

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

THE YIN AND YANG OF EAST ASIA

Part II

The Meeting of East and West

Shanghai, China
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Dear Peter,

All that can be said about differences between East and West has been said. Western writers in the field of East Asian studies have often, consciously or unconsciously, emphasized differences.

"Everything in China is opposite," for example, as John King Fairbank, the late dean of Chinese studies in America, observed in the 1940s. "In China, the men wear gowns and the women trousers. They read from up to down and right to left. The soup comes last. Mourners wear white and brides red. The last name comes first. The compass points south. Left is the seat of honor, and so on."

A half century has passed since Fairbank wrote the words above, but the exotic approach continues: "Chinese people drink hot beer, eat dog meat, kill baby girls." "They don't respect human rights, but we do. They don't know how a market economy works, but we do. They don't understand democracy, but we do." This kind of approach, if not entirely misleading or dangerous, is at least simplistic and superficial.

Cheng Li is a an ICWA fellow studying the political economy of the coast of China.

We, of course, know the great difference between China and the United States, between East Asia and Western countries, for historical, geographical, and socio-economic reasons. Yet, we are all human beings and all societies are faced with the problems of modern administration and challenges of technological development. William Butler Yeats made an insightful remark as he commented on the comparison of different cultures. He wrote: "Talent perceives differences, genius unity."

As a student of world politics and international affairs, I have certainly noticed how this subject is approached differently in China and the U.S. Actually, the discipline of international relations did not exist in China until the early 1980s. Chinese universities used to have a disciplinary sub-field called the "International Communist Movement." One word was added to that sub-field a few years ago, and it is now called the "*History of the International Communist Movement*." Since the mid-80s, the field of international relations (IR) has been established in major universities in the country. A great number of IR courses such as North-South Relations, Political Economy of International Relations, American Foreign Policy are offered.

It is truly remarkable that Chinese colleagues in the field have made great progress in teaching and research, considering all these developments happened only within a decade. During the past few months, I attended a number of conferences on international affairs organized by research institutions in Shanghai, for example, the conference on "Sino-US Relations in the Era of the Clinton Administration" held by the Institute of Peace and Development, the workshop on "Possible Interlinked South Asian and Worldwide Nuclear Arms Control and Disarmament Initiatives" organized by Fudan University, and the seminar on "China and South Asia in the 1990s" sponsored by the Shanghai Institute of International Studies. The Chinese hosts of these meetings not only encouraged me to freely express my views, but also invited me to give formal presentations.



Participants from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China in the "International Conference on Economic Cooperation in East Asia" which was organized by the Shanghai Institute of International Studies.



Participants from Nepal, Pakistan, and China take part in the conference on "China and South Asia in the 1990s" sponsored by the Shanghai Institute of International Studies. Scholars from India, Iran, Bangladesh, and Myanmar also attended.

I have learned a great deal from other participants at all these conferences. What impressed me the most was the increasing global consciousness of my Chinese colleagues. Global problems began to receive much attention, e.g. environmental degradation, resource depletion, population explosion, international refugees and migration, international human rights, nuclear proliferation, narcotics, and the spread of AIDS. This was impressive because it was not until very recently that the mainstream of international studies in Asia (and in Western democratic countries as well) did not give much attention to most of these global issues.

Some Chinese scholars explicitly challenged nationalism and the nation-state system. They argued that the current nation-state system is incapable of conserving resources, protecting the environment, controlling the world's population, securing a healthy world economy, or redistributing wealth. Many ecological and environmental problems in today's world have the characteristic of migrating across national borders, but the nation-state system is the obstacle for cooperation. These issues have to be dealt with on a global basis, but this is prevented by the division of humankind into nation-states.

Zhao Xingshan, a scholar in European studies from Shanghai, likened the entire globe to a lifeboat sailing in an ocean, in which all of humanity will either remain afloat or sink together. In his view, there is no such thing as "national interest" in the global effort in dealing with ecological and environmental degradation.

"We have only one planet with one fragile environment," Zhao said. "We need to stand together through thick and thin, just as a Chinese proverb says: *tong zhou gong ji* (people in the same boat should help each other)."



Hosts and the author at the workshop on “Possible Interlinked South Asian and Worldwide Nuclear Arms Control and Disarmament Initiatives” organized by the Center for American Studies of Fudan University.

Shen Dingli, (on the left), Associate Professor of Fudan University. A Ph.D. in Physics, Shen received post-doctorate training in arms control at Princeton University in the late 1980s. His main interest includes nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear test ban, China’s nuclear weapons policies, and Sino-US relations. Dr. Shen has been invited to give lectures and participate in joint research projects in ten countries, including Pakistan and India. He was recently invited as the Chinese member on the international advisory group of the Northeast Peace and Security Network. A collection of his arms control papers will be published by Fudan University Press in English this year.

Ni Shixiong (in the middle), Professor and Vice Chairman of the Department of International Politics at Fudan University. A 1964 graduate of English literature at Fudan, Professor Ni shifted his academic focus to international affairs in the early 70s. He studied at Harvard as a post-doctoral-fellow in the early 80s. During the past decade, he has been to over ten countries lecturing or attending conferences. He has published over ten books, including Conflict and Cooperation, International Human Rights, and Anthology of American Schools of Thought in IR Theories.



Participants in the workshop on “Possible Interlinked South Asian and Worldwide Nuclear Arms Control and Disarmament Initiatives.”

A.P.Venkateswaran (on the left), Research Professor of the Center for Policy Research in India. A career diplomat from 1952 to 1987, he served as Ambassador to China.

Jeremy J. Stone (in the middle), President of the Federation of American Scientists. A mathematician by training, Stone has been interested in a wide-range of issues concerning the relationship between science and society. Over the 22 years of his stewardship, the Federation has worked on the arms control, international human rights, and energy conservation. Dr. Stone has initiated many of the policy campaigns, include peacekeeping and disarmament efforts, involving fact-finding trips to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the Soviet Union, China, North and South Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. On issues involving science and public policy, Dr. Stone has made such diverse contributions as opening scientific exchange with the Chinese in 1972; embarrassing the scientific community into setting up human rights committees, and linking Soviet scientists with U.S. research centers through a “sibling institutes” approach. Dr. Stone is acknowledged as having done more than any other American to help A. Sakharov in each of his five hunger strikes.

Liu Huaqiu (on the right), Research Fellow and Director of the Program on Arms Control and Disarmament at the China Defense Science and Technology Information Center. A Visiting Scholar at the Center for International Security and Arms Control of Stanford University in the late 1980s, Mr. Liu published numerous articles on nuclear disarmament, nuclear strategy, nuclear non-proliferation and Chinese arms control policies.



A delegate of the Ford Foundation recently visited Fudan University. During the past decade, the Ford Foundation sponsored numerous projects in China, aiding scientific research, facilitating conferences and seminars, and helping Chinese scholars and students pursue advanced studies in the US. The foundation's contribution is greatly appreciated here in China.

Zhang Ye, (from left to right), a native of Beijing and an MPA of Harvard's Kennedy School and now Assistant to the Representative in the Beijing Office of the Ford Foundation.

Wang Xi, Professor of History and World Economics, one of the founders of Fudan's Center for American Studies.

Don Ridings, Vice President of the Wenz-Neely Company.

Dorothy Ridings, a trustee of the Ford Foundation.

Xie Xide, Professor of Physics, a graduate of MIT, former President of Fudan University, and currently Director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan.

Peter F. Geithner, Director of Ford Foundation's Asian Program.

Zhou Mingwei, a Visiting Scholar to both Harvard University and Oxford, and currently Executive Assistant to the President of Fudan.

Chen Yinzhang, a Visiting Scholar to the US, and currently Deputy Director to International Programs Office at Fudan.

In a conference held by the Institute of Peace and Development in Shanghai (a major think tank for the Chinese government), a young Chinese scholar presented a comprehensive paper on international human rights. He not only criticized the Chinese government's views on human rights, but also challenged the concept of state sovereignty. He stated unambiguously in his presentation that the modern nation-state in a sense has become an instrument of domestic abuse, because authoritarian regimes have used sovereignty to defend their human rights violations.

I was really amazed when I heard his bold arguments. It seemed like I was listening to the lectures by Professors Richard Falk and Samuel Kim on the global approach to international affairs at Princeton, or reading Charles Beitz's classic work on international human rights, Political Theory and International Relations. These scholars guided me to look at the world with a liberal perspective when I was their student and have influenced my world views ever since.

"Have you ever studied in the U.S.?" I asked the young scholar during the tea break, and I also told him that his thoughtful presentation reminded me of the lectures I attended in American universities.

"No, I haven't. I just graduated from an M.A. program at the Shanghai Normal University." He replied. "Of course I have read some of the works by globalists like Falk, Kim and Beitz. But the notion of human rights is not uniquely a Western idea. It is, or ought to be, valued universally. It is wrong to assume that Chinese culture completely excludes the notion of human rights."

"Some Westerners assume that people in East Asia have a strong sense of ethnic superiority," a senior professor from Shanghai University joined our conversation, "but I think that these Westerners display their own sense of ethnic superiority when they claim that oriental people don't know what human rights are."

"This claim actually presumes a special access to justice and truth through cultural background," the young scholar commented.

"It's probably true that Americans are more concerned about global environmental problems than we Chinese at present," the professor said. "But, ironically, so much waste of energy and resources is happening in the United States every day."

"It seems that *yin* and *yang* forces also coexist in the U.S." I added.

"You are right. The notion of *yin* and *yang* is relevant everywhere." The professor said.

"Some Westerners like to criticize people in Asia for their strong nationalistic fervor and 'middle kingdom mentality,'" the professor continued, "but nationalism is on the rise in Europe and europocentric views are evident there. Nationalism – in many cases subnationalism – has caused or accelerated ethnic violence and even war in the region."

The professor had just returned to China from a two-week-trip to Norway and Sweden, two peace-loving and liberal states. "Mr. Li, you felt uneasiness among the soccer fans in the Shanghai bar. Have you ever been in a bar catering to sports fans in the U.S.?" He asked.

"Yes, though only a couple of times." I answered.

"Do you see much difference between the Chinese and American bars?"

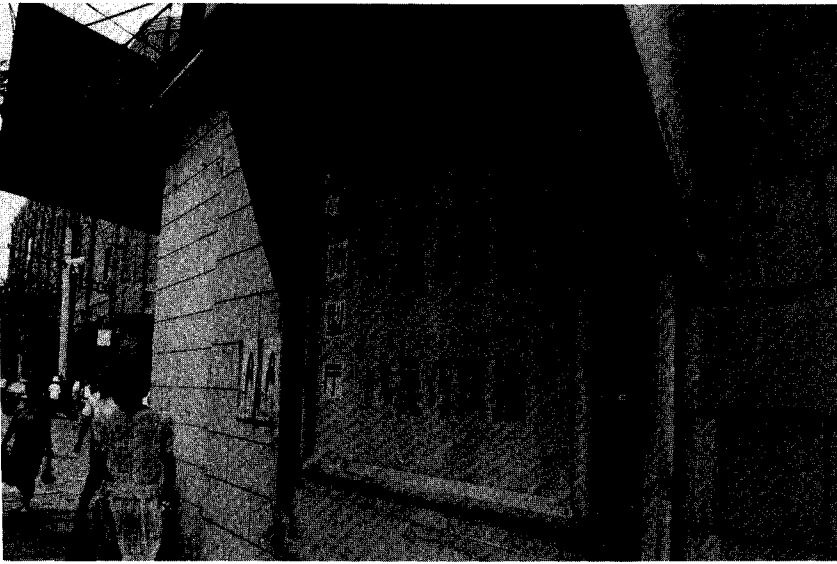
I thought for a while and replied jokingly, "Not much, except that one may smell marijuana in American bars and the Chinese bars like to get their customers 'high' by playing Karaoke during the break in the game."

He laughed and then said "I really don't see any difference among sports fans in all parts of the world. I acted crazily when I watched Sweden play against Russia in the World Cup on TV in a bar with my Swedish friends." He continued. "When Sweden defeated Russia, my friends all rushed to the street to dance and yell. They were absolutely wild."



Being in China again after an eight-year absence, I have often been struck by great changes in Chinese society. The impact of Western influences is penetrative and palpable: People wear Western-style clothes, eat American fast food, drink 7-Up, smoke Marlboro-brand cigarettes, listen to rock'n roll music, and watch NBA basketball.

McDonald's in Beijing has two floors and can hold several thousand customers at the same time. This is the largest McDonald's in the world.



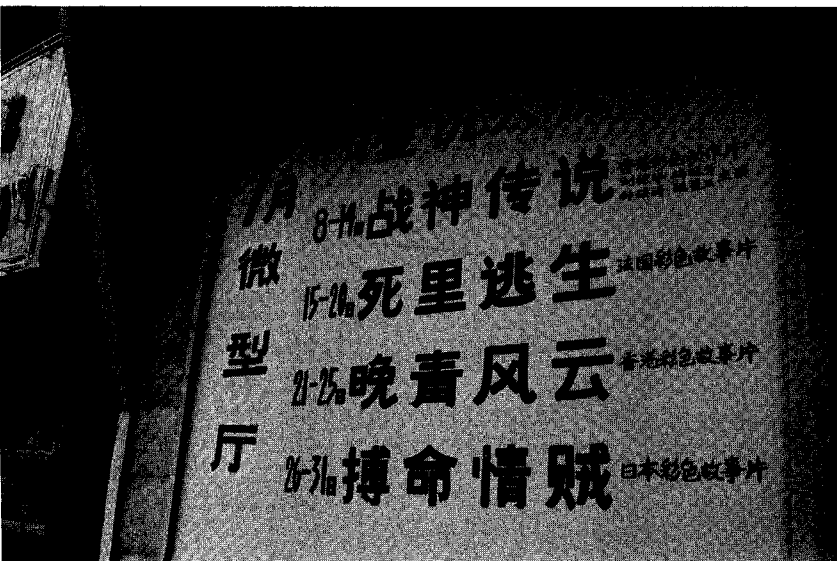
"If you want to see a Chinese movie, you should go to Lincoln Center in New York City," a Chinese film agent said to me when I asked him where I could see some famous Chinese movies such as "Judou," Raise the Red Lantern," "Farewell to my Concubine."

After I stayed in China for nine months, I found that the Chinese film agent's words were accurate. I never got a chance to see a Chinese movie, because almost all the cinemas in Shanghai showed only Western movies, or movies made in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

"Chinese movies usually do not have box office value in China," the film agent said.

I also found whenever I happened to turn on the movie channel on TV late at night in Shanghai, nine out of ten times, I saw a Western movie.

These two photos show that the announcements for the movies shown for the months of June and July in a Shanghai cinema were exclusively foreign movies.





“I don’t feel I am in China. It seems like I am shopping on Fifth Avenue or Madison Avenue in Manhattan,” a friend of mine from New York who visited me in Shanghai said as we did our window shopping in Shanghai. “Shanghai has whatever New York has.” she concluded.

“Are you saying that it’s unfair to single out East Asia and to make a big deal about some incidents of nationalistic fervor which occurred there?” I asked.

“It’s not a matter of fairness,” the senior professor said to me, “it’s a question of how we disseminate globalist and unconventional ideas, and at the same time diminish our own ‘we-they’ dichotomous attitudes.”

I thought he made a good point.

To make no mistake, the globalist thinking articulated by the senior professor and the young scholar whom I met in the conference is a minority view in both the field of international studies and the circle of foreign policy making in East Asia. In China, hardliners with conventional and *Realpolitik* world views are powerful in both the government and the military. Military hawks have not only voiced their resentment against foreign ministry doves, but also demanded a large increase in the military budget in the past few years.

Last year, for instance, several American naval ships stopped a Chinese cargo vessel on the high seas in order to inspect the cargo for banned weapons. In response to this incident, fifty Chinese generals wrote a joint letter to Jiang Zeming, General Secretary of the Party, calling for a tougher policy towards the United States. The generals claimed that the Chinese government should not sacrifice military interest and national security for the sake of maintaining foreign trade with Western countries. They condemned the U.S. for selling arms to Taiwan and interfering with China's domestic affairs in Tibet.

The generals argued in the letter that after the Cold War the American hegemony has shifted its strategic aim from Eastern Europe to the Far East. The so-called "China threat" thesis, according to the letter, has reflected the strategic shift of U.S. foreign policy. The generals accused the West of whipping up fear of the "China threat" in order to boost public opinion supporting interference in China's internal affairs and the fracture of China's relations with its neighboring countries (Beijingzhichun, Feb., 1994, p. 22).

It is unknown how the top leaders of the Chinese government responded to the letter, but some analysts believed that this letter helped military hawks consolidate their bargaining power in the central authority. As a result, Chinese military expenditure has grown sharply. This year it rose by 25%, to 52 billion yuan (\$6 billion). According to some Westerner observers, actual military spending in the PRC may be as much as five times as high because the Chinese leave R & D (research and development) and pensions out of their official figures on the military (The Economist, June 11th-17th, 1994, p. 23).

China has been modernizing its military complex by entering into joint ventures with foreign companies in order to acquire up-to-date technology in electronics and other fields. In addition, China's State Council is believed to have established a Russian Weaponry Purchasing Delegation, allocating an initial sum of two billion dollars for purchase of weapons (Policy Review, Fall 1992, p. 13; and American Asian Review, Summer 1993, p. 32).

Hardliners in East Asian governments not only employ the Western thesis of "the East Asian threat" to call for an increase in military expenditure, but also use the so-called "East Asian values" to maintain and justify their authoritarian rules. China's official newspaper recently published an article by Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's Secretary of Foreign Ministry. In the article, this politician from South East Asia argued that East Asia's way of governance should be the model for the world in the future.

In Mahbubani's view, "something fundamental has gone wrong in American society." For him, the problem lies in the fact that there is too much freedom in American society." He wrote, "In the eyes of most Asian people, the evidence of real social decay in the United States is clear and palpable." Mahbubani used the increase of divorce and illegitimate births, among other facts, as evidence to show the decay of American society (China Daily, May 30, 1994, p. 4).

"Mahbubani does not know what he is talking about." A friend of mine commented as I introduced Mahbubani's arguments to my old friends during a late-night snack in a restaurant in Shanghai several days ago.

Nowadays *only* officials are talking about 'East Asian values' in China and they are talking about them *only* in public meetings." He said.



A huge MasterCard advertisement appears on the platform of the Shanghai Exhibition Center. On this platform used to be a statue of Sino-Soviet friendship in the 1950s and a statue of a Worker-Peasant-Soldier during the Cultural Revolution. The changes in the statues tell us a great deal about the changes of social norms and values.



“Always Coca Cola!” “No matter where you go in China, you will find Coca Cola.” These advertisements for Coca Cola are not exaggerated.

A huge Coca Cola advertising can is placed on the bank of West Lake in Hangzhou. “This Coca Cola advertisement is absolutely destructive and inappropriate. It destroys the beauty and harmony of West Lake.” An American friend said. “The Chinese government calls Western influence ‘spiritual pollution.’ This may indeed be a good example.”

Another friend interrupted the conversation by telling us to look at the table next to ours – three official-looking men in their 50s were having a “business dinner” with five young girls. It has apparently become a social norm here in China that officials and rich businessmen usually do not have dinner with their wives or families. I was told that similar phenomena also could be found in other East Asian countries such as Taiwan and Japan. These rich and powerful men often dine out with their “female secretaries” or “girls of public relations” (*gongguan xiaojie*).

“They are discussing the importance of ‘family values,’ aren’t they?” My friend said teasingly. We all laughed.

It is truly ironic that Huntington and Mahbubani see a resurgent Confucianism at the very time when “spiritual deterioration and moral degradation

are eroding China's cultural foundation." As Liu Binyan, a well-known Chinese writer, has recently observed, although Confucian influence still exists, it cannot be compared to the increasingly forceful influence of Western culture on the Chinese people in the last two decades.

"If the divorce rate is an indicator for social decay, as the Singapore politician suggested, East Asian countries are in serious trouble." My friend, who works in a local newspaper, said. "I read somewhere that the divorce rate in China has increased sharply in last three years. In Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea, the divorce rate actually doubled during the past decade, while the divorce rate slightly decreased in the U.S. during the same period."

My friend continued, "For Mahbubani, one of the most decadent, unhealthy things is probably prostitution. Ironically, the most famous red-light spot in Shanghai, J.J.'s Disco, the disco bar that can accommodate up to about two thousand people simultaneously, is owned by the Army and run by Taiwanese businessmen."

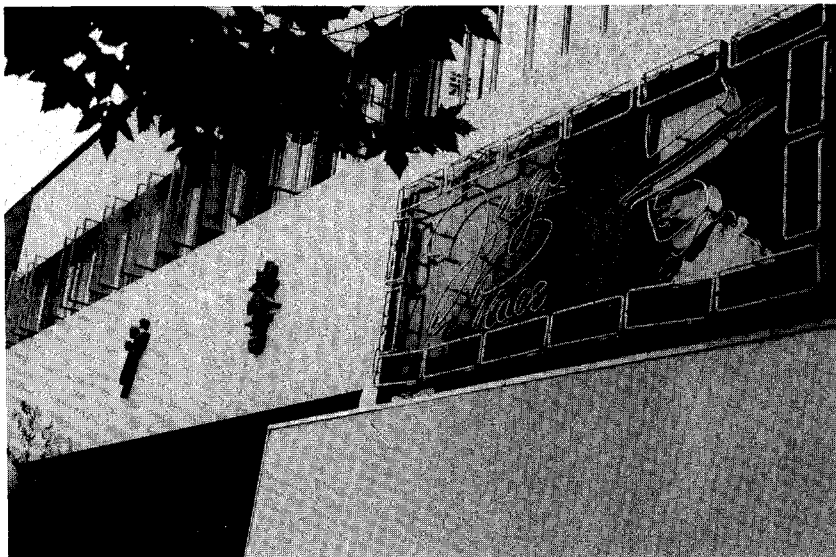
"Owned by the Army?" I couldn't believe what I heard.

"Yes," my friend explained it to me, "this is a joint-venture. The Nanjing Military District owns the building and rents it to Taiwanese businessmen."

"The most popular customers of these places are rich and powerful people in China, businessmen from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and of course, *also from Singapore.*" He added.



Shanghai's J.J.'s Disco, which can accommodate up to about two thousand people at the same time, is the largest disco in China. It was ranked by both the BBC and the CNN as one of the best discos in the world. This is also a famous red-light spot in the city and was forced by the police to close twice in the past year for "unhealthy activities." Ironically, the building housing this disco hall is owned by the Army.



Judy's Place, a popular bar in Shanghai, has attracted many businessmen from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other foreign countries as well as local "call girls." Believe it or not, the Armed Force of Shanghai owns the building housing this bar.

Another extremely popular bar, which is located on Chang Le Road, near the place my parents live, is owned by the headquarters of the Shanghai Armed Forces (*wujing budui*). At first I thought it was odd that the Armed Forces of Shanghai rent the basement of their office building as a night club. When I expressed my confusion to a neighbor, he said in reply, "Isn't it convenient for some people?"

I thought I understood what he meant. Actually, it is not only convenient for some people, but also much safer as the Army owns the bar.

* * * * *

Nine months have passed since I arrived in China. One of my objectives in returning to China, as you know, is to rediscover and reevaluate "East Asian values." To be honest, I haven't yet found anything really unique about East Asia. Unlike Samuel Huntington, I have seen an integration of, rather than an increasing separation of, or even a clash of, civilizations. All the traditional values have been questioned here in China during the recent decade. Changes are affecting attitudes about family, marriage, leisure, education, consumerism, individualism, authority, loyalty, global affairs, etc, as some of my forthcoming newsletters will specifically discuss.

For Westerners, it would be a mistake to maintain an europocentric view and to neglect the fascinating socio-economic changes in East Asia. Yet, it would be equally problematic to attribute the economic success to a set of virtues unique to East Asian culture, instead of looking at other important factors such as a shift in comparative advantage in the world economy. The reiteration of East Asian distinctness, as a British reporter said insightfully, is "mostly a way to maintain the distance between East and West."

Like in other parts of the world, East Asian governments are not hawk-free. Nationalistic hardliners are influential in the region. The rapid increase in military expenditure in many countries in the region is certainly a disturbing factor. Yet, the so-called "East Asian threat" is unfounded. East Asian countries, including China,

are basically doing what the United States and European countries have been doing for decades in consolidating their military powers.

One may reasonably argue that politicians in non-democratic regions, e.g. China and North Korea, are more war-prone because of the lack of constraining mechanisms in their political systems. But one of the things that I have come to understand during my fellowship in the Far East is the dialectical philosophy of *yin* and *yang*. Like elsewhere in the world, a new generation of scholars and practitioners of international affairs has emerged and become more articulate in China. With their non-conventional world views, they have a better understanding of global problems in our time.

In the early 1960s, when the Cold War was going on, Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel prize laureate, expressed his disappointment about the Cuban missile crisis and the conflict between East and West. He believed that the West did not show any real sign of effort to resolve the crisis. In his view, the "West had not sent out its humanity to meet the man in the East, but only its machine."

Now, the Cold War is over, and the two conflicting blocs of the West and the East no longer exist. Scientific and technological revolution greatly blurs cultural and territorial boundaries. People in different countries are able to more freely exchange their views and ideas.

Sol M. Linowitz, a famous American diplomat and a trustee of Hamilton College whom I had a chance to meet prior to my leave of absence from the college, once wrote: "The best way to send an idea around the world is to wrap it up in a person." I am truly delighted to have the opportunity to be in China and to share the ideas and values I have acquired in America with my fellow Chinese. At the same time I have the privilege to learn from them, which is evident throughout this newsletter:

The third part (CL-12) of this series on the *yin* and *yang* of East Asia is based on the paper I presented at the "International Conference on Economic Cooperation in East Asia" which was held by Shanghai Institute of International Studies. The paper, which is entitled "Techno-Nationalism vs. Techno-Globalism: East Asia in Search of a New Vision for the 21st Century," will elaborate on diverse views and values in East Asia. More importantly, it shows a greater need for the meeting of "East" and "West."

Sincerely,



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