

# The Big Banquet - - Banter and Mao Tai

## Peking

Pat and Richard Nixon wielded chopsticks like old pros last night at a banquet given by Chou En-lai.

The American guests ate with obvious gusto, and the Chinese waiters and wait-

resses were hard pressed to keep the wine goblets filled, so vigorously and frequently did the Nixons toast their hosts.

The dinner lasted almost three hours. The supping was leisurely, the sipping unrestrained.

An ebullient Mr. Nixon, after formally toasting Chou from the rostrum in front of the immense Great Hall of the People, stepped down and meandered from table to table among the lesser officials, lifting his glass, clicking it, taking a tiny nip

of mao tai, a colorless, potent liquor distilled from sorghum, nodding his head smartly, moving on to the next guest. He appeared to miss no one.

## Host

Chou was an exemplary host, apparently conversing at times in English with his American guests at the big round table where he sat between President and Mrs. Nixon.

Once Chou served Mrs. Nixon a bit of food from a dish. Another time the tiny, slender Chinese premier rose from his seat and reached as far as he could across the table to spear with his chopsticks what appeared to be a shrimp.

Chou's three-hour banquet for the Nixons and virtually every other American in Peking — about 300 in all — brought a stunning end to the President's first day in the Chinese capital.

## Contrasts

It was an evening of cultural contrasts, of impeccable Chinese graciousness in entertaining their guests from a vast ocean away, after 21 years of isolation and distrust.

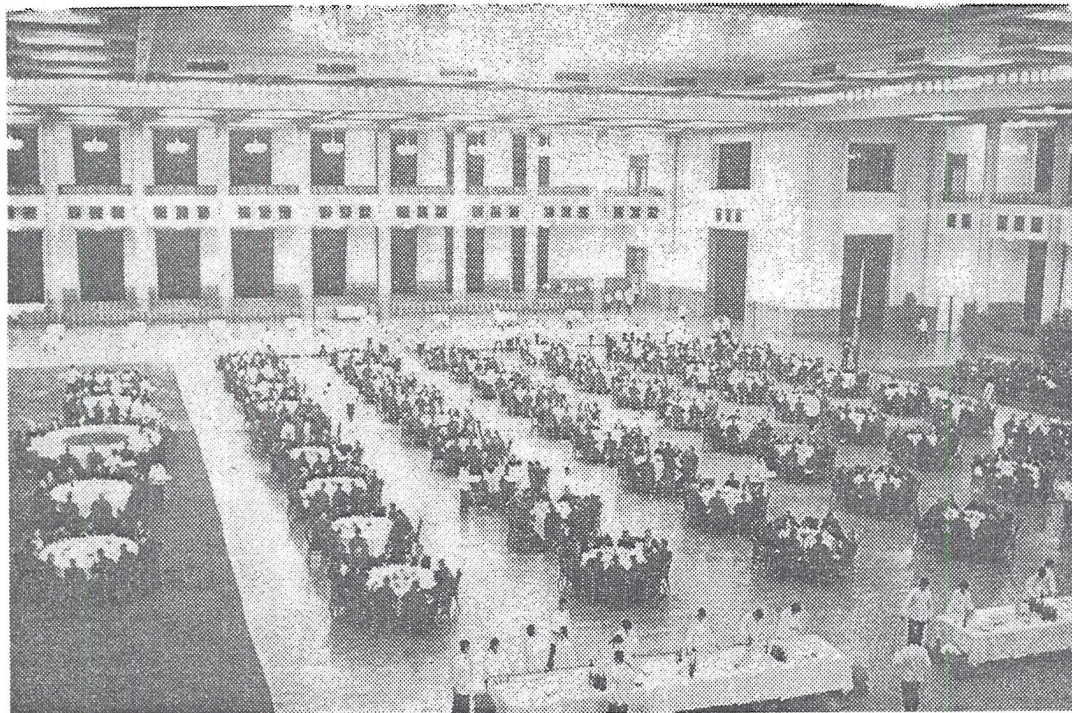
Whatever the toasts portended for the future of U.S.-Chinese relations, the style of the lavish feast was



AP Wirephoto

President Nixon and Premier Chou toasted each other during the dinner





UPI Telephoto

The banquet scene — the Nixons and Chou were at the large round table on the left

one of light-hearted joviality and good feeling, enhanced by superb food and drink.

Mrs. Nixon seated on Chou's left and facing a centerpiece of kumquats and greenery, became misty-eyed as her husband spoke in the words of Abraham Lincoln and Mao Tse-tung.

There were about 700 guests, seated ten each at 60 small tables with 100 of the higher dignitaries seated at a half-dozen larger ones.

The Nixons ate with gusto through a dinner that included a dozen appetizers, bamboo shoots, eggwhite consommé, shredded shark fin, fried and stewed shrimp, boiled preserved eggs, egg-rolls, hams, sausages, steamed chicken with coco-

nut, Peking duck, almond junkets, steamed pastries and fruits.

The military band played what were described as "revolutionary themes" but swing into "America the Beautiful" when Mr. Nixon finished his speech. Later, Chou tapped his feet and shook his head in time to "Turkey in the Straw" and "Home on the Range."

#### Compliment

Mr. Nixon strolled over to the band to say he had never heard American tunes played so well by musicians in a foreign country.

As the President and the premier dined, often chatting good-naturedly in English and ignoring the inter-

preter who sat beside them, Henry A. Kissinger came over to the table to try out on Chou the basic Chinese he picked up on two previous trips to Peking to arrange the President's visit.

Aside from the long, serious toasts, during which Chou sat ramrod-stiff in his leather chair, half-turned in Mr. Nixon's direction, the dinner conversation was mostly light-hearted banter.

Reporters who asked their Chinese table companions about foreign affairs usually received a polite, bland response. While Chou smiled affably Mr. Nixon was grinning so broadly at times that it appeared he might burst into laughter.

United Press