

FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS OF CHINA'S GEOGRAPHY INFLUENCING CHINA'S POLITICAL POLICIES

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IN ADDRESSING MYSELF TO THE FUNDAMENTAL ASPECT OF CHINA'S geography that affect China's political policies, I am aware that I have chosen a topic of such great broadness that I can not do justice to it in the short space of this paper. Each one of the aspects I shall present briefly actually merits as much attention as I shall pay to the entire lot. What is here printed does not go beyond the limits of the talk given by the writer before members and students of the Institute of Asian Studies in July of 1964. It is justified in such abbreviated form only by my intent more to provoke thought and raise questions than to furnish ultimate and definitive answers.

Basic to the geographer are phenomena pertaining to the occupation of space and the problems relating to location. And it is the nature of this occupation of space and the character and quantity of the occupants or occupying substances together with their inter-actions upon each other that is of importance in influencing domestic or foreign policies of a state, whether the occupants of the spaces concerned are by ethnic groups or arable land or mineral deposits. Certain geographic aspects of a land lend weight to a nation's influence abroad; others restrict its influence. Some geographic aspects give the national leaders flexibility in the handling of policy making; others make for rigidity or limit the ways in which the nation can reach its policy goals. In the following paragraphs I propose to present some of the basic geographic aspects that are relevant to these issues. Some of these are familiar enough to all of us, but they bear repeating. Nor are all of these unique to China. Nevertheless, they are important.

The first and foremost geographic aspect of China is the presence of the Chinese people on mainland China. They comprise the world's largest single cultural group as well as the largest population in a single state. I propose that this population differs from those of such large states as the Soviet Union, the United

States of America, or India in the remarkably monolithic character of the ethno-cultural complex. In the Soviet Union the largest ethnographic group is the Great Russians who comprise probably only half the total population of the USSR. In the United States, the ethnographic dominance of any one group is far smaller and the cultural interchange between groups is perhaps greater. In India, diversity of ethnography is the greatest of all and is compounded especially by a linguistic diversity that is not found in the others mentioned. I propose that this monolithic ethno-cultural complex in China probably makes for greater single-minded and also much more rigid national postures, both internally and internationally.

A second point about this population size is that it is an asset, although a decreasing asset, up to the point where it reaches the margin of production, where the per capita output is just above the satisfaction of minimum standards of living as that society defines an acceptable standard. A Communist Chinese definition of what is acceptable as a minimum standard conforms to the views of the ruling group that need not live by such low standard but that can compel the broad masses to accept a low standard. It is not a standard that a free society would willingly accept. Nevertheless, on such a minimum standard of living, the Communist Chinese ruling group may still consider China's large population an asset. This is especially so if the potentially possible rise in productivity of the country is taken into consideration and if the Communist philosophy of life is adopted whereby the individual is required to endure suffering and hardship to serve the interests of an abstract state. In actuality, these interests are those of the Communist elite.

From a free-world viewpoint, however, the present population of mainland China has surpassed the asset stage in its size and its size must be considered a liability. From a capitalistic point of view, a large domestic consuming market provides a larger scope and a more stable free market for that accumulation of capital that is so necessary if industrialization is to be achieved. This also is predicated on a level of per capita productivity that produces a relatively high measure of surplus. The first condition would not appear to conform to the situation in a socialist-communist society, where the goals of Communist planners rather than the purchasing power of the people are the chief stimuli to industrial production. Moreover, when the minimum standards are set

as low as they are in Communist Chinese society, overall production of basic foodstuffs and necessities of life, including what is purchased abroad with foreign exchange bought by exports, must at least keep up with the rate of population increase. Mainland China is not among the group of Asian countries that have managed to keep food production above the population increase, according to a United Nations economic survey for 1963.

Internationally, China's large population arouses illusions or over-optimism for a large trading market among other nations, notably Japan and, to some degree, Great Britain. This optimism seems justified only if the potential market is an open one, which is not the case with Communist China. However, the Chinese Communists try to utilize these illusions as tools for political purposes, particularly for weakening opposition to Communist aspirations, such as the gaining of recognition from free world countries or the gaining of admission into the United Nations in lieu of fulfilling otherwise required obligations of a law-abiding member. Great Britain long ago has recognized Communist China, but has gained little trade value therefrom. In any event, if Communist China need trade with a particular country, it will trade regardless of recognition, as is shown in its trade with Japan.

A second major geographical aspect of mainland China is an equally obvious one. This is the large territorial expanse, the fifth largest in the world since Outer Mongolia became detached from China's body politic. Mainland China now has approximately 3.2 million square miles or roughly 10 million square kilometers. If the slope surfaces rather than horizontal map areas are used as the basis for measurement, the exposed surface of land is much larger. On the other hand, the steepness of slopes add to the limitations of aridity, high altitudes and poor thin soils, so that only about 13 per cent of the total surface area is presently under cultivation. Much of this is accomplished with extraordinary effort.

One of the advantages of large area in China is the potential of under-utilized land which hitherto has not been utilized because Chinese agriculture is geared to the use of the best lands and not to the less-than-best land, a phenomenon of the intensive hand tillage system. That is, slope lands have been under-utilized, both for timber forests and fruit orchards, and for grazing and dairying industries. Most of these, however, are merely potentials and are not lands which could be immediately converted to use

without much investment of labor and capital, including fertilizers. The Communist Chinese prime minister, Chou En-lai, has claimed that China's potentially cultivable land could be doubled. This was also concluded by earlier students of the problem, notably by the American agricultural specialist, O. E. Baker, in the 1930's. This potential land for agriculture could help solve China's arable land-deficiency only were it to be brought into production at a rate that would permit production to keep up with or surpass population growth. The Chinese Communists have placed much too high hopes in quickly turning this potential into food production. The per capita amount of arable land in mainland China has actually dropped from about an estimated 0.5 acres to less than 0.39 acres in the brief period of Communist hegemony.

So far most of the added acreage in production brought about by the mainland regime has been added through such devices as elimination of field boundaries (the potential of which alone was stated at 13 million acres), and of graveyards. Drainage added an undisclosed area in such provinces as Kiangsu where in the pre-war period there was an estimated reclaimable area of saline lands near the cost of about 4 million acres. Machine cultivation of marginal grasslands in Inner Mongolia and former western Manchuria also has added some area to producing land. Irrigation schemes probably have been more effective than other measures in promoting production increase as well as expanding the area of cultivable land.

The cost of such reclamation per acre in 1956 was the equivalent of about U.S. \$115, not an inconsiderable sum for agricultural land, especially since much of the land thus reclaimed is situated in an area of marginal fertility or low rainfall. Inasmuch as the most easily reclaimable land obviously would be reclaimed first; the areas that are more marginal would cost much more. However, assuming that the cost estimated in 1956 were applied to the reclamation of double the 266 million acres then under cultivation (now said to be about 270 million acres), the total cost would be about the equivalent to some U.S. \$30 billion. The speed of reclamation also is not rapid. The 12-year agricultural plan beginning in 1956 only provided for reclaiming 14.5 million acres, or 1.2 million acres per year. This amounts to 0.44 per cent of the existing area per year. If the same rate of progress were achieved for the rest of the assertedly reclaimable 266 million acres, the

time required would be about 220 years. In actuality, the increased difficulty of reclamation would probably stretch out the years required to many more years. There seems little doubt that population increase would far outstrip the expansion of cultivated area as it already has done during the past decade.

There is one aspect of largeness of territorial expanse north and south in mainland China that is a definite asset: this is the climatic variety that permits a great measure of self-sufficiency in secondary food products. Tropical and cold climate products of agriculture alike are found within China's expanse.

On yet another hand, the largeness of expanse of desert and mountainous and inaccessible land makes for expensive and sparse transportation networks over much of China. The transportation needs of China are great. Much too much manpower is diverted from more productive work in China to transportation. Yet, at the rate of construction of railroads averaging about 1,000 kilometers or about 620 miles per year that has prevailed during the ten years between 1949 and 1959, it will take a century to reach the goal of about 120,000 kilometers of rail network envisaged by Sun Yat-sen as the minimum requirement for China's vast extent. Probably, this rate of construction can be speeded up with the expansion of steel production, although steel production has fallen greatly in the years following the vast national exertion of the so-called "Great Leap Forward," and following the disastrous economic chaos that developed therefrom. China, however, cannot produce her requirements in wooden ties so easily.

Yet another important aspect of China's large expanse is the greater amount of economic minerals it is likely to contain. Largeness of area, of course, does not guarantee the availability of adequate reserves of such minerals, but it does increase the likelihood of their occurrence and also of the variety of mineral resources, owing to the variety of major geological structures and rock types that occur. Scarcity of mineral production is often the result of incomplete or inadequate geological surveys rather than of lack of mineral reserves. This appears to be the case with China in many minerals if we are to accept at face value the claims of the mainland regime. According to these claims, mainland China has the world's richest potential reserves of tungsten, molybdenum, tin and antimony and is among the world leaders in iron ore as well as coal and petroleum. How reliable these

claims are is difficult to substantiate. In the matter of coal, there seems to be a high degree of truth to the claims. This is less certain about the claims to iron ore reserves which in some reports have risen above 100 billion tons of metal content. Chu Hsiao-ch'eng, the deputy director of the Research Institute for Geology in the Ministry of Geology in 1959, asserted in another statement that iron ore reserves in mainland China are more than double the total iron ore reserves in the United States and Great Britain. Statements such as these may reflect more the wishful thinkers of a propaganda war than the realities of economic geology. The claims are even more subject to doubt in the case of petroleum reserves, since strenuous efforts are being made to develop this fuel through the expensive medium of refraction from both small and large deposits of oil shales.

The third geographical aspect of China that may be emphasized is its terrestrial contiguity with a top rank world power with which she has a common Communist ideology but also with which she has recently developed leadership enmity. The other aspect of territorial contiguity is that her other neighbors are weak or small states. The importance of geographical contiguity or adjoining boundaries lies in the fact that until recently, no state has entered the Communist bondage that has not been territorially contiguous with a pre-existing Communist state. Cuba is a recent exception and there may be one or two others developing into exceptions. Contiguity also is important in that it is easier to apply pressures by threats hidden or open when there is a land connection over which outright aggression may occur. This partly explains the contrast in the Chinese Communist tactics applied to India compared with that applied to Indonesia which some years back provoked Communist China far more than India did, for instance, in the matter of Chinese citizenship and the rights of Chinese residents in Indonesia. Just as water separation in past ages saved Japan and Java from the conquests of Genghis and Kublai Khans, water separation prevents the Chinese Communists from sweeping easily over Taiwan, the Philippines or Indonesia. Mountain barriers even as difficult as the Himalayas, on the other hand, though effective in an earlier day, no longer keep mainland Chinese military power from spreading into Indian territory.

Contiguity with the Soviet Union, on the other hand, has meant losses to the Chinese nation territorially, both under the Nationalists and under the Communist Chinese leadership. In 1943 Li

Ch'eng-san, a geographer sent to investigate the frontier boundary situation by the Nationalist Government, reported that in northern Sinkiang from the T'ien Shan to the Altai Mountains, the Soviet Union between 1919 and 1943 managed by various devices to push the Sino-Soviet boundary inward into China by some ten kilometers or six miles along much of western Dzungaria Territory seized and occupied by Russia and then the Soviet Union in the Pamir region for long without protest by the Communist regime amounts to some 16,000 square miles. It has been only in the last few years, after the political breach with the Soviet Union, that the Chinese Communists have called for the return of this territory publicly. In the Eastern Altai Mountain region an even larger area was yielded by Communist China to the Outer Mongolian People's Republic, a Soviet satellite. In the Amur valley, long-standing Chinese claims to a 600 square-mile sliver of territory between the Zeya and the Amur rivers at their junction area also appear to have been erased from Communist Chinese maps in favor of the Soviet claims. Thus, although boundary contiguity may be helpful in economic cooperation and trade between the Soviet Union and Communist China when relations are friendly, territorially this has been disadvantageous for the Chinese state. In recent as well as past times, such contiguity also has led to friction over other matters of political suzerainty, namely, over that of minority groups, as will be seen in the subsequent discussion.

A fourth important geographic fact about China is that the West and Northwest of China comprises half of her territory but has a colonial population of only 2-3 per cent of her total population. In Sinkiang the percentage of Han-Chinese in the total population is now about 30 per cent in the pre-World War II era. In Tibet the percentage of Han Chinese is much smaller, but no figures are available. By contrast, Inner Mongolia now has three or four times as many Han-Chinese as Mongols. The Outer Mongol part of the Mongol realm was detached from the Chinese political area by the Soviet Union and placed under Soviet tutelage. These colonial populations throughout history has resisted Han Chinese domination except when suppressed by the superior force of Han-Chinese armies. Of these areas, Tibet and Mongolia have possessed special status owing to the manner in which they became associated with China under the Manchu rule during the time of Emperor Ch'ien Lung in the 18th century. Whereas the

non-Han peoples in these areas in the past have had disproportionate influence compared with their numbers, it appears quite possible that in the near future, Han Chinese population may well outnumber the non-Han, particularly with the growth of modern communications and with industrialization.

A fifth geographical fact of significance related to the above is the presence in south and southwest China of some 25 million people of non-Han cultural backgrounds and languages poorly assimilated to Han culture, but having little organized political power as separate ethnic groups. Their role is different from that of the northwestern non-Han peoples. However, their significance is enhanced somewhat by the fact that, as in the case of some of the northwest border peoples, there are similar ethnic groups lying across the borders in neighboring countries. Through such neighboring ethnic groups, influence can be transmitted more easily across the frontiers for propaganda or subversion of native governments. These peoples include such ethnic groups as the Ching-p'o, Shan or T'ai, and Wa along the Burma borders, and the Yao and Miao in the Lao-Vietnam borders. Their presence not only conditions China's attitudes toward her cross-frontier neighbors, but also toward the minorities within her own borders. Whereas, in these southwest China frontier zones in the past, many of these tribal areas have had a great measure of local autonomous control by local chieftains, the stronger centralized government of Communist China together with improved land and air communications have brought more stringent Han-Chinese control over the indigenous peoples. Their autonomy has decreased, even though the Communist Chinese try hard to propagandize them and the rest of the world into believing that giving lip-service to increased local participation through local Communist cadres justifies designating such areas so-called "autonomous national regions" or "autonomous national districts."

A sixth geographic fact of mainland China influencing national and international policies is that outside of the Communist dominated mainland reside an estimated 26-28 million people of Han-Chinese ancestry, many of them having a continued interest in the mainland through emotional ties or kinship ties to people under Communist Chinese control. About 11 million of these currently live in Taiwan under Nationalist rule. Perhaps another 10-12 million live in different countries of Southeast Asia, some partly absorbed in the political and cultural life of these countries. Still

another four million reside in Hong Kong and Macao. Although their political allegiance is subject to no reliable statistical analyses, it is probably correct to say that most of these are apparently anti-Communist or apolitical even though it may not be correct to consider them pro-Kuomintang. The importance of the overseas Chinese in China's revolutions in the past century is well established. However, the overseas Chinese constitute a double-edged weapon that can operate in their overseas home territories to cause subversion and sabotage as well as they can work to support or overthrow the mainland regimes of China. To either pro- or anti-mainland government forces they form potential assets or liabilities, and they are constantly being wooed by both sides of the political fence.

A seventh geographic factor to be reckoned with by mainland China rulers is the different types of expectable responses of China's geographic neighbors to their policies. These vary according to the classification to which these neighbors belong and require close attention of Chinese politicians and diplomats to the foreign psychologies of these states in order to achieve propaganda and policy successes. These states may be classed into eight major groupings:

- (1) The Soviet Union: a European-Slavic complex conditioned by having adjoining colonial possessions in Central Asia and resented as a non-Asiatic white race despite similar Communist ideologies;
- (2) The Afghan-Pakistan Islamic culture and Indo-Iranian race;
- (3) The Indian-Hindu Brahman culture and Indo-Iranian race;
- (4) The Nepali-Bhutanese Indian satellites with mixed Buddhist-Lama-Brahman religions and with Mongolian racial affinities, occupying pivots between counter-poles of attractions north and south;
- (5) Burma: with mildly anti-British, anti-Indian, fear-induced pro-Chinese Communist tendencies, but still strongly Buddhist in outlook;
- (6) The Mongoloid states of Laos and Thailand, the latter never a colony of European or other powers, of early Thai

stock with related peoples inside China and historically having close and friendly relations with China until the last century; now suspicious of China because of its large resident Han-Chinese population of 3-4 millions;

- (7) Sinitic Vietnam and Korea, each having been a Chinese province in early history for a period of almost a thousand years, and more recently having been occupied as colonies of foreign powers, French and Japanese respectively;
- (8) Finally, the insular countries of Japan and the Philippines, and the more distant ones of Indonesia and Malaysia, each with water separation and each diverse in culture.

An eighth major geographic factor pertains to China's 4,000 miles of sea coasts fronting on a productive continental shelf with under-exploited fishing resources. On the basis of the area of continental shelf with a depth under about 600 feet, there is a large area capable of producing about 10 million metric tons of fish and other marine foods, but which presently produce only two or three million tons. This shelf area is of special interest to Japan as well as to Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The extent of access depends upon the territorial limits of claims by the nations fronting this shelf, and China fronts most of it. Though once claiming only the three-mile limit, China now has joined with various less developed fishing nations in claiming the twelve-mile limit. In practice, it probably does not patrol this territory effectively in most areas. But her claims have restricted Japan's fishermen especially in the Gulf of Po-hai which China regards more or less as a national area and in seas off the Shantung coast where arbitrary seizures are likely to occur. China's claims and practices with regard to such waters give her an economic weapon over Japan whose fishing interests lead the world.

A ninth geographic factor worth mentioning, although of less importance, is the existence of a large number of coral reefs and atolls in the South China Sea, southeast and south of Hainan Island and west of the Philippines' Palawan Islands. These are the Paracel Islands and the Spratley Islands; in Chinese called respectively the East, West, Central and South Sand archipelagoes. Parts of the Spratley group are claimed by Vietnam and the Philippines as well as by China. Although they are important chiefly

for the temporary shelter and landings of fishing crews, they were used by Japanese submarines during World War II and they are strategically situated about half-way between north Borneo and southern Vietnam. Their present importance is small, but they have been the subject of diplomatic and propaganda protests by both Nationalist and Communist Chinese Governments in the past when Vietnamese or French vessels have operated in or among these islands.

A final geographic factor relevant to our discussion is the character of China's approaches to the open sea which undoubtedly has had much influence in Communist China's development of a significant submarine navy. Festoons of island chains completely enclose the seas fronting the China mainland. These island chains are sufficiently close to bring within easy air-reach or easy reach of surface naval craft based on them of the most important industrial and political centers of China. There is no coastal city of China more than about 600 miles from one or the other of important military centers and bases on these island chains or on continental areas held by political powers opposed to Chinese Communist aspirations for influence and power. Korean bases at Inchon and Pusan bring within 600-mile radius all North China ports from Dairen and Tientsin to Shanghai. Okinawa is only a bit more than 500 miles from Shanghai and, of course, Taiwan bases bring the rest of the China coast ports from Shanghai to Chang-chiang and Hainan Island within the 600-mile range. Even free access to the south is constricted by hostile bases in the Philippines and South Vietnam. The presence of these anti-Communist bases may seem provocative to the Chinese Communists, but for the free world they exercise a salutary effect in moderating extremist adventures, especially in the direction of Taiwan.

The foregoing ten geographic aspects are merely a few of the many that could be outlined if we wished to pursue in greater detail China's political and economic geography. The vastness both of China's territory and of her population bring such variety as to require many hours of study to gain full appreciation of their significance. There is a need to understand the problems of China regardless of its political stances or the ideology of its rulers. China has made considerable strides in technological improvement. Technology means power, and technology derives from the cultivation of modern science and engineering. It can be acquired by any of the peoples of the world if that people is determined to ac-

quire it. There can be little doubt that Communist China is determined to acquire it. Technological power can no longer be stagnant in the modern world in any event, but surges forward inevitably with the momentum of multiplying knowledge in every state, in some faster than in others.

It is essential for the student of modern political and international relations to be aware of not only the stage and condition of the technology of the nations of the world, but also of the potentials for development. One must be able to evaluate the comparative potentials in rates of development. Only thus can the political student assess with good judgment the balance of power and the necessary measures to preserve peace and, God preserve us from the necessity, of winning wars in the world. This is the knowledge that derives from the study of political geography and the awareness of our world's environment to which this brief summary hopefully contributes in part. Only the disdain of arrogant ignorance may continue to overlook the importance of the giant monolithic state that is mainland Communist China. If it may still be relegated to second class power status militarily compared with the Soviet Union or the United States, its power for evil is at least earth-shaking in Eastern, Southern and Southeast Asia. As such, it must be reckoned with!