

22 February 1972

Dear Harold:

This is to assure you that we're still here, merely swamped. Your mailings of Feb. 3, 4, 9, 12, 15 and 18 all at hand, and some of the things you asked to have returned will be enclosed. If not all, some later. In any case this is not an attempt to ~~xxxxxx~~ answer much of it, but merely to take care of the most immediate items.

Very little was carried out here on Ray's second attempt, but enough to give us the idea that either the whole preposterous thing had been fabricated or that he had been tricked into ~~ix~~ something so totally against his interests. Your last enclosures throw much light on this, even though you yourself had few details to go on. We enclose copies of the little we have been able to pick up locally on it, and will send anything further. Your letters to him and to the warden were wonderful. If anything can save this situation, they will.

Since we first heard of Ed Snow's illness, on the 5th, we have been greatly depressed. Mostly because he could not savor what is going on in Peking, but also because he meant a great deal to both of us for very personal reasons. But we do feel that even when he became seriously ill last fall he must have known quite clearly what was going to happen, and even though he was the most modest person in the world he must have known that if he had not done what only he could do it might never have happened for ~~an~~ many more years or without a holocaust.

I was able to see part of the ~~xxxxxx~~ ^{arrival} scene ~~an~~ at Peking on television, and here at home Jenifer was taping the puzzled comments of radio and TV correspondents who were baffled by the cool and correct ~~reception~~ reception. Did you notice the stony faces of some of the generals at the end of the reception line? And a nice note that gave me much pleasure: the honor guard was composed entirely of northern boys, tall guys who are so well proportioned you don't notice their height until a man of ordinary stature like Nixon walks in front of them. How many times in the past have I seen the Marines assemble their tallest for the guard to honor a visiting Chinese general.

Nixon is now beginning his third day in Peking, and in spite of the gaffes he and Pretty Pat have pulled here and there we begin to get the feeling that something big is in the works. ~~xxxxxxx~~ Probably won't all come out right away, but the promptness with which Mao saw him and the subsequent opening of the floodgates of publicity for domestic consumption indicate the Chinese know they're going to get something very substantial and valuable to them if they haven't already got it.

It doesn't necessarily have to be Taiwan -- Chiang already has signalled that, as he has done twice in the past, he is ready to dicker and go along in some kind of a coalition. Nor does it have to be Vietnam. (In spite of the protestations by both sides that they're not going to settle Vietnam, the report that Le Duc Tho is supposed to have arrived the day before Nixon from Paris could be of great importance.)

Our guess would be that something much bigger is in the works, some kind of a beginning toward an overall regional settlement, none of which can be spelled out immediately but which will have the farthest-reaching implications. I do not think the Chinese would go for much less. They certainly would not go for what you are worried about -- an alliance against Russia. They are still dedicated Communists and in spite of their ~~own~~ fierce independence would never fall into the trap of undermining socialist unity in any serious way or risking their leadership of the underdeveloped nations and the third world. In spite of the fact that they now are more worried about a Soviet pre-emptive strike than anything else, they would never jeopardize seriously their ace card -- their mutual aid treaty with Russia which does not expire until 1980. They may seem to, but never in reality.

This does not mean they do not fully understand how much room to maneuver they now enjoy, now that the United States needs them again for their historic role of a counter-balance both to Japan and Russia from the American standpoint. Add to this Nixon's campaign needs, and you begin to glimpse the bargaining power they have been able to bring against Kissinger and Nixon. Whether these worthies realize fully what they are up against is another and in the long run irrelevant ~~question~~ question.

History will show that Nixon was wise, probably for the wrong reasons, as usual, to make his bid with Mao and Chou instead of waiting until their successors take over. These two have earned through bloody experience, if anyone ever has, the right to speak and bargain for their country. They are true originals, yet classic Chinese statesmen as well as consummate politicians. George Marshall called Chou the ablest negotiator he had ever met. Mao understands his people better than anyone since the founders of the Ming Dynasty. Their willingness to deal with a fink like Nixon -- and Chou made it plain he knows Nixon is a fink when he tossed off that remark about hostility "for reasons which are well known" -- is not merely the traditional Chinese willingness to deal with the barbarian ruler who comes seeking a deal. The promptness of their response after Nixon had his little chat with Mao can mean only they know they've got him where they want him and have decided to go through with something they think is much to their benefit. They are acting exactly like the Mings, as a matter of fact, and the marvelous thing is that it is working in a nuclear age. Their image of China is that of a great, powerful and peaceful nation which reasons with its barbarian neighbors and if necessary knocks their heads together in order to assure peace in the world. The fact that these plans have gang aft agley in the past does not impress them. Whose plans don't?

Someone like John Fairbank could write a hell of an article on the Ming pattern in Nixon's reception. Even an illiterate like myself can see familiar ~~many~~ parallels. For instance, the minute it became known here last week that two musk oxen were being readied as a gift to China, I would have bet anything that this meant two Pandas would be forthcoming. If there is anything more powerful in Chinese tradition than hospitality, it is the etiquette of gift-giving and exchange. Never less than the gift proffered, certainly, unless an insult is intended, and never too much more lest the original giver be made to lose face. The Mings paractically impoverished themselves toward the last, trying to keep all their satellites happy. A Jesuit named Father Matteo Ricci wrote a highly illuminating journal about all this toward the end of the 15th century.

Fairbank and others understand that the People's Republic is the first truly sovereign Chinese government since the Mings were toppled in 1644. They followed the alien Mongols and were succeeded by more aliens, the Manchus. The Nationalist government which was formed after the Manchus were overthrown were merely a continuation of the foreign domination which brought about the Manchu downfall. That is all ended again. China is being ruled by Chinese again, and this is the central fact.

Service and Davies have made it clear that Mao's first choice of an ally was, like Sun Yat-sen's before him -- the United States; powerful, remote, yet with an astounding rapport in many ways with the Chinese. We made the mistake of driving Mao into the arms of Russia just as we had done with Sun Yat-sen; it is in the Chinese tradition to pursue their own best interests in the long run, merely pointing out courteously that there has been a slight delay "for reasons which are well known."

It would be foolish to predict what may come out of all this, but I will be foolish and say I wouldn't be surprised to see some sort of framework which eventually could include both Russia and Japan. The Chinese, all things considered, have as much or more reason than anyone to mean it when they say they want peace.

Re Ted White: too bad he seems to have become an Old China Hand in the worst sense of the word. He and Annalee Jacoby wrote "Thunder Out of China" in 1947, an excellent account of the ~~Kuomintang~~ Kuomintang corruption which led to the Communist victory. I haven't seen him since he first arrived in China in 1936. Brash, then, but well trained, by Fairbank.

Many thanks for letting us know about the NBC documentary. We may send for it. We too find a swing back, toward objectivity in the news, but haven't seen enough yet to try to assess it. The NBC thing sounds better than any we have encountered thus far, and you may be right, someone may have passed the word. Let's hope it keeps up.

More later, and all the best,

jdw