



Chapter 22

****American Myth? American Lost?**) ****

I've believed in America for a long time. What exactly I believed in about America, I wasn't really sure. It was akin to how children watch movies, categorizing characters into good guys or bad guys—I believed America was the good guy.

During the US-Soviet confrontation era, many wise individuals opposed America. They felt that while communism was terrifying, the nuclear arms race between the US and USSR was even more alarming. Hence, some people said, "I'd rather be Red than dead." Another said, "Every Earthling, on average, has 300,000 tons of yellow explosive at their disposal!" There's also the saying, "I don't know what weapons will be used in World War III, but I know that in World War IV, humanity's weapon of choice will be stones." These warnings were heartfelt. During times of anti-communism and resisting the Russians, such

words had little effect on us, as we had some lingering American admiration in our hearts.

Why is there such a myth surrounding America? Naturally, it's due to American cultural influence. "Culture" isn't innate; it's a way of thinking, behaving, and expressing emotions formed through education and other means. Experts say culture is an extension of our physical bodies, much like the use of prosthetics, glasses, or dentures. Having it offers convenience, but over time, it can also dominate us.

Since ancient times, education in China has not been widespread. After the May Fourth Movement, those educated were termed "intellectuals." Studying the spiritual and psychological qualities of traditional Chinese intellectuals is a profound subject. Without extensive knowledge and patience, one isn't qualified to discuss it. However, by reading "Beijing Fayuan Temple," one can at

least understand that since Tan Sitong, many intellectuals were very "patriotic," willing to sacrifice their lives for "saving China."

Actually, I want to discuss American culture. Not being qualified to discuss Chinese culture, how can I discuss American culture? It's because I have been immersed in Anglophone culture since childhood. During junior high school in Baoji, we had twelve hours of English lessons per week, which continued through high school and military academy. Whether this allowed me to read, write, or speak English is another story, but at the very least, it implanted in me the idea that English is crucial—even more so than Chinese. As mentioned before, culture is like wearing glasses or dentures, meaning it needs a medium or hardware. So, what exactly is American culture? This is easier to answer.

For my ten-year-old grandson, American culture is

McDonald's, French fries, and Coca-Cola. For my almost twenty-year-old older granddaughter, American culture is her favorite Hollywood star. As for myself? In my earlier years in Chengdu, it was a pair of second-hand American GI shoes. At my current age, if I still haven't identified the characteristics of American culture, I'd undoubtedly seem rather unenlightened. Of course, there have been changes along the way. Initially, I saw American culture as "a culture of convenience," even though "instant noodles" consumed worldwide today were first made by the Japanese.

Nonetheless, "making life more convenient" was the goal of 20th-century humans. A writer from the May Fourth period pointed out that it's impossible to make those accustomed to cars revert to mule carts or sedan chairs.

With increasing general knowledge, I've come to see the essence of American culture in just two words:

****Consumption.****

During the anti-communist and anti-Soviet era, no one dared to oppose Anglo-American culture. Back then, cultural perspective equated to values perspective.

Opposing consumption meant opposing democracy and human rights. Now, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and China's "capitalist roaders" in power, one can finally stand on the shoulders of Malraux and loudly proclaim, "Down with the culture of consumption!"

Regardless of perspectives, world culture is, and always has been, diverse. It is disappointing that even we, Chinese, seem to have forgotten we are a multi-faceted society. In the illustrious Tang Dynasty, about 5% of the capital's population were foreign residents. Historians claim that the exchange between Hu and Han cultures made China at the time "magnanimous and composed." But how many "foreigners" inhabit the US today? I wonder if Americans are aware that 1.3 billion people worldwide practice Islam, about one-fifth of the world's population. Furthermore,

there are 2.8 million Muslims in the US, constituting 1% of their population. However, America has not only stopped being magnanimous but seems to be heading in the opposite direction. America is lost.

Why is this?

Returning to my own perspective, I came from a military background and have received American aid like milk powder, flour, or cornmeal. Military forces have also received American weapons, which is well understood by everyone. For a long time, I believed America was the only nation providing aid to others, making it the most generous country keen on helping others. This impression, besides from milk powder, might stem from the success of the ****Marshall Plan****, which significantly assisted in the economic recovery of post-WWII Western Europe. Many in Taiwan share the same belief: "Americans are the most generous."

After I became middle-class and had extra time that couldn't be spent playing mahjong, I began reading various books. About thirty years ago, I learned of a global institution called the **Pearson Commission**, which set forth that developed countries should allocate at least 0.7% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for aid to developing countries. This resolution has been endorsed by the United Nations. Whether the US has adhered to this standard is not within my complete purview, hence I cannot answer definitively. However, I possess a list from 2000-2001 detailing foreign aid contributions by various countries. Denmark leads, donating 1.06% of its GDP, exceeding the 0.7% minimum requirement. Following are Norway, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Sweden. Other countries follow, descending in order. The UK stands at eleven, Australia, Austria, Portugal, and New Zealand tie at fourteen, and Japan ranks eighteenth. Guess the US position? The US is ranked twenty-second, contributing just

0.11% of its GDP. However, it's only fair to mention that due to the monumental size of the US GDP, their 0.11% is a significantly higher amount in absolute terms than Denmark's 1.06%.

Continuing on, who exactly received the aid money from the US? This is very important. Which countries on earth need aid? Even without looking it up, one can guess. Here is a ranking and amount of aid received by the top ten countries from the US between 1999 and 2000. The top recipient was Russia, receiving \$1.15 billion. The reason is simple: without the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US would have spent more than this every year on fuel consumption alone for defense. So which country received the second-most US aid? It was just under \$200 million less than Russia's amount, totaling \$967 million. Any guesses on who received it? This really surprised me; it might surprise you too: that year, the US aided Israel with over \$900 million!

It's worth noting that the 9/11 terrorist attacks had not happened yet at that time. Israel had a population of about 6,029,000 people, with a per capita income of \$18,900 (in Taiwan, it was \$17,400). In contrast, the US gave only about \$140 million to India, a country with a billion people. Just how many times less is this compared to what was given to Israel's six million people? This information comes from the 2003 World Almanac published in the US, page 864, though I wish my data were incorrect.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US has naturally taken on the role of world leader. The perspective of a leader should not be so narrow. The US, after all, is not Israel. Israel, surrounded by strong enemies, may think only of the US, but how can the US, as the leader of the world community, be biased only towards Israel? What do the Palestinians oppressed by Israel think? What do the world's 1.3 billion Muslims think? Considering just this one

example, it's not too surprising that the 9/11 incident occurred by 2001.

There are even more unexpected injustices. Each year, global weapons spending increases, and it's not the generous donors like Denmark or Norway spending the most on weapons. Instead, it's the developing countries in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa. Who sells the most valuable weapons? That's a no-brainer; the US controls 60% of the global arms market. Russia ranks second, selling mostly outdated equipment, and other exporting countries and their sales values are negligible, including Israel.

In fact, weapons exports have clearly become one of the most important industries in the US. We often hear people casually express their hope for world peace, but the first to worry if the world truly became peaceful would be the United States, the world leader. No war means no weapon

consumption; no weapon consumption means no one buys new weapons. If no one buys weapons, American weapon production lines will stop, leading to job losses for numerous workers and researchers. World peace and global economic depression seem synonymous. This is the fundamental contradiction of capitalism. The current buzzword "terrorism" begs the question, what is the real source of terror? This warrants deeper consideration; it's well worth pondering.

The area southwest of the Sahara Desert is geographically termed Sub-Saharan Africa. Countries in this area are also American arms customers. It is estimated that there are a total of 40 million people infected with AIDS around the world; in this region alone, the number is as high as 28 million. Their spending on weapons increases annually, while their average life expectancy decreases each year. Among the top ten countries receiving American aid, none are in Sub-Saharan Africa, even though their population

definitely exceeds six million. However, when it comes to selling weapons, they will not be forgotten. Using an outdated slogan: "American imperialism is the destroyer of world peace, the war profiteer trading in the dark of night." This doesn't seem too far-fetched.

America really shouldn't be like this.

Reflecting on the past, many elites from around the world gravitated toward America, which, like the ocean, embraced all rivers. America should be the epitome of "global harmony," housing people of English, Irish, Italian, and many other heritages. For many years, even long before 9/11, TV images repeatedly showed Palestinians hiding in alleys, throwing stones at the rampaging Israeli tanks. Were these images not broadcast in the US? Were Americans unaware? Why then did they continue to favor Israel, provoking Palestinians who were banned from establishing their own state or military? Palestinians had

long declared war on Israeli occupation; throwing stones at tanks is also warfare.

In the history of human wars, the use of all means to achieve victory is common. During World War II, Japan had kamikaze pilots, similar to today's Muslim suicide bombers. Kamikaze attacks killed more than 5,000 American soldiers, yet the term "terrorism" was never used. Presumably, this is because kamikaze targeted American soldiers. On the other hand, the two atomic bombs killed 200,000 people, and how many of them were military personnel? In war, using all means to secure victory has always been the norm. Now, the powerful side says, "You can fight using tanks or planes, but not suicide bombs." Is this fair?

Hoping for fairness and justice in the international community might seem like a lofty standard, so let's start with basic responsibilities. As early as the 1950s, during the Eisenhower Administration's "Atoms for Peace" program

aimed at containing the Soviet Union, the US leased, loaned, or sold weapons-grade uranium to dozens of allied countries surrounding the USSR. This program continued until 1988. Later, when the enemy disappeared, logically, these harmful uranium materials ought to have been reclaimed, or at least measures should have been taken to ensure their safety to prevent potential misuse for nuclear weapon production. It takes about ten kilograms of uranium to make one atomic bomb; currently, 15,000 kilograms of uranium are in the hands of foreign entities, including Pakistan, Israel, Mexico, and Iran. (This news was reported in the New York Times on March 6, 2004.) No wonder Americans are paranoid about "rogue states" making atomic bombs. With uranium available, bomb-making technology is straightforward. The question is, why spread enough uranium to make 1,500 atomic bombs around the world? With the Soviet Union's collapse, it should be traceable, reclaimable, and accountable. Though this is complex and costly, requiring sophisticated

diplomacy, even if some countries wish to return this hot potato, others adamantly refuse. Now, with Iraq's depleting supplies proven nonexistent—no, only Iraq's lack is confirmed—what about elsewhere? Must every country be occupied and conquered for verification?

After decades of long-standing enemies disappeared, the US seems lost without an adversary. Concern over the potential misuse of 15,000 kilograms of uranium has transformed into action: "To protect Americans' safety," the US has decided to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in developing a 100,000-ton "bunker buster" new generation nuclear bomb, reportedly capable of penetrating underground defenses to destroy deeply buried weaponry and command centers. (This news is from a resolution passed by the U.S. Senate on June 15, 2004.) It seems that treaties such as the "Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty" have been mentioned by no one and disregarded by all since the Soviet Union's dissolution.

We think that the United States is already very secure, for example, its invasion of Iraq seemed unopposed. The repeated exposure of photos showing abuse of Iraqi soldiers and civilians by American and British forces makes one wonder what exactly America is fighting for. Is it really for oil? Iran initially received US aid and surely uranium as well, leading to reasonable suspicion that Iran might be developing nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, Iran's land is also rich in oil, and prayers cannot save the ancient Persian nation now laid onto the chopping block. What will happen in the future? No one knows.

Europeans, especially the French, love to use a bit of humor to mock the shortfalls of American culture, and now it's somewhat understandable. After all, a cowboy can't become a nobleman overnight, and the American mindset remains petit bourgeois. If a country is ruled by self-serving petit bourgeois, it has no future. But what about our world,

if it's dominated by a nation focused solely on its own interests? The future looks grim. Americans fear a repeat of the 9/11 attacks the most, yet their actions only seem to create more "martyrs." With more people aspiring to be martyrs, preventing another 9/11 would be increasingly difficult.

Forget it, life is short and fraught with worries. Aren't I merely a petit bourgeois myself?