

Chapter 22

American Myths? American Lost?

For a long time, I believed in America. What exactly did I believe in about America? I wasn't quite sure myself. It was akin to children watching movies, categorizing characters as either good or bad. I believed America was the good guy.

During the US-Soviet confrontation era, many wise individuals were already opposing America. They believed that while

communism was certainly terrifying, the nuclear arms race between the two superpowers was even more terrifying. As a result, some said, "Better be red than dead." Another wise person once said, "Earthlings, each of you has about three hundred thousand tons of TNT awaiting you!" And yet another said, "I don't know what weapons will be used in World War III, but I know that in World War IV, humans will use stones." These remarks were deeply heartfelt. At a time when anti-communism and anti-Soviet sentiment prevailed, such

statements had little impact on us because we were, to some extent, gripped by an American myth.

Why the American Myth?

Naturally, it was due to the influence of American culture. Culture is not innate; it is a way of thinking, behavioral standards, and forms of emotional expression formed through education and other means. Experts suggest that culture is an extension of the human body, just like using prosthetics, wearing glasses, or getting dentures—it may make life easier but, over time,

it often governs us.

Historically, education in China has been inaccessible to many. After the May Fourth Movement, those who received education were referred to as "intellectuals." Studying the spiritual qualities and psychological habits of traditional Chinese intellectuals is a true scholarly pursuit, requiring extensive and patient scholarship. Without it, one is not qualified to discuss the topic. Yet, just by reading a book like "Beijing Fayuan Temple," one can see that many intellectuals since Tan

Sitong have been very "patriotic." They truly sacrificed their heads and blood for the salvation of China.

Actually, I want to discuss American culture. If I am not qualified to discuss Chinese culture, how can I discuss American culture? Because I was steeped in Anglo-American culture from a young age. During junior high school in Baoji, we had twelve hours of English classes each week, which continued through high school and military school. Whether this enabled me to read, write, and speak English

is debatable, but at the very least I was implicitly told that English was very important—perhaps even more so than Chinese. As mentioned earlier, culture is like wearing glasses or having dentures, implying culture requires a medium or hardware. So, what is American culture? That's much easier to answer.

What American Culture Represents

To my ten-year-old grandson, American culture is McDonald's, fries, and Coca-Cola. To my almost twenty-year-old granddaughter, it's the

Hollywood star she idolizes. As for myself, early on in Chengdu, American culture was represented by a pair of second-hand GI boots. Now, at my age, if I still can't identify the characteristics of American culture, that would be a bit dull-witted. Of course, there have been changes over time. Initially, I thought American culture represented "convenient culture," even though the widely consumed "instant noodles" we eat today were first made by the Japanese. Nonetheless, "making life more convenient" became a goal for twentieth-

century humanity.

The Essence of American Culture

The more I learned, the more I realized that the essence of American culture revolves around two words: consumption. During the anti-communist, anti-Soviet era, no one dared to oppose Anglo-American culture. Back then, cultural perspectives were akin to value systems, and opposing consumption was tantamount to opposing democracy and human rights. Now, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and China's

power taken over by the "capitalist roaders," one can finally stand with Malraux’s perspective and loudly proclaim, "Oppose consumerism!"

Regardless of the perspective, global culture is diverse. Sadly, even our own countrymen seem to have forgotten that China is a multicultural nation. The much-discussed Tang Dynasty, with five percent of its capital's population being foreign residents and historians saying this cultural exchange made China more magnanimous, stands in sharp

contrast. How many "foreigners" are there in America today? I almost suspect whether Americans know that 1.3 billion people, making up one-fifth of the world's population, follow Islam, and within the United States, around 2.8 million Muslims (making up one percent of their population) face mistrust and discrimination. The U.S. isn't continuing on its previously magnanimous path but seems to be tilting otherwise, showing that America has lost its way.

Why Has America

Faltered?
Speaking from my experience, I come from a military background. Back then, we received American aid, which included powdered milk, flour, or cornmeal. The military also accepted American-made weapons, which doesn't need much explanation. For a long time, I thought only America provided such generous aid to other countries, making it the world's most generous and helpful nation. This impression was partially due to the Marshall Plan, which greatly aided Western Europe's economic recovery post World

War II. In Taiwan, many probably shared the same view—"Americans are the most generous."

Generosity and Reality

Later, as I moved into the petite bourgeoisie class, I spent leftover time reading eclectic books and came across information about the Pearson Commission, which set a benchmark that high-income countries should allocate at least 0.7% of their GDP for aiding underdeveloped nations—approved by the United Nations long ago. Whether the

U.S. adhered to this requirement, I lack complete data to answer. However, I do have statistics from 2000-2001 on foreign aid contributions: the leading country is Denmark, donating 1.06% of its GDP, followed by Norway, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Sweden. The United Kingdom ranks 11th, Australia, Austria, Portugal, and New Zealand 14th, and Japan 18th. Guess where America stands? The United States ranks 22nd, offering only 0.11% of its GDP. Granted, due to America's enormous GDP, its actual amount exceeded Denmark’s

1.06%.

Who Received U.S. Aid?

Looking at who received American aid is crucial. Which countries genuinely need aid? Without needing to consult sources, one can figure it out. For 1999-2000, the top ten recipient countries of U.S. aid placed Russia first, receiving 1.15 billion dollars, understandable considering the collapse of the Soviet Union had saved America more on defense costs against it. And the second most aid? Israel received almost 967 million dollars! This was well

before the notorious 9/11 attacks. Israel, with a population of over six million and an income per capita of 18,900 dollars compared to Taiwan’s 17,400 dollars, receives hundreds of millions more than India with its billion-plus population.

When considering the discrepancy between America’s aid distribution—967 million dollars given to Israel versus the enormous amount to India—one can't help but feel that this is unfair. This discrepancy directly impacts the perception and attitudes of

global Muslim communities and explains,

In Fact, Weapon Exports Have Become an Important Industry for America

We often hear people casually express their hopes for world peace. If true peace were to come to the world, the first entity to worry would be the world leader, the United States of America. Without wars, there would be no consumption of weapons, and without such consumption, no one would buy new ones. If everyone stopped purchasing weapons, America’s weapon

production lines would come to a halt, leading to significant unemployment for workers and researchers. World peace and global economic depression almost seem synonymous. This is the fundamental contradiction of capitalism. Currently, the term "terrorism" is in vogue, but where exactly is its source? It's worth contemplating seriously. Try thinking about it carefully.

Southwest of the Sahara Desert, geographically designated as Sub-Saharan Africa, countries in this region are also clients of American

weapons. It is estimated that there are 40 million people infected with AIDS worldwide, with 28 million of them residing in this region. Annually, their spending on weapons increases while their average life expectancy decreases. Among the top ten beneficiaries of American foreign aid, none are in Sub-Saharan Africa, despite their population being significantly over 60 million. However, when it comes to arms sales, they are never forgotten. Using an outdated slogan: "U.S. imperialism is the world's destroyer of peace, a war

trader in the dark night." This isn’t entirely unjustified.

It shouldn’t have come to this for America.

The Dichotomy of America’s Historical Role

Reflecting on the past, numerous elite figures from around the world sought refuge in America, and like a vast ocean, it embraced all streams. America once stood as the prime example of a "world community," incorporating English, Irish, Italians, and many other races. For many years, well before

9/11, images frequently aired on television of Palestinians hiding and throwing stones at surging Israeli tanks. Did America not broadcast these? Were Americans truly unaware? Then why was America so biased toward Israel, aggravating Palestinians who were banned from building a state and army? Palestinians had long declared war on Israeli occupation, and throwing stones at tanks was also a form of warfare.

Historical and Current Contradictions

Looking into the history of human warfare, employing all sorts of indiscriminate methods to achieve victory is commonplace. During World War II, Japan used Kamikaze pilots similar to today’s suicide bombers among Muslims. Kamikaze pilots caused over 5,000 American military deaths, yet "terrorism" wasn’t a term used then. Perhaps because Kamikaze targeted U.S. soldiers; but what about the atomic bombs that killed 200,000 people, including both civilians and military personnel? Facing war inherently means using any

means necessary for victory. Now, a dominant power states that you can fight using tanks or planes but not suicide bombers – how fair is this?

Analyzing Fairness and Responsibility in Global Context

Expecting justice and fairness in international society might be setting standards too high. Let’s start from the most basic responsibility. Back in the 1950s, the Eisenhower administration initiated the "Atoms for Peace" program aimed at containing the Soviet Union, leasing or selling

weapon-grade uranium to allied nations. This program continued until 1988. When the enemy disappeared, it logically followed that harmful uranium materials should have been recovered, or at the very least, measures should have ensured their safety to prevent misuse in atomic weapons. Approximately 15,000 kilograms of such uranium are currently in the hands of various foreign nations including Pakistan, Israel, Mexico, and Iran (The New York Times, March 6, 2004). No wonder Americans worry about "rogue states"

developing nuclear bombs. With raw uranium, making a bomb is technologically simple—the question is, why disperse such dangerous and valuable uranium materials worldwide, sufficient to produce 1,500 bombs? Given the Soviet Union's collapse, tracking, retrieving, or negotiating the return of these materials is complex and costly. Some nations may hastily seek to return these hot potatoes to America, while others staunchly refuse. Iraq has been confirmed uranium-free—but what about other countries? Must they be

occupied one by one to verify?

Paradox of Security and Aggression in American Foreign Policy

After numerous long-term adversaries vanished, America seemed bewildered, consequently allocating millions of dollars in funding to develop new ten-megaton nuclear bunker-buster bombs designed to destroy underground facilities ("U.S. Senate Resolution, June 15, 2004"). Since the Soviet Union’s demise, treaties like “Nuclear Non-Proliferation” rarely surface or attract

attention anymore.

America, perceived as secure, invaded Iraq without obvious resistance. Repeated exposure of American and British troops' abuse of Iraqi soldiers and civilians raises suspicions: Why was this war fought? Was it truly for oil? Iran, having received U.S. aid initially, likely also received precious uranium. Given Iran's vast oil reserves, what's next for this ancient Persian state placed on the global chopping block? No one knows.

Europeans, particularly the

French, often mock American culture for its superficiality. Their critiques bear some truth—after all, cowboys don’t transform into nobility overnight. America's mindset remains that of the petite bourgeoisie. If governed by self-seeking petty bourgeoisie, neither the country nor the world led predominantly by such a class towards its own interests will have a promising future. Americans dread a recurrence of 9/11, yet their actions provoke further martyrdom. With more potential martyrs, preventing another 9/11 becomes

increasingly challenging.

Let it be; life rarely exceeds a century, continually worrying with millennia-long angst—aren’t I part of the petite bourgeoisie too?