional focal point for those journalists who sought to unmask the chaos behind comprehensive socio-economic reform. In many instances, the idea that China circumvented international rules of commerce flooded the pages of the popular press, in addition to the assertion that a cunning market culture had evolved in China; a culture that ignored the legal rights of foreign and domestic investors. Similar to allegations of Chinese thievery and underhandedness that characterized American images of Chinese “coolie” laborers a century ago, image formulators propagated the thesis that although China was in the midst of a massive economic overhaul (deregulation), significant impediments thwarted comprehensive reform in the areas of commercial law, equal access to joint-ventures, and most importantly intellectual property rights. Newsweek sited the complaints of one foreign businessman in 1995 who admitted that enormous hurdles prevented optimum levels of capital accumulation, since 92 percent of computer software in China was of pirated origin. Similar complaints were voiced about the sale of foreign music and movies. Russell Watson summed up the
situation aptly when stating, "[e]veryone does it, but no one does it like the Chinese, who have turned illegal copying into a $1 billion-a-year racket. They have flooded their own cities and world markets with ripoffs of American-music CDs." Other cases of patent theft and illegal duplication of non-Chinese products stressed the perplexing idea that the vast majority of Chinese simply accepted bootlegging as a natural component of market freedom. With regard to modified sport utility vehicles that ran under the name of Jeep Cherokee but were generic replicas, the Chrysler Company president admitted how baffled he was that "the Chinese see nothing wrong with this." In all, the investor's paradise that Americans lauded in one breath, was condemned as a commercially unsafe and treacherous environment in another. China had evolved, in the assessment of the press, into an economically anarchic nightmare in which multinational corporations were prone to unstable market forces.

For most westerners, the military might unleashed upon the democracy demonstrators in 1989 was the work of a political regime that utterly disregarded universal standards of human rights. State Department documents from this period confirm this position, for America's policy makers repeatedly expressed concern for the human rights "record" of China. Based on western and American ideological precepts proclaiming the universality of democracy and representative government, media personnel took a stance of firmness on this issue. More than any other set of images present within press articles, the notion of tyranny and political repression formed the core of popular attitudes toward Chinese human rights. In brief, the catalyst for the creation of this series of cross-cultural assumptions was the suppression of political dissent by the Chinese government. Rather than presenting these images in mass, image
formulators broke down the most serious violations of human decency into four distinct categories: MFN and cheap labor, the status of women in contemporary China, and the attempt on the part of Beijing to stifle ethnic nationalism in Tibet.

The United States Congress, since 1989, has viewed the annual renewal of Most Favored Nation (MFN) for China as the primary tool in Washington’s arsenal for extracting concessions on issues pertaining to human rights. In rhetorically stressing the violent character of the CCP and the PLA, administrators and elements within the American media linked these topics together and effectively created an image that political and social rights in modern China were on America’s bilateral agenda with the PRC. In a 1990 column discussing the political position of the Bush administration and MFN, Newsweek reported the president as having warned, “I don’t want to send a signal that we are happy [with the Chinese] human rights record.”56 In relation to the renewal of MFN and the corporate use of Chinese low-cost labor in China, a picture of Chinese textile and consumer goods manufacturing materialized, in which inexpensive exports were said to have inundated the international market. Once again, the Chinese were depicted as a cunning breed of businessmen who cast aside even the most basic protocols of employer-labor relations; namely a neglect for decent wages. Journalist Tom Post warned that as China “dumped” products “made by prisoners” into the global marketplace, American companies simultaneously suffered exclusion from certain markets in which the Chinese repeatedly underbid American based companies.57 If that were not enough, even the historically revered employees of state-owned firms were forced to work under less than acceptable conditions of work. These dreadful labor standards included virtually no time off and company fines for illness, to name but a
few. One engineer who worked for a joint-venture enterprise was quoted as having admitted, "people are being worked beyond reasonable limits and then docked if they don't." The MFN question tied in wonderfully with these cross-cultural assessments, as evidenced by Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen's succinct declaration regarding the renewal of MFN. Bentsen claimed that America detested the use of prison labor, and would only grant MFN on the condition that "overall, significant progress" was made in the area of human rights. As the preeminent weapon for the United States in pursuing its ideological disposition for establishing social-democracy and capitalism in China, MFN and human rights took center-stage in the era of American ambivalence toward the PRC.

The status of women, notwithstanding the assertion of the CCP that attention to women's issues was a primary concern for the party, became a point of interest for American journalists during Hilary Clinton's visit to China in mid-1995. In one notable instance, Susan Lawrence dismissed the Maoist slogan that "women hold up half the sky" as simply a pseudo-communist myth. The economic standing of many Chinese had been raised with the ascent of Deng Xiaoping and the introduction of the four modernizations, but workplace rights for women and equal opportunity employment, according to Lawrance, were "often cast aside" in an effort to maximize profit at the expense of gender equality. Effectively, corporate profits were more important within the socialist market system than the equality of the sexes. The First Lady, in an effort to speak out on behalf of the politically voiceless, echoed many of the above criticisms during her trip to China for the Fourth World Conference on Women. One report predicted that if Beijing attempted to suppress these critical voices during the conference,
the government "may end up creating its own worst nightmare: a big group of angry feminists with some particular gripes about China." Through this manner of reporting, Americans moved toward a negative understanding of gender and social conditions within contemporary China.

Independent reports of human rights abuses from organizations such as Human Rights Watch contributed to the infusion of the popular image that government brutality was rampant in state-run orphanages. The concomitant assumption that the national one-child policy breached the right of individuals in deciding parental issues added a distinct tone of negativity to the already tarnished image of the CCP as a monolithic, totalitarian entity. In detailing the living conditions within these orphanages, *Newsweek* described the daily standard of living for the children as "horrific," because medical and administrative neglect contributed to a high mortality rate within these institutions.\(^5\) Carroll Bogert went on to conclude that for a child, life within these compounds was comparable to residing in "virtual death camps."\(^6\) When describing the government's one-child policy and family planning, the press leveled charges of obsessive cruelty and control at the Communist Party. Their draconian method of maintaining a stable population level was said to conflict with the universal rights of humans in deciding the fate of their lives. Further depictions of the system presented the regime as an entity that involved itself in the most personal affairs of citizens. "Controlling the population," in Bogert's view, "is the crucial obsession of the Chinese authorities... the central core policy that radiates out in all directions."\(^7\) With regard to government interference in public affairs, Hilary Clinton, at the 1995 women's conference was quoted as saying:

> It is a violation of human rights when women are denied the right to plan their own families, and that includes being forced to have abortions or being sterilized against...
their will... let me be clear... freedom means the right of people to assemble, organize and debate openly. It means respecting the views of those who may disagree with the views of their governments.67

An intricate component of American social philosophy is the belief in individual self-determination and a respect and love for human diversity. Linked to the idea that individual development of cultural characteristics and modes of behavior should be guaranteed through representative government, American individualism lends credence to many ethnic separatist movements around the world. Backed by numerous entertainment figures from the Hollywood film industry and affiliated NGOs and human rights groups, the Tibetan independence movement gained a massive following in the wake of the Tiananmen crackdown. Presented as the bastion of ethnic self-determination in Asia, the Tibetan independence movement was popularized by the press during the period of ambivalence.

As the public showpiece of the Tibetan separatist movement, the Dalai Lama has taken advantage of pro-Tibetan sentiments outside of China. Depicted as the savior of ethnic self-determination in the west, the Dalai Lama has become a symbol of ethno-religious freedom for the American press. *Time* ran a short article in December of 1995 in which the Tibetan leader reiterated his unyielding position toward Beijing. “Unless we guard our own country,” he declared, “it will now happen that the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, the Father and the Son, and all the revered holders of the Faith, will disappear and become nameless.”68 Even though Beijing regarded Tibet as historically a part of greater China, American sentiments leaned heavily toward the Tibetan position that the province was an independent tributary of China. Other depictions of Chinese political domination in the remote province characterized the current policy of the government as “cultural
In sum, the combined depiction of Tibetan suppression, the low status of women, and the brutal condition of government orphanages cemented an image of communist brutality within the American psyche.

Most notably, the pivotal event that became the catalyst in heightening American fears of Chinese expansionism was the PRCs show of military force near the Taiwanese coast in mid-1995. The presentation of this potential political crisis in the American press followed a pattern of biased anti-Chinese coverage so common to the period under scrutiny. Taiwan, politically and economically, has maintained a congenial relationship with the United States for more than two decades, but Beijing's interaction with the Taipei government has not fared so well. As noted before, American observers in media and government, left with a sense of political uncertainty after Tiananmen, were searching for tangible validation of their assertion that China was in the process of evolving into an aggressive and malevolent power. Observers, realizing that the current conflict was a continuation of the historical conflict between the communist and nationalists, seized upon the 1995 military exercises as credible proof of China's regional political misconduct. Because Taiwan functioned under democratic principles and a free-market economic system, Americans felt a certain bond of loyalty to the ideals of freedom represented by Taiwan. Hence, when Beijing announced its first round of routine exercises in the strait, American reports presented the scenario more as an act of international aggression, than an internal political dispute; the position held even today by the PRC.

Although passive reference was made to the Chinese claim that the island was a "renegade province," virtually every article written at this time lauded the economic
success of Taiwan and its adherence to western principles of representative government and human freedom. A *Newsweek* article from February of 1996 summed up the American perspective succinctly. [China] regards Taiwan," Tom Post cynically wrote, "as a miscreant province — a free-market, democratic stepchild as odds with its Confucian, socialist parent — and its president a crypto-separatist."\(^71\) The reason offered by journalists for the timing of these military maneuvers ranged from an outright show of force, to an internal political diversion. According to columnist Greg May, domestic dissenters, not unlike the students that organized the Tiananmen demonstrations, were becoming more and more difficult for mainland authorities to co-opt and control. Thus, in the tradition of the Tiananmen crackdown, the PLAN’s show of force served as an immediate deterrent against democratic elements in Taiwan and the mainland. At length, May writes:

> In fact, while Taiwan keeps its cool, China is the side that looks truly frightened. Some observers say Beijing’s nightmare goes far beyond the specter of Taiwanese separatism. The real fear, they say, is the steadily rising tide of democracy—not only in Taiwan and Hong Kong but on the mainland as well. And at least some of that fear is grounded in fact. China’s galloping prosperity is raising people’s aspirations and expectations. Growing numbers of Chinese are realizing for the first time that individual liberties are no less precious than refrigerators and television sets. That’s one reason the Beijing government has felt compelled to go on waging its war against public dissent…\(^72\)

As the issue of anti-democratic suppression filtered into press reports around this time, naturally, other questions concerning China’s military capabilities moved to the fore of foreign policy inquiries and debates.

> In the greater scheme of cross-cultural image periodization, the Taiwan Strait crisis galvanized American fears of Chinese expansionism and military intimidation. With a critical eye focused upon the military and nuclear capabilities of China, the American
government, during the second Clinton administration, fabricated the scenario that China was actively involved in upgrading its nuclear arsenal, as a means of eventually challenging America’s military hegemony in East Asia. Previous fears about the nature of post-Cold War politics in China, especially the anxiety witnessed in the era of uncertainty, matured in a radically negative direction following the Taiwan incident. As the transitional point that brought an end to the post-Tiananmen period, the Taiwan crisis intensified domestic anxiety and fostered the myth that China had taken the place of the Soviet Union as the geo-political adversary of the United States. The fragility of the period’s optimism, sanguine expectations, and hopefulness had been effectively undermined by the Chinese military’s show of force toward the Taiwanese government.
TAINTED IMAGES: ADVERSARIAL CHINA?

The three year period ending the twentieth century witnessed a reemergence of hostile American attitudes toward China. Sparked by the threat of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan and its concomitant military modernization, American government officials and media personnel uncritically concluded that a continuation of Cold War rivalries was imminent. Accordingly, American viewers of the situation emphasized the expansion of Chinese military power in East Asia, and the potentially destabilizing force that such a development might signify for the Pacific Rim. In addition, these adjustments in remedying their outdated/antiquated technology were characterized by many Americans as a program of deliberate militarization to counter American military hegemony in East Asia. Allegations of suspected espionage on the part of the Chinese government surfaced during this era, in conjunction with the assumption that China was on the verge of upgrading its nuclear arsenal; a plan that ran counter to the international movement for a steady reduction of nuclear weaponry in developed countries.

Since the path that China had taken in the 1990s in moving toward a market economy was viewed with contempt, given that the regime formulated a political-economic structure that incorporated elements of capitalism and socialism into its design. Thus, an image of China as a rising communist giant captured the American psyche.
America, however, steadfastly maintained that the incorporation of China into the global socio-economic milieu was possible and necessary for the future of the PRC. As such, engagement with international forces and institutions, access to foreign ideas, and the proliferation of free-markets through privatization were the tools by which this transition was to take place. Thus, the ultimate transformation of American social philosophy into a "global standard of philosophical operation" developed simultaneously along with these cultural images.

In the former portion of the decade, governmental and popular appeals to American ideals of moral, economic, and political conduct, dominated cross-cultural debates regarding the contemporary political evolution of China. In the latter part of the decade, however, the paradigm of American ideological superiority shifted to a discussion of the same under the rubric of global universality. At least rhetorically, the American ideal of liberal-democracy had become the gauge by which developing countries and their structures of government were evaluated.

Images and Foreign Policy: Menacing China

In his book entitled The Third World Century, Charles Stewart Goodwin argues that as civilizations have ascended and descended in political superiority throughout history, noticeable signs of transition have marked these phases of rise and decline. Most civilizations that are experiencing a process of perpetual decline, Goodwin maintains, exhibit tendencies toward the maximization of human freedom and individual liberty. On the other hand, civilizations that are increasing in political influence and international stature, for the most part, maintain relatively authoritarian systems of government while
allowing for only minimal to moderate expressions of individuality and deviations from accepted social norms. Generally speaking, Goodwin’s assertions are applicable to recent developments in Asia, but more specifically to the sphere of Chinese economics and politics. Given that China maintains an authoritarian system of government, an increased level of attention has been given to the possibility that China is becoming the latest in a series of international superpowers. Furthermore, Goodwin’s conjecture has gained notoriety and popularity among the ranks of American journalists since the anti-communist bias of many media personnel compels them to accept apocalyptic and often paranoid suggestions about the future of Chinese political evolution.

With regard to the upsurge of nationalism in contemporary China, scholars such as Yongnian Zheng point to a number of contributing factors that have led to the growth of patriotic expressions of behavior in the post-Tiananmen era. The apparent “crisis of faith in Marxism and Maoism,” the delegitimization of popular support for the CCP after Tiananmen, and the absence of the Soviet Union from the geo-political scene, are some of the more pertinent variables that have contributed to the rebirth of nationalism in China. A natural intellectual inclination on the part of many scholars to equate these socio-political changes with Chinese expansionism has fostered an uncritical understanding in circles of government and the popular press that China has taken the place of the Soviet Union as America’s international political adversary. From a more critical perspective, as Zheng has observed, the Chinese government has remained “rational” in its reaction to popular outbursts of nationalism and emotional patriotism. Therefore, heightened fears of nationalism in China derived from a plethora of internal political problems. In many ways, the notion that the government sponsored the upsurge
in domestic nationalism was unfounded. Nevertheless, the press seized the issue of outward power projection and hastily assumed that American hegemony and regional stability in East Asia were effectively threatened by China’s military modernization and burgeoning domestic production.

With regard to America’s China policy, the most pressing concern that government analysts encountered in the wake of the Taiwan debacle was not necessarily military in nature, but rather strategic. The question was posed: In a global economic system, how can a nation configure a long-term, strategic program for dealing with a potential enemy? Although this question will be addressed in a later section, president Clinton echoed the fears of many Americans in a statement presented before The Institute For Peace. By validating the popular notion that China was a security threat in the East Asian region during his speech, Clinton passively affirmed the image that the PRC behaved in a belligerent manner toward its neighbors. At length, Clinton stated:

More recently, many Americans have looked to China to see either the world’s next great capitalist tiger and an enormous motherlode of economic opportunity for American and their workers, or the world’s last great communist dragon and next great threat to freedom and security. For a long time, it seems to me, we have argued about China with competing caricatures. Is this a country to be engaged, or isolated? Is this a country beyond our power to influence, or a country that is ours to gain and ours to lose? Now we hear that China is a country to be feared. A growing number of people say that it is the next threat to our security and our well-being. What about this argument? Well, those who say it point out, factually, that if China’s economy continues to grow on its present trajectory, it will be the world’s largest in the next century. They argue, correctly, that the Chinese government often defines its interests in ways sharply divergent from ours. They are concerned, rightly, by Chinese missiles aimed at Taiwan and at others. From this they conclude that China is, or will be, our enemy.⁴

As an adequate solution required for the handling of a potential adversary, Clinton tacitly advocated a policy of strategic engagement. Unfortunately for the administration, allegations of Chinese espionage surfaced immediately after the Taiwan crisis unfolded.
Numerous government sources cited the fact that over the past decade, China has taken steps toward military modernization and technological restructuring. A 1997 State Department Bulletin asserted that “the Chinese military is trying to transform itself from a land-based power, centered on a vast ground force, to a smaller, mobile, high-tech military, but has a long way to go.” Supported by conservative elements within American academia, similar research depicted China as a nation that sought the effective technological transformation of its land, air, and sea based forces. In essence, these reports claimed that China was in the process of upgrading its weapons systems in order to meet twenty-first century demands of operation.

The most controversial of these allegations pointed to the possibility that sensitive nuclear information had been compromised through a program of Chinese espionage that spanned nearly two decades. The most publicly debated aspect to this scenario was the publication of the Cox Report, drafted by a select committee of the U.S. House of Representatives. In the final presentation of the document, the summationary overview determined that “the People’s Republic of China... has stolen design information on the United States’ most advanced thermonuclear weapons.” Moreover, the authors of the report admitted that the penetration achieved through covert methods resulted in an extensive breach of national security, which, to the surprise of many, was an operation that “almost certainly continues today.” According to intelligence sources documented by the committee, the stolen information was acquired by the Chinese in an effort to modernize their intercontinental ballistic missile program.

Fearing congressional reprisal from both Democrats and Republicans, Clinton countered the findings of the report by maintaining that American military security was
of the highest caliber, because he had personally increased the counterintelligence budget of the Energy Department "by 15-fold since 1995." Therefore, the popular assertion that national security had been breached via Chinese covert operations emerged as an important assumption of public policy during the period under consideration. Not only had China become a threat to Taiwanese security as discussed in the latter chapter, it also affected the ability of the United States to maintain an adequate level of military security. The question that arose in the ranks of government as a result of the Cox Report focused on the steps that were needed to ensure that China modernize along a path that was acceptable to the security requirements of the international community. Even in the midst of these negative images, the administration found hope for the possibility of stable relations.

In his detailed reanalysis of American historiographical conceptions of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, Stephen F. Cohen has observed that for the duration of the entire experience, the Untied States interpreted the industrial, military, and economic achievements of the communist block as the "antithesis of real progress." Through the publication of his pathbreaking work entitled Rethinking the Soviet Experience, Cohen sought to redirect the efforts of conservative historians in an analytical direction that critiqued the Soviet experiment on its own terms. In a similar vein, even though strides toward this end have been achieved in the realm of Chinese studies, the gradual erosion of anti-Maoism in American Chinese studies has not translated into popular politics and the culture at large. The transformation of the Chinese industrial complex in the last two decades, since it still functions under the supervision of a communist regime, has been viewed by government and press officials as quasi- or pseudo-progressive. Hence, as
allegations of Chinese espionage flooded the media in the two remaining years of the
decade, policy makers assumed that its secretive, confining political system was the cause
of current international tensions.

For most of the previous decade, oddly enough, Republican and Democratic
administrations clung to the sanguine idea that in opening China up to American liberal-
democratic ideas of free trade, press, and association, its incorporation into the
international community could be undertaken on peaceful terms. However, in the period
possible confrontation which began in 1997 as a result of the Taiwan strait incident, the
nature of the ideological rhetoric pertaining to liberal-democracy changed dramatically.
The source of genuine progress before this time was said to have originated from the
libertarian tradition of the United States and the European Enlightenment. Interestingly
enough, the content of the socio-philosophical rhetoric in the period following the
Taiwan crisis era was left unaltered, but the standards of national conduct for
recognizable reform were no longer interpreted as western in origin. Instead, standards
of acceptable international conduct were regionally reformulated and presented under the
rubric of globalism. The nature of the liberalization and reform debate, therefore, shifted
focus to a liberal-democratic system that was acceptable to capitalist nations world-wide.
Rather than culturally bound concepts of government with limited applicability, the
content of ideological policy was said to have received international acceptance and
applicability.

Before continuing with the government’s presentation of this philosophical
reformulation, it is important to attain an adequate understanding of how the process of
globalization operates. From a sociological perspective, in recent years, a new sub-
discipline of studies related to globalization has been established. In his masterful inquiry of various theoretical aspects of the emerging global environment, German sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues that the movement of capital across the national borders has created an economic motivation for the increased interaction of national capital and cultures. The new capitalist, in Bauman’s view, requires open access to markets on a global basis, so the global network of cross-cultural interaction and economics is most accurately understood as a process of released spatial delimitation. Many global analysts have discounted the importance of this phenomena, but as a vital feature of the global marketplace, localization and particularization of cultural ideas, values, and habits of mind are being replaced (or augmented) by the expansion of market-driven values and cultural norms. As Francis Fukuyama has persuasively suggested, humanity is in the midst of an international trend that posits liberal-democracy and free enterprise as the most useful and sought after forms of political economy. In place of the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century, humanity has determined — through the trials of the Cold War — that representative government and the individual worth of the human being is best served by a political structure founded on western principles of freedom and liberty.

Echoes of this newly formulated perspective marked the thematic tone of government policy following the Taiwan incident. Rather than appeals to the infallibility of American values, policy makers advocated the cultural-economic internationalization of China. In their view, the most effective way of dealing with the possibility of Chinese militarization and regional belligerence was by continuing the policy of comprehensive engagement. Hence, the method of bilateral interchange advanced by the Clinton
administration in a 1997 fact sheet on U.S.-China relations was that of global interaction. “First,” the document read, “the United States seeks to fully integrate China into the global, market-based economic and trading system. China’s participation in the global economy will nurture the process of economic reform and increase China’s stake in the stability and prosperity of East Asia.”

As far as human rights were concerned, the administration stated that gradual cross-cultural contact with global standards of ethics had improved the lives of countless Chinese minorities, and had placed the trajectory of national progress on the road to actual reform. Although the 1997 factsheet on Chinese human rights issues carefully avoided stating that the magnitude of human rights reforms in China were impressive, it nevertheless summarized some of the gains that bilateral engagement had created for the Chinese populace.

With respect to the above findings, the State Department avoided any mention of western value judgments. As far as standards of conduct were concerned, China had progressed because its antiquated system of government and cultural traditions had been exposed to “outside” (global) patterns of thought. The writers of the document concluded that Clinton’s engagement policy had improved the lives of a significant portion of the population:

Exposure to the outside world, exchange of goods, ideas, and people, has brought increased openness, social mobility and personal liberties, including greater freedom of movement, greater choice of employment, schooling, and housing opportunities, and improved access to information... Over time, citizen-to-citizen contacts through media, internet and travel expose Chinese people to international standards and values and will continue to loosen rigid, authoritarian structures.14

Finally, government sources augmented the above position of international cultural assimilation with an economic determinant. Cultural influences from the outside world...
were pertinent elements in freeing China from the stagnancy of communism, but deeper reform for the nation demanded more than the diffusion of democratic ideas into the complex of variables that foster political-economic change. In the Clinton administration’s view, the integration of marketization under international standards of commercial behavior was a requisite for long-term success. Progress could only take place if China was economically drawn into the commercial network of the global market. By way of entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), not only would the requirements of membership in such an organization propel the Chinese “toward acceptance of the rule of law” and financial accountability, it would also decrease the prospects of China becoming an “isolated and unpredictable” adversary.

In sum, policy makers, following the Taiwan incident and the publication of subsequent reports that perpetuated the atmosphere of paranoia created by the initial cross-strait situation, hastily concluded that China was, in fact, involved in a program of wholesale military modernization. In digesting these political developments, government officials looked to the international system of commerce as the means by which this supposed military/economic expansionism might be derailed.

Cultural Images of a New Cold War?

Cross-cultural perceptions of China during this period evolved along similar lines as America’s foreign policy initiatives. Given that the Soviet Union collapsed in the wake of its own internal political and economic contradictions but China had not, journalists steadily assumed that the Chinese communists had tentatively averted the same fate by accommodating the commercial market through limited privatization. In the greater
scope of national development, China was, nevertheless, under the control of a brutal regime that was willing to jeopardize regional stability for nationalistic purposes. In effect, China materialized as the post-Cold War enemy of America in East Asia; a nation with political intentions that diametrically opposed those of the United States.

Much of the popular hype that swept the journalistic community around this time influenced the analytical perspectives of many figures in the American literary community. One author who was deeply affected by the adversarial school of thought in the latter half of the decade was journalist/author Richard Bernstein. Bernstein began his professional career as a journalist for Time magazine in 1973, and later went on to publish three books on topics related to cultural issues. When Bernstein’s latest book entered the market in 1997, the fears of American anti-communists and paranoid journalists were affirmed by the primary thesis of the text. The author, in a show of uncritical analysis based on unfounded hypothetical assertions, predicted that China and the United States were on a catastrophic course for eventual military conflict. In citing the decade-long diplomatic tension that characterized bilateral relations and China’s military modernization, Bernstein concluded that in the long run, this manner of diplomacy was unstable and hence unmanageable, so a “looming conflict” between the two powers was virtually inevitable. As the author described the situation in the first sentence of the introduction, “The People’s Republic of China, the world’s most populous country, and the United States, its most powerful, have become global rivals, countries whose relations are tense, whose interests conflict, and who face tougher, more dangerous times ahead.” With predictions such as this inciting fear within the
American community of journalists, further manifestations of malevolent images progressively emerged in press reports that dealt with China.

The most unsettling of the images crafted by the media was the notion that if the power of the middle kingdom increases, the United States is more likely to enter into a conflictual relationship with the PRC. In echoing Bernstein’s conjecture, William Holstein stated that in the ranks of government, “[t]he underlying idea has been that as China’s power inevitably grew, economic and political interaction would be the most promising way to avoid showdowns or the emergence of a new cold war.” The author went on to add that containment of this colossal nation was out of the question, because its economic influence in the world “is already so profound.” Thus, from a strategic perspective, the growing role of China in the twenty-first century required intensive planning, since China appeared as though it was willing to use force as a means of achieving its political objectives.

The second most controversial dilemma that entered the media coverage of U.S.-China relations was the allegation that China had acquired missile technology from an American satellite and communications firm. The Senate Intelligence Committee investigated the charge that Loral Space and Communications Corp. had “improperly” helped the Chinese in upgrading their antiquated missile systems. The company denied any wrong doing in the matter, but the perception of the event in the press dovetailed reports of espionage that were advanced by the “Cox Report.”

A more general fear that dominated the coverage of China in the press was the idea that China was actively pursuing a program of military modernization aimed at dislodging American tactical hegemony in the East Asian hemisphere. Renowned China
scholar David Shambough observed that China, in fact, was involved in bringing its military capabilities up to twenty-first century technological standards, but this did not represent a direct attempt on the part of Beijing to disrupt the balance of power that existed in the region. In Shambough's view, the more probable reason for technological standardization was deterrence; a policy ultimately based on defensive principles of national security.

In contrast to this more non-cataclysmic conclusion, the press created a dramatically adversarial picture of Chinese military restructuring. Newsweek reporter Michael Hirsh summarized the goals of the PLA in purely negative terms when he wrote, "Beijing seeks to modernize its armed forces to project power in the South China Sea in the 21st century." With regard to nuclear capabilities and the structural dimensions of Beijing's military buildup, Douglas Waller, in a 1999 Time article entitled "China's Arms Race," wrote that "the world's most populous country wants the world's best military," because it plans on upgrading technical capabilities so it can conduct "limited war under high-tech conditions." Hence, by portraying the geo-political intentions of the PRC as blatantly offensive in nature and a threat to the stability of East Asia, the press reports molded an image of China as a country that was politically and economically defiant, with respect to "global" norms of conduct.

Lastly, the most pertinent development that arose in the area of cross-cultural relations was the philosophical and rhetorical shift in America's dialogue regarding liberal-democracy and the free market. Due to the collapse of Soviet communism, the international movement toward economic and cultural globalization increased substantially. Without an ideological foe such as the Soviet Union to thwart the
proliferation of liberal-democratic values on a global scale, the 1990's have witnessed the integration of post-communist nations into the commercial milieu. Within the national confines of the United States, the conceptual underpinning of capitalism, democracy, and individual freedoms evolved along similar lines. During the era of ambivalence, American policy makers and journalists argued that democratic concepts of government and free trade were cultural forces that originated in the west; while maintaining universal applicability. By the end of the decade, however, a rhetorical shift occurred in which Americans repeatedly posited the geographic basis of capitalism and democracy in more general, global terms. Suddenly, the political roots of human liberty and self-expression were not premised around the western tradition. The international community, instead, became the source of free thinking and human self-expression. As the bulk of this analysis has hitherto contended, the socio-ideological basis for American reactions to Chinese political developments were founded on political principles cast in the light of western liberal-democracy. This ingrained ethic of response to foreign crises was effectively transformed into an accepted socio-philosophical system that encompassed the global community, save those nations that functioned under authoritarian regimes.

With respect to the diffusion of American ideals, literary critic Frederic Jameson has observed a similar phenomenon in the internationalization of American popular culture. American film companies, in an effort to seize markets abroad, have targeted Latin American, European, and Asian consumer markets with American cinematic productions. For this reason, Jameson contends, indigenous cultural expression has been stifled by the onslaught of American films within these nations. In the international political sphere
the globalization of democratic values and institutional ideals progressed similarly. Since the foundation of the global economic structure functions under premises of commercial exchange that evolved in the western political-economic setting, the recent intensification of international commerce has cast the dialogue of political-economic reform under the rubric of global expectations and ideals. The depiction of China in the late 1990s echoed this unprecedented alteration in the international arena. In fact, the most interesting development at this time was that journalists withdrew most references to American idealism from their reports. Apparently, emotional appeals to the core beliefs of the western tradition were no longer necessary in securing the primacy of liberal-democratic values.

The validation required in indicting China for military expansionism and political malevolence came with the flurry of support that Americans offered Taiwan during the cross strait conflict. Rather than isolating China from the global community, American policy makers and journalists advocated a long-term strategic solution to the rising power of the PRC. President Clinton presented this plan as an intricate variable within the overall plan of comprehensive engagement. In a 1998 special report printed in *Newsweek* magazine, Clinton summarized the nature of his policy. By applying the new mode of political discourse and standardization to his program, Clinton called for an intensification of engagement on all possible fronts:

In short, America has an interest in a stable, secure and open China that embraces political pluralism, free markets and the rule of law and joins us in working to build a secure international order. Working with China serves our interest in open trade. Access to its markets remains far too restricted. We could retaliate... [o]r we can keep pressing China to open its markets and to join the World Trade Organization on commercially meaningful terms... The more we bring China into the world, the more the world brings freedom to China.26
National integration into the global matrix is a multifaceted process, however. President Clinton packaged a wide variety of issues into the above comment, but the most crucial aspect of this globalization process was the commercial economy. In advancing a more prosperous and open China, the popular press affirmed the validity of the idea that the international marketplace was the tool by which closed societies were to become actors in a new economic structure that embraced all willing participants. Mortimer Zuckerman captured this commercial axiom marvelously when stating, “for survival [in the global milieu],” the author declared, “China must integrate with the world economy — and therefore shrink the role of the state.” In order to achieve such an outcome in the political-economy of the nation, Newsweek writer Michael Hirsh pointed to China’s possible entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) as a means of securing a peaceful coexistence with its trading partners. If foreign companies further their financial stake in the Chinese domestic market, so the argument went, the central government would be forced to accept international standards of trade and market exchange. The basic logic of the argument is that as non-national influence penetrates the conservatism of dogmatic socialism and hence the state, this process will coax the nation’s leaders into fully converting state-owned-enterprises (SOEs) and semi-socialized firms into privately owned and operated entities. Moreover, the use of the WTO as a mechanism for bringing about this sanguine outcome was posited by Hirsh as the next major hurdle in U.S.-China relations.

In a philosophical sense, America’s underlying assumptions about reform and social change in contemporary China had come full circle. Within popular discourse, notwithstanding the cross-cultural antagonism that typified the three concluding years of
the decade, the idea prevailed that the inclusion of China into the global network of cultural dialogue, trade, and communication was imperative, if its entry into the global community was to occur on peaceful terms. Moreover, the habitual appeal of government officials and journalists to *western idealism* as the driving force of cultural transformation waned during this period, because as British sociologist Martin Albrow has observed, global perspectives on cultural development and political evolution have replaced regional, localized, and national forms of social discourse. Therefore, the past decade has witnessed a progressive rise in American hesitancy about China, and later the increased cross-cultural disdain for a political-economic system that government analysts and journalists viewed as possibly threatening the supremacy of American military power in East Asia.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION, AND THE CREATION
OF HISTORICAL FICTION

The chronological format of this project has centered around the primary thesis that as Sino-American relations have progressed in the past decade, American cultural misperceptions and popular judgments of Chinese social, political, and economic developments resulted in the formulation of a fictional history of contemporary China. The existence of a strong ideological inclination toward interpreting foreign cultures via domestic standards of evolutionary progression was illustrated as the primary cause of these inaccurate and often uncritical ethnocentric conclusion. Beginning in the pre-Tiananmen period, popular images of China concentrated on the reformist nature of the Deng regime while de-emphasizing the political constraints that were characteristic of Chinese political culture in this era.

After the Tiananmen Square massacre, however, the American government began to focus intensively on the highly negative and unpredictable nature of the regime in China. In addition, the possibility that China in the coming years could very well become an aggressive economic and military giant in the region, was also another factor that moved to the forefront of the policy debate. Even though the economic stance of the United States remained much the same after the incident, emphasis was increasingly placed on
non-proliferation, the nature of the communist regime, human rights, Chinese expansionism, and relations with Hong Kong and Taiwan. Because the images that the press produced were so volatile and culturally biased, the first chapter of a fictional history regarding the socio-political evolution of China was created in the media. Because American institutions such as the government and the press have a unique missionary nature, in terms of propagating American ideals abroad, the returned images about the socio-political climate in China were tainted with an ethnocentric negativity. Policy makers and the media refused to look past the blood that had been spilled in Beijing to ascertain the true nature of the incident, therefore, a skewed impression of these two tumultuous months was presented to the public, with only minimal information about the deeper political, social, and cultural elements of the Tiananmen fiasco.

In the wake of the Tiananmen debacle, America’s optimism dwindled quickly and popular-political images of China swung dramatically in the opposite direction, to create an atmosphere in which modifications in Beijing’s reform policies and economic advancements were viewed in a dualistic/ambivalent manner. When Chinese leaders decided to undertake military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in mid-1995, America’s perceptions of the PRC swung even further in a distinctly negative direction; an event that marked the outset of a three-year period during which Chinese military modernization was seen as a direct threat to America’s military preeminence in East Asia.

In the greater scheme of cross-cultural image periodization, the Taiwan Strait crisis galvanized American fears of Chinese expansionism and military intimidation. With a critical eye focused upon the military and nuclear capabilities of China, the American government, during the second Clinton administration, fabricated the scenario that China
was actively involved in upgrading its nuclear arsenal, as a means of eventually challenging America's military hegemony in East Asia. Previous fears about the nature of post-Cold War politics in China, especially the anxiety witnessed in the era of uncertainty, matured in a radically negative direction following the Taiwan incident. As the transitional point that brought an end to the post-Tiananmen period, the Taiwan crisis intensified domestic anxiety and fostered the myth that China had taken the place of the Soviet Union as the geo-political adversary of the United States. Although images and literary descriptions of China cast a unsavory light over Beijing's long-term intentions in Asia, American expectations of Chinese political-economic restructuring remained fairly optimistic. However, the socio-philosophical rhetoric of this period downplayed the notion that China needed to accept western ideals and standards of political evolution. Rather, the liberal-democratic assumptions through which American correspondents and government officials interpreted developments in China were reformulated to meet the needs of an international economic order that functioned under common principles of individual freedom, representative government, and free enterprise.

This feature of America's cross-cultural depiction of China was arguably the most pertinent ideological modification of the post-Cold War period. Throughout the Cold War and during the decade that followed the collapse of Soviet communism, the socio-philosophical core of American liberal-democracy was conceptually tied to its indigenous roots within the libertarian tradition of the United States and the European Enlightenment. Different facets of this tradition carried various levels of ideological weight at specific junctures in Sino-American relations, but ultimately, the cultural supremacy of western democratic thinking was reaffirmed in virtually all cases. In the
1990s, as a result of the political-economic transformations that were undertaken by post-communist nations, the capitalist (free-market) ethos gained additional acceptance in Eastern Europe and East Asia. Communism, as a viable alternative to the social problems created by the free-market, was no longer lauded by left-wing theorists, populists, and national socialists as a credible structure of government that could eradicate the social ills of capitalism. As such, the free-market ethic, *procedural* democracy, consumerism, and individualism, attained a preeminent status in the international political sphere. Since the marketplace of ideas functioned under the premises of liberal-democracy as the underlying force of commercial innovation, the philosophy acquired a global character. Within the new global structure of markets, liberal-democracy was said to have received unanimous acceptance by the nations whose economic maturation had been stifled under socialism. In many ways, as Francis Fukuyama suggested, the triumph of democracy has ushered in a new epoch in human history where a nation’s success depends on its adaptability to the modern condition. It remains to be seen, however, if the fruits of a burgeoning market can remedy the countless social ills (poverty, unemployment, and social dislocation) that are endemic to laissez-faire capitalism and *procedural* democracy.

In sum, when these transitions in attitude are viewed as part of a greater historical picture, popular depictions of China in the past decade have contributed to the legacy of existing Cold War stereotypes regarding communist and post-communist nations. The methods of reform, the intentions of student demonstrators and the relations of the conservative elite, the culture of Chinese free enterprise, and the objectives of military modernization are but a few of the questions that Americans have answered through a
contemptuous lens of anti-socialist disdain and statist economic intervention. As a result, academic conclusions regarding the political nature of contemporary China have rarely corresponded with the less objective conclusions propagated by their counterparts in the profession of journalism.

Finally, if globalization has brought about the internationalization of cultural norms and political ideals as this study has suggested, the mode of analysis applied in this examination will require subtle reconfiguration for future case studies of this sort. The notion of an ideological superstructure as the basis for the perpetuation and transmission of culture is a feasible point of departure for cross-national inquiry between nation-states, but when the boundaries that maintain the integrity of socio-philosophical norms within the confines of a particular nation-state are cast aside or progressively deconstructed, Chomsky's framework of a cultural superstructure is insufficient in explaining the nuances that are fostered by the cross-assimilation of values. For example, how might the social analyst examine the proliferation of democratic ideals, individualism, and consumerism, if the geographic source of these principles is no longer analytically tangible? How does a student of cultural transmission locate the domestic reaction to heterogeneous forms of thought when the demarcation of international political and ethical differences is gradually fading. These and other vital issues, in the coming decade, will compel the academic community to engage the modifications that globalization has generated within the spatial dynamics of cross-cultural studies. As such, the fluidity of modernity has destroyed the cultural isolationism of the twentieth-century and replaced it with the global epoch of commercial internationalism.
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