

Nixon Visit Symbolic to Chinese

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 10 — Why are the Chinese, in a delicate period of leadership change in Peking, troubling themselves to dispatch one of their Boeing aircraft to California to pluck Richard M. Nixon from seclusion in San Clemente?

News Analysis One American scholar responded to that question by recounting an anecdote of how, on a recent tour of China, he was challenged by his guide to justify his hostile attitude to his former President.

Searching for an answer the Chinese would understand, the American came up with a provocative analogy. Mr. Nixon, he said, was the American Lin Biao. Like the disgraced Chinese leader who perished mysteriously in 1971, the scholar explained, Mr. Nixon is now considered by most of his countrymen to have been guilty of a criminal conspiracy.

The guide responded frostily and two days passed before a higher-ranking official, renewing the discussion, furnished the American with an apparently authorized explanation of the Chinese attitude. "We esteem ex-President Nixon," the official said succinctly, "because of his China policy."

Thus, in a distinctively Chinese fashion, it is as a part of that policy that Mr. Nixon will be hailed when he lands in Peking on Feb. 21, four days after his arrival for his first visit there. What his visit will really commemorate for the Chinese is the commitments he made in the Shanghai communiqué issued at the end of that visit.

The most important of these, in the Chinese view, was the promise to move toward normalization of relations between the two countries. This, if fully accomplished, would mean diplomatic recognition for Peking and the withdrawal of the recognition the United States now accords to the Nationalist Government on Taiwan as the Republic of China. A security treaty still in force between the United States and the Nationalists would then be automatically abrogated.

The commitments Mr. Nixon made have been regularly renewed by Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and—most

Trip Seen by Peking as Reminder to U.S. of Its '72 Pledges

recently, during his visit to Peking in December—by President Ford. But from the Chinese point of view, each renewal of the pledge has had the practical effect of a postponement.

Until the Watergate scandal dashed their hopes, the Chinese had every reason to expect that full recognition would come at some point in Mr. Nixon's second term. The Shanghai communiqué seemed to say that the American withdrawal from Taiwan would be completed at about the time the American combat role in Indochina ended.

In the view of most diplomatic and scholarly specialists on China, "normalization" is now being held up only by President Ford's reluctance to aid his challenger for the Republican nomination, Ronald Reagan, a tailor-made issue.

But Peking has not been satisfied with that explanation. Repeatedly the fear has been expressed there that the delay is an outgrowth of an excessive sensitivity by Mr. Kissinger to the wishes of the Soviet Union and a general inclination in post-Nixon Washington to play down the advantages of the new relationship with Peking.

In this context, the invitation to the former President is an indirect but obvious expression of impatience with his successor.

Analysts are puzzled not so much by the question of why the Chinese have invited Mr. Nixon but why they have done so at a time that is so obviously awkward for Mr. Ford, coinciding as the visit does with the New Hampshire primary election, and awkward for themselves.

Nixon's visit came within a month of the death of Prime Minister Chou En-lai and a day of the surprising disclosure that Deputy Prime Minister Teng Hsiao-ping, Mr. Chou's apparent choice as a successor had been passed over in favor of a relative unknown, Hua Guofeng, a lower-ranking Deputy Prime Minister.

One answer to the puzzle, suggested by some analysts, may be that the leadership in Peking—perhaps Chairman Mao Tse-tung himself—has

played the American political scene. It is possible, according to this interpretation, that the Chinese think they have the power to rehabilitate Mr. Nixon and the policy with which he has become synonymous in their eyes by bringing him back to Mr. Mao's inner sanctum in the Forbidden City.

In this view, they may be wholly insensitive to the possibility that their invitation will backfire and arouse resentment here. One American who has been to Peking commented: "It's as if we invited Liu Shao-chi for the Bicentennial." Liu Shao-chi is the disgraced former head of state.

Another interpretation is that the Chinese are aware of the possible American reaction—in the Ford Administration and the public at large—but indifferent to it, and that the visit is intended to serve some other purpose of their own.

It is unclear what that could be, but some analysts here believe that foreign policy questions may have figured in the factional conflicts that appear to have taken place in Peking in recent weeks. In particular, it is noted that China made an unusual conciliatory gesture to Moscow at the end of December with the release of three Soviet helicopter crewmen who had been held for nearly two years on espionage charges.

If that was a signal for a policy shift by Mr. Teng, it is theorized, it may also have aroused Mr. Mao and furnished him with a reason to bar Mr. Teng as the successor to Mr. Chou. This is pure speculation on slimmy, circumstantial information but it points to the possibility that Mr. Nixon may serve a symbolic function on the Chinese political scene as well as in his own country.

Symbols regularly acquire new meanings in Chinese discourse. Not so long ago, Mr. Nixon was symbolic of "fascist atrocities" there, to quote from a 1970 denunciation by Chairman Mao himself. Even now, he is by no means the only foreign leader to have been endowed with symbolic virtues after having lost power in his own country.

A recent example was that of Edward Heath, the former British Prime Minister, who was given the kind of welcome normally reserved for a head of government when he arrived as leader of the Opposition; after he lost that job, Mr. Heath was welcomed back again. In Chinese eyes, he is a certified symbol of unity among Western European nations.

A more dramatic case was that of Stalin. Chairman Mao and his comrades never had much love for the Soviet dictator when he was alive, but, since his death, he has been given a prominent point in the Communist pantheon in China to make the symbolic point that his "revisionist" successors have all strayed from the true path. However it is finally explained, the symbol of Richard M. Nixon is being manipulated in a similar manner.