

CHAPTER 15

Letters to the Editor - and Others (1979-89)

Early in 1979 I ran into an old Chinese friend who held a high post in Xinhua - the official New China News Agency. We had first met in the Liberated Areas, when Xinhua's head office was hidden away in a mountain village. "What do you think of our propaganda now?" he asked. I replied with a 2,000 word diatribe. Here is part of it:

Too much verbiage and too little information; too much name-calling and too few facts.

The verbosity of Chinese journalism is all the more unpardonable when there is a serious shortage of paper. It may be traced to Soviet journalism, which was long the duller in the world. Now it's improving and China has taken over its unenviable reputation. ... Lu Xun is a model of succinctness. Why is he quoted so much and copied so little?... Why does every mention of Chairman Hua Guo-feng's name have to be preceded by the words "wise and farseeing"?... A leader's greatness is measured by his deeds, not by the adjectives before his name. The masses can judge greatness without the aid of epithets....

Socialist China seems to be crazy about ranks and titles, far more so than capitalist Britain. In Chinese press reports everybody possible is referred to by a rank or title, repeated in every mention. ... All these reports of who was present at each social function in strict hierarchical order is worse than our British Court Circular in The Times.. And then there's the business of reporting that so-and-so and so-and-so had their photographs taken together. Where else in the world is the taking of a formal photograph considered news....

Perhaps concrete information is left out of foreign propaganda for fear of giving information to the enemy. That is an illusion. The enemy has countless listening posts and highly-trained China-watchers working full time. ...The people deprived of concrete information about what goes on in China are not China's enemies but her friends..

I ended my diatribe by referring to Mao Ze-dong's essay "Oppose Party Jargon" - and using a little Party jargon myself, saying "If that weapon (Mao's essay) is grasped, great and rapid strides can be made in the field of propaganda similar to those being taken in other fields in the new Long March to China's socialist modernization.

One stride taken, the following year, was the launching of an official but relatively free-wheeling English-language newspaper, the China Daily. The China Daily was founded in 1980. Since then it has printed a couple of dozen of my letters to the editor on subjects ranging from the superiority of wholewheat bread to noise pollution, tourist rip-offs and mixed marriages. It has also turned down some on hotter subjects, such as anti-

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

Semitism and China's arms sales.

My first letter was sent to both China Daily and the People's Daily. It ran:

Jan 4, 1980.

Though I am English, for many years, every morning at 6.30 I have listened to the news in Chinese over Radio Beijing - preceded by the signature tune "The East is Red". At the beginning of this year the tune was changed to - I know not what. Of course it is for the Chinese people to decide what tune should be broadcast by Radio Beijing... I can understand that at this point in history, a less personal tune than "The East Is Red" should be preferred... (That tune is a paean of praise to Mao Ze-dong, D.C.) (But) China is a socialist country with a long and glorious revolutionary tradition Surely Radio Beijing, then, should be identified by a rousing, vigorous melody. The new tune, however, is more of a lullaby than a call to action calculated to inspire listeners with the energy required for China's modernization....

This reaction must have been shared by many Chinese listeners, for soon afterwards the tune was changed to an old revolutionary favourite.

Next came one of my interventions on mixed marriages, a subject in which I had a personal interest, being partner in a mixed marriage myself. My attitude had become well-known among foreigners working in China and I was often consulted by Chinese and expatriates whose applications to marry were obstructed by the bureaucracy.

"Chinese citizens can wed foreigners". I was delighted to see this clear-cut headline in China Daily...It marks an historic advance over both China's feudal past and the fascistic intimidation of the Gang of Four period.

...Premier Zhou En-lai, in his March 8 speech said "...the Chinese tend to be conservative...They just want to cling together and are rather unwilling to have contact with foreigners. Chinese men do not want to marry foreign women, and Chinese women are still more unwilling to marry foreign men." (This is no longer true, with the opening up of the last few years and the desire of Chinese intellectuals to go abroad. D.C.)

...The new regulations ...are in the spirit of Zhou En-lai's speech. They uphold both internationalism and China's sovereignty and national dignity... (but) it is oversimplifying matters to state, as your article does: "There is no problem about marriage between a Chinese and a foreigner.... In 10 seconds I can list 10 Chinese-foreign couples, whose applications to marry were delayed and dragged on for months and months causing spiritual suffering and material difficulty. This shows that the formulation of correct policies and regulations is only a first step; their application can only be the result of prolonged and principled struggle...

Next in my files comes the momentous subject of brown bread or white - a subject dear to my heart since

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

my mother's food reform days in Harrogate over half a century earlier. This was part of an ongoing correspondence controversy in which Isabel thought one letter from me was more than enough. (I wrote at least two).

October 5, 1983.

Professor Pringle writes: (The academic handle was ironically added by me): "Chinese people seem to prefer both their rice and wheat products white.. the whiter the better". Some do, some don't..

Scientific tests made in China..showed that rural people eating less refined flour had higher resistance to disease than urban eaters of highly polished white flour staples....

True many people do opt for white bread. I never suggested that they should be deprived of their choice - only that brown bread be brought back so that the others have the choice that they have had for decades.

I don't think it is wise to dismiss the health problem with a "Vox Populi" stance of "Maybe the people know best; or at least what they like." Doesn't true respect and concern for the people call for a friendly suggestion that may benefit their health - and their taste buds?

There was more to this letter than met the eye. I suspected that Pringle was a pseudonym and that the writer was somebody I had long known. His reply to my advocating restoring the excellent brown bread which was suddenly withdrawn from the market was personal and sarcastic.

But my chief concern in pursuing the subject of brown bread was not this. Nor was it China's backwardness in dietetics. That subject I realised is a luxury in any country whose first task is to fill the bellies of people who cannot afford to be discriminating in the nature of the filling. What was at stake, I suspected, was profits and indeed after a time brown bread came back - at six times the previous price. Such increases, I felt, were not just a legitimate adjustment of prices which had been fixed years earlier and had not taken into account rising costs of production. Nor were they a problem of shifting from a state controlled to a mixed economy which gave freer play to the market. They struck me as a rip off which smacked more of capitalism than socialism. I was becoming more and more concerned about rampant commercialism, especially in the field of tourism, where the foreigner was considered fair game.

I had already written a letter on this theme of "soaking the foreigner" (March 11, 1983), giving the example of a foreign teacher on holiday. She was put in a double room and charged at the rate of two people, because the hotel had no single rooms. I maintained that "Friendship first, foreign currency second" should be the

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

motto for tourism in a socialist country. Otherwise what is gained in profits will be lost in goodwill - an asset which money cannot buy.

I came back to this theme of having a political as well as an economic approach to tourism again and again. For example:

April 24, 1987

China does need to attract visitors who can pay high hotel prices - even though some of them are not rich; many have to go moonlighting and work overtime to save enough money for a trip to China. But if China goes on building more and more luxury hotels while not providing good accommodation at low prices with good food and service, she will price herself out of the market. Then the capital, Chinese and foreign, will yield diminishing returns. The skyscraper hotels with their marble vestibules and revolving roofs will stand empty.

Backpackers are many, plutocrats few. In the long run many poorer people can provide China with more of the foreign currency she needs than the few who can afford to stay in fancy hotels...

Besides the question is not only one of economics. Politics is involved too. China wants peace and the understanding of the masses of the people of the world. The low income tourists count when it comes to winning friends.

Some time between these two letters on tourist troubles I broached another matter of concern to both tourists and long-term foreign residents - the telephone system. With modernization heavier and heavier demands were being placed on it. At the same time it was being more and more abused. I wrote:

July 18, 1984

Less chat and more business (public and private) would ease the strain on Beijing's overloaded telephone lines and on citizens' nerves. Too many people take too much time for a good old gossip on the phone. This form of social life should be carried on after work hours and not on the office phone.

Could the problem be solved by a public appeal for brevity on the phone? ...should there be a charge for local calls as there is for long distance ones? (Local calls are free and not cut off however long they last. Control would call for additional, high cost equipment. D.C.)

Something needs to be done fast without waiting the "three or four years for large scale renovation" promised on July 17. Otherwise we shall have to pay a high price in nervous wreckage.

Now, years later, the wreckage continues. Such are the growing pains of modernization. Another strain on the nervous system is noise.

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

August 15, 1984

The banning of the blowing of horns has eased the strain on the eardrums of Beijing's inner city residents. For this relief much thanks. But in the suburbs the main source of noise remains ...the clattering of the tractors. These juggernauts rattle and rumble past our classrooms...with such devilish decibels that we teachers can hardly hear ourselves speak. What's worse we can hardly hear our students speak.

Tractors should be banned from city streets - above all from educational zones - and banished to the fields where they belong. In China to-day they seem more a means of transport than of tillage. And the effect of their jolting on the joints of their drivers must be as lethal as it is ruinous to the roads.

I realise that the use of this agricultural implement as a means of transport is hard to dispense with. I believe it results largely from selling tractor fuel at subsidized prices on the grounds that it is used for farming. Most of it is not. Now is the time to put tractors in their place - on the land; and to provide farmers with trucks. And to provide the trucks with silencers. This will help to make Beijing a city as easy on the ear as it is already on the eye.

Although I believe the points made in this letter are valid I am struck by my impudence in laying down the law on farming - until I recall that the farming facts were furnished by my friend William Hinton, a farmer and tractor expert of long standing.

A type of transport on which I am qualified to write - and I did so more than once - is the bicycle, having received a byke for my 13th birthday and ridden one on and off ever since.

October 15, 1986

"China is sure to become one of the world's biggest markets for cars" (C D October 1) I hope this does not mean that she plans to switch from a bicycle to an auto culture. That would be a disaster.

In US, Canada and the UK (from which I have recently returned) roads in the towns have changed from highways to parking places, up to half of their width being taken up, night and day, by parked cars; this in spite of parking lots and multi-storey car parks. What these countries - and China - need is not the proliferation of private cars, clogging the streets as they proceed half empty or often carrying only the driver. It is good, cheap public transport. Beijing, and I dare say other Chinese cities, have made efforts to provide this in recent years; but bus and tube travel remain more of a torture than a pleasure. An underground railway network to match that of American and European capitals is urgently needed.

At the same time the bicycle, which Bernard Shaw with typical exaggeration described as the only machine which has contributed to human happiness, must be preserved. Otherwise the limbs of China's urban inhabitants will atrophy like those of citizens in certain foreign metropolises.

I mounted my bicycle once more, though for a shorter ride a few months later, again referring to a China

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

Daily article which had stated on May 25, 1987: "Automobile industry should be protected". This letter was more constructive and more political. It concluded:

China needs more trucks for goods transport and better public transport for passengers. She does not need more private cars to block the roads, poison the air and pollute minds with ostentatious display. These are in direct conflict with "building socialism with Chinese characteristics" (the current Party principle D.C.). They are...an essential ingredient of capitalist economy and therefore against the four basic principles of China's government and the C.C.P.

"China's ambition of developing its car industry is sure to come true" says your article, quoting the Economic Daily. Perish the thought.

The part of my letter underlined above were omitted from the printed version.

Occasionally, though not often, whole letters were omitted; for instance one on the subject of livestock, I was certainly no expert in the subject; but I had become interested in it on the prompting of my old friend William Hinton. Bill would call on us when he passed through Beijing on his way to and from remote pastoral regions on whose problems he was often asked for an opinion, sometimes by the United Nations, sometimes by the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture for whom he had worked in the fifties. But he was highly critical of China's farming policies in the eighties, especially of livestock raising in Inner Mongolia. Bill is not only an expert in his field; he is an entertaining raconteur. On the subject of the Mongolian grasslands his descriptions of herds of half-starved, overgrown cattle scouring the overgrazed pastures for a blade of grass were heartrending and hilarious. On September 27, 1982 I wrote to the China Daily:

I was surprised at the headline in yesterday's China Daily: 'Mongolian livestock at record levels' The story continues: 'Inner Mongolia has increased the total number of its livestock to a record 42 million head..'

I understand from livestock experts that the grasslands in Inner Mongolia have seriously deteriorated in recent years precisely because of overgrazing, due to keeping the animals alive too long; and that this is causing serious erosion. So while the quantity of livestock goes up their quality goes down. The way of improving the pastures - and thereby the livelihood of the herds-people and the supply of milk and meat for the country as a whole should, for the time being, be to reduce the number of livestock, not increase it.

The paper did not print my letter, but it did answer it at some length and sent me by courier a copy of the issue containing its indirect reply. This was an article headed: LIVESTOCK BOOMING IN INNER MONGOLIA

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

(Oct. 6, 1982) To this I replied in a friendly letter to the editor:

I remember that when Isabel and I taught a summer session at Huhehot in 1979 we were astounded at how difficult it was even for us privileged people to buy milk powder... But this National Day some Canadian teachers working there told us that they have no trouble getting milk. And your article refers to the big increase in milk output over 1980. The meat situation, however, does not look good: 0.2% over 1980. At the same time there is a 21.5% increase in hides. That's a bit puzzling. The main problem, though, is the omission of any reference to overgrazing, which is what my short letter was all about. The article states that: "In 1980, when natural disasters caused serious shortage of grass..." Was it really natural disasters? Or was it unscientific methods of cattle breeding, keeping the animals alive too long because they are a traditional form of wealth. In short was the shortage of grass due to natural disasters or faulty methods of management?...I think this question should have been dealt with in the article.

This correspondence then ceased. We agreed to differ. After half a dozen more of my letters had been published I suffered another rejection, this time on the touchy topic of China's relations with Israel and the Arabs.

January 17, 1984

The cartoon in to-day's China Daily is racist...The "typical Jewish nose" on the face and the six-pointed Shield of David on the backside of the figure hammering plough-shares into swords is doubtless intended to denounce the belligerent expansionism of past and present Israeli governments. It is right to denounce them - especially for a socialist country. But not by resorting to mockery of physical characteristics or of emblems which have for centuries inspired the mass of the Jewish people in its struggle against anti-Semitism... They, the people, should be united with, not insulted.

This letter received neither publication nor private reply. Yet I myself was at fault, for I should have pointed out that I, as a Jew, well knew that China generally was exceptionally free from anti-Semitism. This lapse was not surprising. China's relations with Israel were and still are delicate. There have been occasional public contacts between Chinese and Israeli officials at U.N. and only a year or so after the printing of the offensive cartoon (May, 1985) an official Israeli trade delegation visited Beijing. But for China, more important than anything Israel might have offered in trade and high technology, were her own relations with the Arab nations. So publication or comment on my letter was bound to be awkward. But I felt I had to write it. At the same time it was in keeping with my having attended Arab-organized meetings in Beijing protesting Israeli aggression against Lebanon - at which I identified myself to the organizers as "an anti-Begin Jew".

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

My next unpublished epistle was on another complicated question.

January 29, 1986

Should the China Daily be distinguishable, in its reporting of strikes, from the Wall Street Journal, the Financial Times and such publications? A question to be asked. Yesterday's C.D. suggests that your publication does not find it easy to answer.

The headline over yesterday's report of the strike of the British print workers of The Times and The Sun newspapers read: "Print unions foiled" and the picture beside it showed a triumphant Rupert Murdoch...over the caption: "Murdoch beat print union strike action to produce the papers and splashed news of his victory all over the front pages"...

The overall impression is that China Daily rejoices with Rupert Murdoch. The issues involved are admittedly complex. It may be argued that the print workers... are modern Luddites...But they are defending their livelihood under a government which is hacking away at the Welfare State...In such a situation it would be best for the China Daily at least to observe neutrality - by avoiding such coloured words as "beat" and "foiled".

The British dispute is significant for China. For a time will come when it too has to face the contradiction between technical advance and unemployment. Indeed it is already being argued: 'How can China press ahead with the mechanization of agriculture?' (which Mao Zedong said was its only way forward.) 'What would become of all the displaced rural labour?' Such a problem may be insoluble under capitalism. Socialism I believe can solve it...

The China Daily - being the China Daily - if it cannot make its stand clear, should at least not line up with capitalism.

A few months later I broached a criticism on a more momentous matter - China's arms trade.

September 8, 1986

I was horrified to read that "CHINA PUTS JET FIGHTER ON SALE" and "officials hope it will sell on the world market... Air-to-air and ship-to-ship missiles have also been put on the world market (C.D. Sept. 2, 1986)

Whom are these weapons to be sold to? Iran, Iraq, the Soviet Union, the United States? Or even through some third party, to South Africa or Israel? Can China control the use or resale of these commodities once they are sold?

Certainly "The Chinese aeronautics industry has still to catch up with the most advanced technology of the world" and she needs to build the most modern aircraft to defend herself against aggression. She also needs to earn foreign currency for her socialist modernization. But does a country building socialism need to enter the ranks of the international merchants of death?

If I remember correctly the late Premier Zhou En-lai said that was something China would never do, but that she would give (not sell) weapons to countries fighting for national liberation or defending themselves against aggression.

This met with neither publication nor reply. But when China was being reported in the world press as selling arms to the Contras I wrote to Zhao Zi-yang, then acting Premier, enclosing a copy of my letter to the

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

ChinaDaily. Again there was no answer. But I heard through a former student that my letter to the Premier had been received and a reply was being considered. It never arrived.

However, a protest against a different type of murderous traffic was published. This letter dealt with smoking. I myself had toyed with cigarettes for a time, mainly to keep myself awake during long and boring meetings. But I never learnt to inhale and never became an addict. So I did not suffer from deprivation of tobacco in prison; and afterwards, on trips abroad I gradually became alerted to its evils. China lagged behind in its consciousness of the connection between cigarettes and cancer but began to catch up in the '80s. So on March 21, 1987, I wrote

The coming campaign against cancer is good news. The root of the problem is the profitability of producing and marketing tobacco. Lopping off the leaves will not get far.

Enforcement as well as establishment of anti-smoking regulations especially in public places is essential. So is mass education in the harm of smoking to the smoker and the smoked at.

Cigarettes, too, are the common currency of corruption and the snobbery that circulates with the smoke of imported brands is a social as well as a chemical poison.

If the cancer campaign can cope with these problems it will succeed. I hope it does.

The campaign did achieve something. Smoking has been barred from Beijing's main railway station, but not from trains, and the fug on the crowded carriages - which is to say all carriages (except for the small soft-seat compartments) is almost asphyxiating.

As to cigarette corruption, Isabel and I both non-smokers, still have to resort to it at times. But we are not well versed in the arts of either smoking or bribery and seldom have cigarettes in the house. Once when a school carpenter came to do some repairs I went out to buy a package at the co-op, but being unfamiliar with the brands I bought the local equivalent of Woodbines. The carpenter took one look at them and said no thanks. We now keep a couple of packets of Marlboroughs on hand. Is that opportunism or realism?

Later in the same year I was still concerned with killing - this time in the boxing ring. "Amateur boxer dies in second round" ran a headline in the ChinaDaily of October 24, 1988; and I wrote

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

...Should not socialist China ban this barbarism?

Boxing is a lineal descendant of the gladiatorial combat of the slave society of ancient Rome. It satisfied the demand for bread and circuses of a disgruntled populace dangerous to the Roman ruling class. Such bloody combats have no place in socialist society even though they are practised internationally. Winning or losing gold medals in such an inhumane, health-destroying and commercialised "sport" is something with which a socialist society need not concern itself. Human life and civilized behaviour are worth more than medals.

When China began to develop boxing in what struck me as a blind quest for medals in international competition I was sad and angry. And when she invited Muhammed Ali to come and give the "noble art" a fillip I submitted a protest. In it I paid my respects to Muhammed Ali as a man who upheld the dignity of his race and approved his being welcomed to China as such; but I denounced the brutality and brain damage that went with boxing. My letter was not published but soon a similar protest signed by some 20 overseas Chinese did appear. Now, a year or so later the paper reported the death of a 19-year old amateur boxer after being knocked out in a provincial championship fight.

Meanwhile the sports lists had been entered by Scott Corbett, an American colleague at our university, who wrote an article published in the China Daily on March 10, 1988. It read in part:

On March 2, 1988 China Daily carried a story on its sports page with the bold headline: "Chinese satisfied with games results". Just a day later it began a story with the headline "China must beef up its winter sports." The story stressed the need to build new and better sports facilities with the rousing sentence: "Bent on becoming a world sports power by 2000, China must redouble its efforts in winter sports"...

I wonder why...The answers must seem obvious to most. China must become a major sports power for the greater glory of China! Right?

Let's step back from the issue a moment and ask: What does China stand to gain from becoming a major sports power, and/or what would happen to China if it didn't become one?

I can't help but feel that a better goal might be for China to become a world "educational power" by 2000. Which would be better for China: to win 20 medals in some Winter Olympics or to win just one Nobel Prize for Physics or Chemistry or Literature? Which would contribute more to the glory of China and to the betterment of the quality of life in China, a world record in speed skating or a cure for cancer?

This article delighted and, I must confess, surprised me. I knew the writer, but not well and did not realise that we had so much in common. So I wrote a follow-up letter:

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

March 25, 1988

Three cheers for Scott Corbett's plea for China to become a world education power rather than a world sports power by the year 2000.

Olympic gold medals are largely a product of a country's financial investment in athletic training and equipment. Given enough money, all countries large and small can turn out champions. But more investment in education will bring modernization, prosperity and socialism faster than a mintful of gold medals.

Sport is no substitute for socialism. Over-emphasis on it diverts attention, energy and resources from solving such social problems as corruption, crime, superstition and gambling.

China has one of the world's oldest civilizations, with a traditional respect for learning. Yet to-day the country's per capita expenditure on education is among the lowest in the world...

On one point I disagree with Scott: his emphasis on higher education. When Deng Xiao-ping returned to power in the mid-70s he immediately spoke out in favour of improving China's education, stressing that the educational process began not at college but at kindergarten; and that more attention and support should be given to primary and elementary education. How right he was! And another Party leader recently said it was no good turning out more people with higher education than the national economy could absorb, in terms of jobs and equipment. We don't want a lot of unemployed PhDs. True.

But what is most urgently needed is education all along the line, starting from the bottom, so that lower and middle level officials have the education required to implement policy. The best policy in the world is ineffective if it is not put into practice.

Of course China does not want to become a nation of bookworms. The Romans were right. The ideal is "a sound mind in a sound body". That, for China today, means mass education and mass sport, not a few dozen world champions. China, with her billion people, will undoubtedly produce enough gold medallists to maintain her self-respect, even if she does not become a sporting super-power.

With this the China Daily had printed nearly but not quite all of my letter. Here is what was left out:

Let me quote from the research of an old Chinese friend: 'China's educational allocations...remain at a low level compared to those of other countries. Educational allocations generally absorb 4-5% of the gross output value in other developing countries ...while in China they stood at only 2.33% in 1980 and 2.43 in 1984...in recent years...elementary education including kindergartens, primary and middle schools, and schools for training skilled workers saw little development... at present, intellectual workers earn less than physical labourers...unless China changes the backward state of its elementary education both economic development and the quality of the nation will be undermined, which could lead to a degree of instability in the nation... (Signed He Yan-ling, professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, International Social Science Journal, August 1987) End quote

Among the results of giving such a low priority to education in China's national budget are: extreme competitiveness, increasing sex discrimination, deteriorating eyesight (what a pitiful sight is a small child wearing spectacles) and increasing "back-doorism" which involves a general decline of moral standards. A survey taken in 1983 of leading officials at all levels revealed that over 70% do not have any education to junior middle school level..The 1982 census in China showed that illiterates (including those who can read a little) totalled 235 million...

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

These omissions may be justified on the grounds that my letter was somewhat diffuse; but they are significant.

I had felt for some time that some Chinese leaders were whipping up sports fever and linking it to nationalism so as to divert the attention of the youth from the current departure from socialistic policies; in other words, substituting sport for socialism. I hope I am wrong, but I remember late one night hearing our students parading round the campus after China had won some big international sports victory. They were shouting a slogan I had never heard before: "Long live China." The Communist Party and the names of Party and Government leaders were conspicuous by their absence. Times had changed.

So had my thinking. After the mistrust of Deng Xiao-ping I had expressed a dozen years earlier, here I was quoting him approvingly in my letter. More important, I had finally come to realise that obvious and elementary fact of life: that policy is not always the same as practice.

I submitted more letters to the China Daily in 1987 and '88. One called for improved transport to and from China's National Theatre; half a mile from our university:

April 4, 1987

I agree with China Daily! CODT (China Opera and Dance Theatre) is a fine theatre. Yet it puts on plays or films only once in a blue moon. Theatrically and cinematically this 20 million yuan structure is a white elephant, though as a local inhabitant I would not go so far as to say it is "in a rather desolate area" - where I suppose white elephants might be expected to roam.

I think that lack of adequate public transport may be the main reason for CODT's failure as a theatre, even though it may be as you say "a recording success". If the number 323 bus, which passes the theatre's door, were to run more often and later, till 10.30 pm or whenever plays and films end, CODT could play to packed houses every night. Not only would people come from far afield but also those living in the locality, for example at the Central Institute of Nationalities, the Beijing Polytechnic College and Beijing Foreign Studies University, would flock to such a fine neighbourhood theatre....

This "fine theatre" actually has an unsavoury history. It was originally built by the P.L.A. and intended not for the general public but for elitist audiences of senior military officers. As this intention became known, owing to the pretentious structure and high expenditure, the government stepped in and held up the project. It remained half-finished for years. After much dickering permission was given to complete construction of the

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

building provided it was run as a public theatre. But the work had gone so far that the original elitist intent could not be entirely undone. The result was a dis-proportionately large stage, for the presentation of extravagant spectacles, and a relatively small auditorium hardly big enough for the masses of people who now had access to it. This, no doubt was why, in the China Daily article I was replying to, much attention was devoted to the advanced audio-equipment which explained the term "recording success".

Another letter indicates that though my traumatic five years imprisonment had not left its mark on my social behaviour - so far as I myself can judge - I had not forgotten it. Perhaps it had made me super-sensitive in some respects. I wrote on April 16, 1988:

I am one of the many who have been delighted by developments in democracy at the National People's Congress. I was accordingly all the more disappointed at seeing on Chinese television the demonstration of a feudal practice. The train driver held responsible for the tragic railway accident in which 28 young Japanese visitors were killed was displayed in a court of law in handcuffs. Such treatment is typical of the practice of humiliating prisoners to break their spirit used in feudal times and during the cultural revolution. It has no place in socialist society. Surely a socialist society should set an example of administering justice humanely, regardless of whether the accused is ultimately proven guilty or innocent.

I hope the feudal practice of calculated humiliation of prisoners will be dealt with by the National People's Congress.

The forlorn, obviously conscience-stricken train driver presented a picture on television of anything but a dangerous criminal; yet he was escorted into court handcuffed as if he were a terrorist who might at any moment run amok. Somehow his treatment reminded me of my own interrogations when I was forced to sit bolt upright for hours and was commanded to look at the prison clothes I was wearing as if the sight of them would humiliate me and break my spirit.

Perhaps my complaint was unjustified. I made it because I believed that a socialist society should set an example of humaneness to the whole world. These high expectations of socialism have made me sad and at times bitter about official pronouncements on "the superiority of the social system", in the face of rampant corruption, inefficiency, racial discrimination and male chauvinism. Of course these evils exist in highly developed countries and often on a larger scale. But I had overestimated China's progress - which is great - and underestimated the

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

achievements and resiliency of the capitalist system. Marx and Engels made no mistake on the former though they did perhaps on the latter. In any case I myself have been relieved by the C.C.P.'s recent formulation that China is in "the initial stage of socialism". That matches what I have long said in argument with opponents of socialism. That system is in its infancy, world capitalism is mature. The infant will grow up and overtake the adult. For the time being, despite its achievements, in some respects it cannot compete.

My letters throughout the '80s reflected an increasingly critical attitude towards various aspects of Chinese society, including sportsmanship - or the lack of it.

November 21, 1981

I was delighted to hear a Chinese speaker on the radio yesterday acknowledge that China's women's volleyball team had learnt much from the Japanese players. This is in the spirit of Zhou En-lai's "Friendship first, competition second" - which seems to be forgotten by many people to-day. Some people even oppose it. I think there is no contradiction between that principle and going all out to win...

Sportsmanship is being displaced by hooliganism and vandalism in many countries these days, including alas my own. China as a socialist, Third World country has the opportunity and the duty to set an example of sportsmanship for the whole world. Instead she seems to be in danger of succumbing to jingoism. That was the impression created by China's TV-Radio commentator at the volley-ball games in China. Many of my friends, both Chinese and foreign, were turned off by him.

China's athletes could never have achieved such fine results without the higher living standards and improved sports facilities achieved since 1949. That is something to be proud of. So is Zhou En-lai's "Friendship first, competition second." Strengthening it will raise China's prestige still higher.

Some readers and writers ridiculed my plea to put friendship first as naive, out of touch with the facts of modern life. But I stuck to my naivete even after seeing a sharply satirical play condemning corruption. And on December 26, 1981 the following letter of mine appeared in the China Daily:

It was painful to see a play ("Who is the stronger") which so vividly presents the facts of Chinese life to-day; the corruption - the widespread use of clout, connections, back-doorism - which negates the best traditions of the Chinese people, the Chinese revolution and the Chinese Communist Party. But the play also shows hatred of this corruption and struggle against it. And the ending, though in some ways inconclusive - as it must be at this stage of Chinese history - also expresses optimism.

That such plays can be written and ...performed means that among the Chinese people and their leaders there are those who are prepared to struggle. Not just against corruption and for restoration of the fine old traditions ... So long as this struggle is waged - on the stage and off

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

it - all of us, Chinese and foreigners alike, who are saddened by the widespread selfishness and cynicism can maintain our faith in China

My faith did remain. But by 1984 I was becoming angry at the disregard of socialist values in another field: the purchase of foreign films for showing in China. Here is the first of a series of letters (not all of them published) on the subject of films:

September 1984

The sound track (in English) of the film "Chariot of the Gods", recently shown at this Institute, is a dangerous piece of pseudo-scientific nonsense and a denial of the achievements of ancient civilizations.

This joint German-Australian production shows magnificent scenes of the pyramids and palaces of ancient Egypt, the superb stonework of ancient Zimbabwe, the medieval art and architecture of the Mayas, Aztecs and Incas in Mexico and South America, the strange statues of Easter Island and other wonders of the world. The commentator raises significant questions as to how, hundreds and thousands of years ago, without advanced science and technology these miracles could have been achieved. All this is fascinating.

But the solutions suggested are a load of rubbish, if not a calculated hoax. These wonders, it is maintained, were beyond the ability of the Egyptians, Zimbabweans, Mayas, Aztecs, Incas, Easter Islanders and others, so they must have been accomplished by beings from outer space! By E.T.!

I do not suggest throwing out the baby with the bathwater, for the film has artistic merit and historical interest. But such nonsensical, anti-scientific commentary should not be allowed to pass uncondemned in a socialist country, for it poisons the minds even of college graduates. Our failure to cultivate the habit of analysis in place of reliance on authority is to blame for this.

I suggest that the Chinese Academy of Sciences assemble a team of scientists, historians, archaeologists, architects and others to study the film and compile a commentary which would realistically explain these ancient achievements. This would refute the dangerous implications of the existing commentary. At the same time it would educate people in history and cultivate the capacity for critical analysis, which is the primary task of education.

My next movie diatribe was an attack on "Rambo, First Blood", published September 21, 1985 under the headline: Why Does China Import Trashy Films?

The film "First Blood", now being shown in China, has been a box-office success in the USA. It has also been denounced there as brutal, fascistic... Some Americans in Beijing, from tourists to teachers, were amazed and horrified to learn that it was being shown in China. It will doubtless provoke equally varied responses among Chinese people.

Rambo, the hero, is a veteran of the American invasion of Viet Nam; the villains are the sheriff and police force of a small town in USA.

Rambo returns to the US from Viet Nam, where he killed so many Vietnamese that he has won the title of combat hero. He goes to the poor, rural home of his black buddy, to find that

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

he is dead. So are the rest of his wartime pals. He is dazed by the death of his friends and his mind has already been affected by the horrors of the war, and the fact that his side did not win.

Leaving his black buddy's home town Rambo is picked up by the sheriff and detained as a vagrant... Rambo refuses to identify himself or answer any of the policeman's questions. So they brutally beat him up.

He is outraged and despite the odds against him he breaks loose and escapes in a hair-raising ride on a stolen motor-bike. The police, led by the sheriff, pursue him into the woods. The police not only fail to capture Rambo but suffer heavy losses.

Effect

Finally Rambo's wartime commanding officer, a humane and gentlemanly colonel tries to persuade the sheriff to call off the pursuit and let Rambo go free. Rambo daringly hijacks an army truck loaded with machine-guns, crashes his way back into the town, sets the sheriff's office on fire, wounds the sheriff himself and leaves a trail of death and destruction. Finally the sympathetic colonel persuades Rambo to give himself up.

What will be the effect of showing "First Blood" in China? I do not favour narrow-minded, dogmatic censorship. On the contrary, I agree with Mao Zedong's statement: "It is a dangerous policy to prohibit people from coming into contact with the false, the ugly, and the hostile... It will lead to mental deterioration, one-track minds and unpreparedness to face the world and meet its challenges."

"First Blood" does reveal some of the ugliness of life in "advanced" countries which China needs to see in order to avoid it as she herself advances. But to show such a film, especially to children, who formed a fair proportion of the audience when I saw the film, involves heavy responsibilities...

Explanation

Why should it be shown in China then, without explanation or organized discussion? True, the people should and can learn to think and speak for themselves, not wait passively to be told what to think and say. But to think and speak clearly they need knowledge of the facts of history. For this, young people especially need help. They should not face such bloody stuff without mental preparation.

The showing of "First Blood" is one more example of buying and showing foreign films which many foreigners and Chinese consider cheap, vulgar and trashy. The list of such films purchased in the last few years is long. The chief criteria seem to have been low cost and no overt sex. But foreign countries, like China, have made many fine films over the years. Why not buy them? One of them, incidently is another American film about the Viet Nam war: "Coming Home", starring Jane Fonda. True, like life itself, it contains a little sex: perhaps that is why it was not bought. But it is a moving, mature and intelligent movie, which throws more light on the effect on Americans of the invasion of Viet Nam than the fantastic feats of Rambo in "First Blood".

That is what was published, but parts of my ms had been cut. Some of the cuts were legitimate sub-editing for the sake of brevity; others were politically based. For example:

(What will be the effect of showing "First Blood" in China) where 17 criminals have just been

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

executed for murder, robbery, rape and other crimes of violence. Will this film give such people the idea that unbridled violence is heroic?

This was a touchy topic for Chinese executions had provoked harsh criticism abroad by opponents of capital punishment. I myself was not an absolute opponent of it. I agreed with Mao's statement that there should be as few killings as possible because once a head has been chopped off it cannot be put on again in the event of a mistake having been made. But I disagreed with those who maintained that capital punishment was never a deterrent. In China apparently it was, for according to official figures it drastically reduced the rate of crimes of violence. Whatever the case the China Daily evidently did not want to focus attention on the controversy. Also cut were my last two paragraphs, which ran:

This film has made so much money that a sequel has already been produced. I hope it will not be shown in China.. Above all, to-day, when Viet Nam has changed from being the victim of invasion into an invader, showing a sequel to "First Blood" would spell failure to distinguish between just and unjust wars.

Six decades ago Lenin spoke of the educational potential of the cinema in socialist society. Socialist China will surely heed his words. The way to do this, I think, is not by the crude method of censorship but through cultivation of the critical faculties of the people - and the film buyers.

Why were these paragraphs cut? Simply for the sake of saving space?... I do not know. But readers wrote follow-up letters. Westerners sided with me but some Chinese seemed to see Rambo as a Robin Hood type of character. One of them wrote:

To some Chinese there is a similarity between Rambo and Lin Chong one of the traditionally respected rebels in the Chinese classic novel Water Margin by Shi Nai'an. Both are pushed into a corner...Rambo by a fault-finding ...sheriff and Lin Chong by the arrogant son of a Song Dynasty minister. They both fight single-handedly against the odds. Their successful fights, usually involving violence and blood are surprisingly appreciated by the ordinary Chinese because they disdain the powerful bullying of the weak, the bureaucrat persecuting the commoner and the rich oppressing the drifter.

Thus...Rambo becomes a hero in the eyes of the audience who...only remember Rambo fighting off the heavily armed National Guards...many, particularly the young, don't even hit upon the idea that Rambo has killed so many Vietnamese that he has won the title of combat hero from the American Government...

Well, apparently after nearly 40 years in China I still had much to learn about the thinking of the people

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

around me, including the writer who was one of my students. I was happy to learn from him.

A couple of years later a film forum was arranged for foreign experts at the Friendship Hotel, attended by movie stars and directors. One of the latter, at the end of it, came up and shook my hand, thanking me for alerting Chinese film distributors to the undesirability of showing "Rambo". But that was not the end of the affair. Some time later I was surprised to see on the hotel notice-board an announcement that next Friday evening's film was - "Rambo". He was dead but would not lie down. I sounded out a number of foreign experts. The Germans, especially, were outraged, saying that the film had provoked hostile demonstrations in their country. So I went to the hotel management. Not wishing to throw my weight around I politely pointed out that if the film were shown they could at least expect a negative response from the westerners who constituted a majority of the audience; probably a boycott, possibly a demonstration. The notice was taken down and another, innocuous film substituted.

But the individual hero Rambo had his collective successors on the screen - "The Wild Goose Commanders". So I was moved to write again to the China Daily which on November 4, 1986 published the following letter:

The Wild Goose Commanders has been publicly billed as an anti-Fascist film. It is not. It is a Fascist film with sugar-coating. For China to buy and show such stuff makes a mockery of "spiritual civilization". The "heroes" are mercenaries, killing for money. Their victims are black Africans, who are portrayed with racist arrogance as inferior to the whites who mow them down, each one of the whites being capable of dealing with dozens of blacks. True, the whites have the most modern weapons, including napalm and poison gas, which internationally is outlawed but bravely used by the mercenary "heroes". The black "villains" are identified by the presence of Cubans and Soviet advisers as soldiers of Angola or Mozambique... The sugar-coating consists of a few "good" token blacks of the Uncle Tom type and a few bad whites - financiers who hire the mercenaries and then betray them (thus making the mercenaries innocent victims) and who buy up African politicians.

The film as a whole reeks of brutal Fascist ideology. Its violence, depicted at length and in gruesome detail, is revolting. Since I started seeing films some 70 years ago I have never seen so much blood spilt on the screen.

What effect will this glorification of violence have on the minds of Chinese youth, on whom the government and the Party are calling to abide by the law?

Some people may argue that bloody violence is a fact of life in this day and age, and that art should be true to life. But if violence is to be condoned on the screen of a socialist society, should it not be revolutionary violence? Even then, need there be so many horrifying close-ups of it? Is that not sinking to the level of the capitalist box-office and vulgar sensationalism?

What is the excuse for showing this film? Is it the all-star cast or the excellent

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

photography? Did not Chairman Mao point out that the higher the artistic quality of a reactionary work, the more poisonous it is?...

China has made many great films since Liberation and quite a few before. Many of these have not been released because of bureaucratic obstruction. The foreign cinema, too, has made and is making some excellent films.

So why show such Fascist filth as the "Wild Goose" - especially at the Friendship Hotel, where I have just seen it? That cinema should show the world, through its international audience, the best Chinese and foreign films, not reactionary rubbish like "The Wild Goose Commandoes".

That is a sampling of my letters to the China Daily during the '80s. During roughly the same period I also had letters published abroad. The topics ranged from U.S. foreign policy (in the left-wing National Guardian) to the 50th anniversary of the International Brigades (in the New York Times); and in Britain from an exchange with John Gittings (in the Guardian) to refutation of slanderous allegations against Michael Shapiro and myself (in the Daily Telegraph). But it was an interview by the Chinese language People's Daily, in October 1977, which expressed something of my thoughts and feelings about China Britain and the relations between them. It was occasioned by the visit of the then Chinese Premier Hua Guo-feng's coming visit to Britain. Here are some extracts:

- Q. Mr Crook, how do you as an Englishman feel about Premier Hua Guo-feng's coming visit to your country?
- A. I think it's a fine thing. Although I'm English I've spent over 30 of my nearly 70 years in China, so I feel drawn to both the Chinese and the British people and I feel this visit will draw them closer to each other. I think this is going to be a visit of a new kind.
- Q. New in what way?
- A. Well, there are visits and visits. Not all the British visitors to China in the century before Liberation were friendly.
- Q. Which visitors do you have in mind?
- A. Those who came to sell opium, to suppress the Taipings and the Boxers and so on, right up to 1949. But since then Sino-British relations have changed for the better. And now finally the Chinese Prime Minister has been invited to Britain.
- Q. What do you think of the news that Premier Hua is to meet the British Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher and the Queen?
- A. Oh, I think that's normal and natural. Still, there are more important people for the Chinese Premier to meet.
- Q. Who are they?
- A. The man and woman in the street. Judging by his record of close contact with the Chinese people, the Chinese Premier would get along well with ordinary British people. The question is, will he be allowed to meet them? If he is, I think they'll like each other.
- Q. Do you think he'll get along equally well with all sorts of people?
- A. No. At least I hope not. We've got our share of China-haters in Britain. But they're a tiny

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

minority. The overwhelming majority of British people, I think, have quite a friendly attitude towards China

Q. So you don't foresee any problems?

A. I wouldn't go that far. Most British people don't regard relations with China as vitally important. You see, although British people are quite friendly to China they are not necessarily well-informed about it. And some may unintentionally say or do something which the Chinese visitors may not be too happy about.

Q. Such as?

A. One of our Chinese teachers while studying in England a few years ago was asked: "Which China are you from?" She answered "There's only one China in the world" and walked away in a huff. Now the English student who had asked the question did so in all innocence. He knew little about the People's Government's stand on the Taiwan issue. He was not malicious or hostile. He was friendly but uninformed. A patient explanation would probably have made him still more friendly. I think there are a lot of people in Britain like that.

Q. And what about us Chinese? Do you think we are better informed about Britain than they are about China?

A. Maybe not...So I'd like to offer a word of warning about a danger you'll have to face in Britain.

Q. A danger? What's that?

A. The British sense of humour. Many Americans think we have no sense of humour. But we think we have one and it would be terrible to be without it. I'm not so sure myself. Maybe if we didn't see the funny side of the most terrible conditions we wouldn't put up with them the way we do. We'd change things... Anyway, I warn you, when in Britain, don't take every word seriously. Be on the lookout for jokes told with a straight face.

Q. Shall we end on that note of warning?

I returned to the topic of Sino-British relations several years later in a letter to the British right-wing newspaper the Daily Telegraph. On October 4, 1986 the Telegraph had published an obituary on Michael Shapiro, under the headline: "Peking Death of 'Odious Briton'" My attention was drawn to this by a friend because it took a sideswipe at me, stating:

"It was suggested that Shapiro and his fellow British detainees (i.e. during the cultural revolution, D.C.) David Crook and Elsie Epstein might have been involved in sacking the British mission Peking in 1967."

Apart from defending myself I felt it necessary to take up broader issues. Here is my letter in full, twice as long as the edited and truncated version published in the Telegraph under the mild heading "Unfounded Suggestion".

The Editor

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

Daily Telegraph
London

Sir,

"Replete with inaccuracies and unwarranted innuendoes" would be an apt description of Hugh Montgomery Massingberd's article in the Daily Telegraph. (Oct.4, 1986)

Coming around the time of Queen Elizabeth's state visit to China and following the satisfactory solution of the Hong Kong problem - which have brought Sino-British relations to an all-time high, the article is all the more unworthy of the Daily Telegraph, with whose politics I disagree but which I have long regarded as a reliable source of information.

"It was suggested" reads Mr. Massingberd's article, "that Shapiro and his fellow British detainees, David Crook and Elsie Epstein (nee Fairfax Cholmley, D.C.) might have been involved in sacking the British mission in Peking in 1967."

Is the Daily Telegraph not aware that the British, Foreign Office (correctly, to the best of my knowledge) stated in 1971 that as far as it knew no non-Chinese took part in the burning of the British Embassy Chancellery; and that the British Embassy itself subsequently specified that no Britons took part. I most certainly did not. In fact I associated myself with Premier Zhou En-lai's denunciation of the act.

In the interests of Sino-British relations and of its own reputation the Daily Telegraph would do well to disavow Mr Massingberd's unfortunate contribution.

Yours etc.

David Crook

(Professor Emeritus and Advisor to Beijing Foreign Studies University)

In the '70s and '80s I had other, less polemical letters published in the foreign press including the British Guardian, the U.S. National Guardian on China's foreign policy and the cultural revolution. And on November 15, 1986 the New York Times saw fit to print the following:

Other English Speakers In Spain's Good Fight

To the Editor:

As an Englishman who fought in the International Brigades in "that valley in Spain called Jarama," I welcome your article (Oct. 19) on the 50th-anniversary return to Spain of the Lincoln Brigade, who fought the good fight. But, also as an Englishman, I take exception to the phrase "the Lincoln Brigade, the English-speaking contingent in the International Brigades."

We in the British Battalion also spoke English. And the Lincolns were not a brigade but a battalion of the 15th Brigade of the Spanish People's Army - along with the Garibaldi's of Italy, the Dimitrovs of Eastern Europe, the Franco-Belge, the Thalmanns of Germany, we Brits and many other nationalities.

I write with malice toward none - except those who have said that we "premature antifascists" "fought on the wrong side." (By that logic, the United States in World War II should have fought under the swastika.) I have taught my Chinese students extracts from The

HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)

Volunteers by Steve Nelson, whom you mention as "commander of the 120 returning American veterans."

It is indeed regrettable that there is no memorial in the U.S. to the men of the Lincoln Battalion. I hope some of your readers and others will see to it that this wrong is righted. I will be happy to subscribe. There is, incidentally, a memorial statue to members of the British Battalion on the south bank of the Thames, near Country Hall, London.

David Crook
Peking, Nov. 3, 1986

But my latest letter (January, 1989) was to my old friend the China Daily, which has, understandably, not considered it fit to print. It is on a subject of unavoidable and lifelong concern to me: race and racism.

Chinese government policy on race is exemplary. But that does not mean that racism can be "ruled out as an issue" in the recent campus clash between Chinese and Africans, as to-day's China Daily maintains.

Policy does not always match practice. It may be more of a guide and a goal than a reality.

Can it be maintained that Chinese society is free from racism? No other country is, so far as I know. Mao Ze-dong - whom it is no longer fashionable to quote - said in the '50s that Han chauvinism existed "to a serious degree among Party members and cadres." Such ideas are a product of history and may take an historical epoch to disappear.

When teaching African history, hoping to provoke debate I set as a topic for discussion "Black is Beautiful." Not one student agreed. The male students acknowledged that they considered pale-skinned (Chinese) girls more beautiful and would prefer them as wives. So I was not surprised to see young Chinese women climbing Mount Emei carrying parasols to protect their complexions from the summer sun.

On the other hand, when we showed the American movie "Roots" many students said it had made them admire and sympathise with the Blacks and in a way find them beautiful. So views can be changed. But it takes education.

Meanwhile of course the Chinese government must deal with offenders according to Chinese law regardless of race. That is clearly what it is doing. But it is best to "seek truth from facts," not to deny them.

And what should I, not a citizen but at least a friend of China, do about all the controversial matters touched on in my Letters to the Editor and others. Why did I write them? To see my name in print, to grind axes - or to try in my small way to help right wrongs? I believe it was mainly the latter. I hope so. But it's a wise man who knows his own motives. Whatever the case the letters reflect my thinking in recent years - specifically that China has not advanced as far and as fast towards socialism as I had naively hoped she would; that building a socialist society in the world's most populous land is beset with immense difficulties and human error, that in the course of socialist modernization there lies the danger, perhaps the inevitability of capitalist modernization and

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

that feudalism was not destroyed by the victory of the revolution in 1949. Perhaps Mao Ze-dong's greatest mistake - and great men make great mistakes - was his singling out of capitalism as the main enemy instead of focusing first on feudalism. As my awareness of Mao's humanity - that is his proneness to human error - gradually displaced my earlier adoration - I have become increasingly critical of feudal aspects of this self-professed socialist society to which I feel willy-nilly committed. At the same time I have held on, though not blindly, to a more or less orthodox attitude towards socialism. But not to the evils of Stalinism. All this is reflected in my letters to the press starting in 1980.