

Citizen Nixon in Peking

There were no flags, no bands, no banners. But 300 "representatives of the masses" were on hand—and so was China's newest power figure, Hua Kuo-feng, making his first major public appearance as Acting Premier. Then, at 10:16 p.m., the white Boeing 707—with four outside Chinese characters painted on its side and a red flag with mustard-yellow stars emblazoned on its tail—cut through the mist and taxied to a stop. Richard Nixon had returned to China. It

who asked Nixon to return to China, Chairman Mao Tse-tung, was all but certain to grant him a generous audience. In short, as one diplomat put it, the Chinese set out to make sure that throughout Nixon's ten-day visit "his carpet will be redder than red."

From the moment it was announced, Nixon's sentimental journey back to China was cloaked in mystery. Even the most routine details—the time and place of departure, the length of stay, the sights

to put its imprimatur on the Nixon trip and President Ford repeatedly stressed that his predecessor was traveling as an ordinary citizen. Ford's eagerness to disassociate himself from the ex-President's trip was understandable. Nixon's re-emergence revived the issue of his tainted Presidency; just two days before Nixon left for China, the Phillips Petroleum Co. reported that candidate Nixon had "personally" accepted an illegal \$50,000 campaign contribution in 1968. Watergate, the cover-up and the pardon were all suddenly thrust into voters' minds again. Some thought that Nixon's China trip would have an adverse impact on Ford's chances in the New Hampshire primary—and perhaps make life harder for all Republican candidates. Professional politicians generally discounted the view that the Nixon journey would cost Ford support at the polls. "It isn't going to make ten votes' difference in New Hampshire," said Ronald Reagan's press secretary, Lyn Nofziger.

Message: Nixon's intimates insisted that the trip was a personal pilgrimage. "He has been sitting there at San Clemente for a long time now," said son-in-law David Eisenhower. "This is a marvelous opportunity for him to get out and take a trip he knows he will enjoy. He suddenly came to life." It was a trip that Nixon had frequently been asked to make—the first invitation from Peking came shortly after his resignation—but which he declined because of poor health following his phlebitis attack. (He is still monitored daily by a U.S.

Navy corpsman who administers an anticoagulant and checks his blood pressure.) Recently, said one Nixon aide, "they brought a message from Mao in which he referred to Nixon as 'the most significant Western leader of this generation'." After doctors pronounced him "fit to travel," Nixon said yes to China. "I'm going to respond to this invitation from the Chairman and then I'm coming back to finish the manuscript of my book," he told his former White House press secretary Ron Ziegler.

He made many of the logistical arrangements himself, even going so far as to call an old Washington friend to obtain permission for the Chinese jet to land in the U.S. Most of the preparations, however, were left to the Chinese. They accredited the press (Nixon was offered a veto, but declined to use it), admitting the television networks, the



Wally McNamee—Newsweek

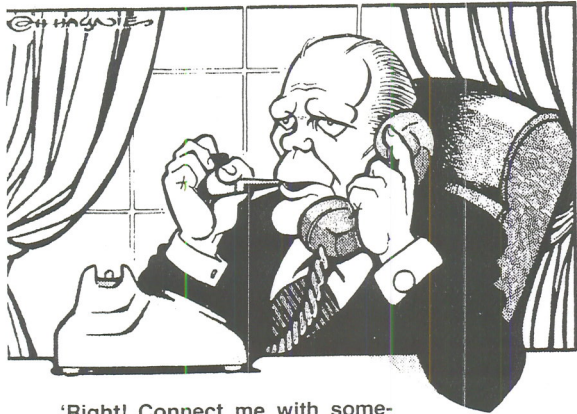
Nixon with Hua (center): A baffling journey to the scene of his greatest triumph

was four years to the day since the fallen President had made his first journey to Peking, a visit that ended 22 years of bitter hostility between the two nations and opened the door to a historic rapprochement. Citizen Nixon was not merely back last week at the scene of that great triumph. He was also back dramatically in the minds of his countrymen.

It was a baffling attempt on Peking's part to rehabilitate a deposed American President. The Chinese sent a special VIP jet across the Pacific to pick up Nixon, and despite the absence of hoopla, they greeted him like a Head of State. They put him up in the same guest house that he occupied four years ago. They planned banquets, cultural exhibitions and trips to the mountain resort of Kweilin and the bustling commercial city of Canton. To top everything off, the man

to be seen—were kept secret until he left. The timing was especially provocative. Nixon landed in Peking in the midst of a bitter Chinese power struggle—and just as the voters in New Hampshire were preparing to go to the polls in the kickoff of America's own Presidential campaign. Beyond that, there was the question of why Peking had invited a disgraced President to make such a visit, and why Nixon had accepted the offer. Some thought the Chinese were using Nixon to signal their displeasure over the slow pace of Sino-American rapprochement and their anger over Washington's détente with Moscow. Others simply believed that Nixon was anxious to get into the swing of things once more—and that a triumphal return to China was a perfect way to start a comeback.

The White House steadfastly refused



'Right! Connect me with somebody in Peking who can explain what the heck's going on there.'



'Deputy Premier Nee Ex-sun, speaking'

wire services, NEWSWEEK and Time but barring such newspapers as The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Chicago Daily News and The Los Angeles Times.

At one point, it appeared possible that the Nixons might have to meet the Chinese jet somewhere outside the United States. The State Department reported that an unnamed American had threatened to put a lien on the plane and seize it in compensation for assets that had been frozen more than 25 years ago by the Chinese. Nothing came of that, however, and the ex-President was able to depart as planned from Los Angeles International Airport.

Nixon looked suntanned and fit—although slightly stooped—as he and wife Pat boarded the Boeing 707 (purchased from the United States in the aftermath of his 1972 visit to Peking). But there was none of the pomp and ceremony that marked his first departure for China. The public was barred and the Nixons by and large ignored the crowd of 150 newsmen on hand, posing only momentarily for photographs. The two Chinese officials accompanying them were beaming, but Nixon managed only a strained grin and did not wave.

Many Americans, including a number of outraged editorial writers and nervous politicians,

thought that China's invitation was a blunder—an astonishing failure to grasp the extent of Nixon's disgrace in the United States. "It erases the goodwill toward the Chinese that was sustained by Ford's visit," said a leading China scholar at a U.S. university. "Americans will now be more suspicious of the Chinese." But the Peking government clearly admires Nixon, feels that he was unjustly forced out of office for minor offenses and saw the invitation as a way in which to say thank you to an old friend. "Never overlook the profound importance of Nixon in China," said a Western diplomat in Hong Kong. "There was a flood of diplomatic recognitions after his visit."

Struggle: Whatever the reasons behind it, the Nixon trip came at an odd moment for the Chinese. For the second week in a row, huge posters were pasted on the walls of Chinese universities denouncing Deputy Premier Teng Hsiao-ping. The attacks on Teng were among the most savage denunciations of a ranking leader since the 1960s, and could touch off clashes similar to those that disrupted China during those years of the Cultural Revolution. It was clear that a heated and bitter struggle was under way between the militant followers of Mao, who favor continued ideological revolution, and China's pragmatists, who have been seeking internal stability and economic moderation.

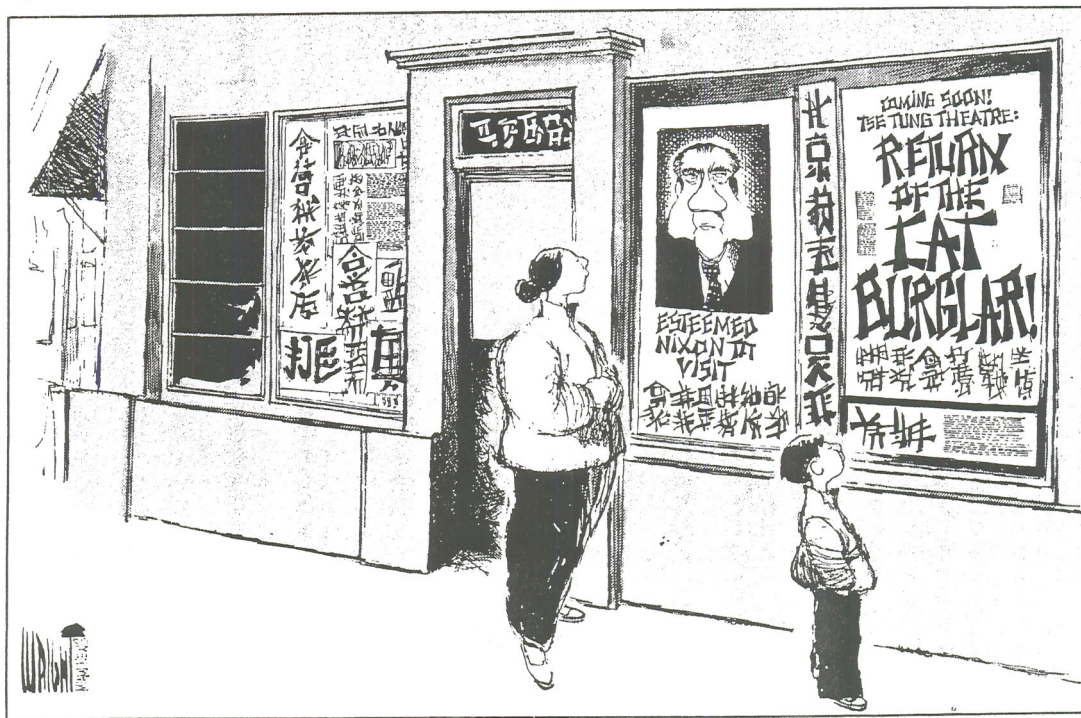
U.S. China watchers detected Mao's

hand in the campaign attacking Teng as a "capitalist roader" and China's "new Khrushchev." Since Nixon is regarded by the Chinese as an American leader who shares their anxiety over Soviet expansionism, his presence in Peking—fortuitous or not—might be used by the Maoists in this campaign against Soviet-style revisionism.

The spectacle of Nixon in China was already causing some repercussions back home. During an appearance in a New Hampshire high-school gymnasium, Ford was confronted once again with questions about his predecessor. One young man asked the President why, if he considered Nixon a "private citizen" for the purposes of the China journey, "you didn't treat him as any other American and have him face criminal charges as any other American would instead of pardoning him?" Visibly nettled, Ford replied: "The former President obviously resigned in disgrace. That is a pretty severe penalty."

For all its efforts to dismiss the significance of Nixon's voyage, the Ford Administration seemed uncertain how to handle it. In the midst of his Latin American tour, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said that Nixon would be debriefed upon his return because "we will wish to learn the nature of his discussions and his impressions." But back in Washington, a high-ranking White House official flatly contradicted Kissinger, declaring that there were no Administration plans to meet with Nixon. That sense of confusion over the Nixon trip was widely shared, for ultimately no one really knew what to make of it.

—RICHARD STEELE with JOHN LINDSAY in Peking. PAUL BRINKLEY-ROGERS in Hong Kong. HAL BRUNO in Washington and bureau reports



Wright—Miami News

Poster art: The Chinese promised that Nixon's carpet would be 'redder than red'