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# On Leaving China

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C. S. Holling

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## ON LEAVING CHINA

Kowloon Harbour after two weeks in China is a tumbled pattern of lights -- reds, oranges, and blues, climbing on each other up the hills. And a glowing boat slides by, matching its own reflection. With the sights are sounds, odours, and tastes: the small orchestra plays tunes from England, North America, and Latin America; the ladies and their perfume, the familiar taste of steak, baked potato and French wine after the unfamiliar intricacies of Chinese cuisine.

The West, after experiencing the East, is sensual -- a rich, joyful fabric of sensation. And although it might be but a moment, I see more gaiety, smiles and joy on the faces of both rich and poor in the streets of Hong Kong than I ever saw in China. And more room for both lecher and poet.

To the juvenile Western male the contrast is crystallized in women. Girl watching is great in Hong Kong, lousy in China. The close-fitting clothes and bright colours of the West make the body a setting for the face. In China, the faces are no more sensitive nor coarse, fine nor ugly than in the West. But there is no bodily setting in the colourless loose clothing that is neither male nor female.

But if Hong Kong is sensual, China is intellectual. Behind the cant and slogans lies a brilliantly structured

and humane strategy which emphasizes persistence not efficiency, equality not diversity, and self sufficiency not dependence. These are not the strategies of the West. The result is a society which does not know want, after thousands of years of history of just that. It is a society of individuals who have all the qualities which the intellectual aspect of the West, despite a different strategy, holds as an ideal -- complete honesty, hard work, social commitment, cooperation, and honour.

There are now three worlds -- China, the undeveloped nations, and the West, the latter including not just North America, but both capitalist and socialist Europe as well. China is intellectual; the West is sensual. As individuals we relate either to the intellectual or the sensual by emotion. If we are emotionally sensual, China is anathema and the West a joy. If we are emotionally intellectual, the reverse is true.

Our delegation was a scientific-technical one. As such, there was a strong emotional intellectualism which identified with the brilliantly conceived experiment of China while reluctantly despairing of the tactics of indoctrination. But the delegation also had government and political representation, which, together with at least one of the scientists, reflected a strong emotional sensualism. To them, China was abhorrent, or, increadibly, irrelevant. And yet of all of us they were the best guests -- publicly charming, appreciative and positive. In the best sense, they better

represented Canada to the Chinese than did the ascerbic, irreverent, and probing intellectuals. And yet, it was the intellectuals who had the deeper feeling and rapport with the Chinese experiment.

But, in truth, no one of us is wholly emotionally wedded to the intellectual or the sensual. We are a mix of both. As an intellectual, I see China as a totally new experiment which can avoid the fragmentation, blind consumption (and defecation) and the spiritual impoverishment of the West. As a sensual being, I cannot help but enjoy the rich orchestration of sights, sounds, and smells of the West. After all, my concentrated pleasure of today is finding a simple and elegant ring for my wife, and my anticipated pleasure of tomorrow is to find her a silk gown of rich blues and greens. We are at once sensual and intellectual as individuals.

But we are not as societies. How can we evolve a society which can give home to both -- can walk on two legs?

Hong Kong  
October 5, 1973