

Loewenberg, P. (2011). Matteo Ricci, Psychoanalysis, and Face in Chinese Culture and Diplomacy. *Am. Imago*, 68(4):689-706.



(2011). *American Imago*, 68(4):689-706

## Matteo Ricci, Psychoanalysis, and Face in Chinese Culture and Diplomacy

Peter Loewenberg<sup>①</sup>

Intolerance of minor insults will ruin great projects.

—*Analects of Confucius*

The past is never dead. It's not even past ... The present, you know, began 10,000 years ago, but the past began one minute ago.

—William Faulkner

How to penetrate the covert level of an alien culture is still one of the most difficult problems which confront the investigator. Since most of any society's attitudes operate at the unconscious level, they can rarely be ascertained by direct questioning ... The investigator ... must be able to perceive the emotional context of situations and to understand much that is left unsaid.

—Ralph Linton

## Carl Schorske, Matteo Ricci, and Psychoanalysis in China

When I told Carl Schorske of beginning my work teaching psychoanalysis in China, he said: "It occurs to me that western scholars like you seem to walk in the footsteps of the Jesuit fathers of the late sixteenth century who brought western science to the Celestial Empire. (One of them served, I seem to remember, as Astronomer Royal) ... To think that you will educate the Chinese analysts! I wonder what my good friend Joseph Levinson [I took two of Levinson's courses on China as a graduate student. PL] would have said to that turn in the Confucian tradition ..." (personal communications, April 30 and December 28, 2007). With his unflinching sense of

---

An earlier version of this essay was presented to the IPA Asian Centenary Congress, Beijing. October 22-24. 2010.

- 689 -

the dialectical irony between orthodoxy and adaptation and wonderful historical resonance, Carl with assurance pointed to Father Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and the early Jesuits as relevant forerunners and precedents for the current work of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) China Committee.

Ricci authored the first Chinese-Portuguese dictionary; he founded the Jesuit houses in Nan-ch'ang, Shao-chow, Shanghai, Nanking and Peking. His policy was to adapt to the special conditions of the country and avoid unnecessary attacks on traditional Chinese customs and habits. He was sensitive to issues of *face*, urging missionaries to avoid anything that "clashed with Chinese pride, which would not admit that China had anything to learn from foreigners." Personally, he chose to dress as a mandarin. He encouraged a broad toleration of rites and ceremonies in honor of family ancestors and Confucius.

These practices resulted in controversies with the Dominicans and Franciscans and appeals to the Holy See leading to the Sacred Congregation of the Inquisition condemning toleration of the ancestral rites. Ricci's writings were censured for "too favorable references to the ancient Chinese philosophers." Ricci was found to be "in error" by the Papal Bull "*Ex quo singulari*" (1742) of Pope Clement XII. Christians were forbidden to participate or assist in "sacrifices or solemn oblations" in honor of Confucius or the dead (Brucker, 1912).

Ricci stressed the necessary mutual identification and adaptation in foreign work when he wrote about his friend Feng Yinging, a civic official and scholar who was imprisoned in Beijing, "he treated the affairs of our fathers as if they were his own and our fathers in turn treated his as if they were ours."<sup>1</sup> Carl has a special capacity for human empathy that would have endeared him to Matteo Ricci.

## Face in Chinese Culture

We in the West have much to learn from China in the important realms of interpersonal relations and public tact and sensibility. The concept of *face*, wrote Lin Yutang (1939): “abstract and intangible, it is yet the most delicate standard by

- 690 -

which Chinese social intercourse is regulated ... it is prized above all earthly possessions. It is more powerful than fate and favor, and more respected than the constitution” (p. 200). *Face* is an ancient Chinese concept of protocol and social behavior that is relevant for the understanding of Chinese perceptions of each other, of interaction with foreigners, and of foreign policy and international behavior. By *face* in Chinese culture I mean the self as presented to, or revealed to, others. Chinese culture has a highly developed sensibility to preserving, not humiliating the *face* of others. *Face*, may be conferred, saved, or lost. A person or group may “save” or “leave” *face* to another by not exposing a lapse, slip, or *faux pas*. *Face*, which is an external surface quality visible to others, implies reputation and good name. Erving Goffman (1955) defines “*face work*” as “actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face” (p. 216). *Face* is dramaturgy as a social construct: “It is the rules of the group and the definition of the situation which determine how much feeling one is to have for face and how this feeling is to be distributed among the faces involved” (p. 213). Martin C. Yang (1945) writes: “Face is really a psychological satisfaction, a social esteem accorded by others” (p. 167). To lose *face*, in Mandarin Chinese *diu lian*, means to be disgraced, humiliated, to lose one's credit, good name, or reputation, to be made to feel embarrassment before a group. Therefore, the restoration of *face* must be in public. *Face* may be given and even asked for, as in: “Please stop it and give me a little face, will you?” Or, “Please help me; it is a matter of face” (p. 171).

*Face* may be presented as a gift. I give an example from my personal experience. I represent the IPA China Committee, an international group of psychoanalysts experienced in mental health education, with a background of 20 years of intensive courses in psychodynamic psychotherapy in China, who have trained Chinese mental health professionals in full psychoanalytic training since 2008.<sup>2</sup> Carl Schorske's analogy to Jesuits bringing to China a Western system of thought is appropriately stimulating of irony and self-reflection.

We wished to hold a conference in China in 2010. I wrote to a distinguished leader in Chinese mental health, who was herself sponsoring a major Congress in 2009, requesting her interest and support for our project. Her response was: “I think

- 691 -

if we decide to hold an ‘Asian Psychoanalytic Conference’ in 2010, 2009's conference can be a pre-conference” (personal communication, December 23, 2008). A Westerner would have queried: “What is your budget?” “How much money do you have?” “Which ‘stars’ do you plan to invite?” By contrast, this Chinese eminence subordinated her Congress to our yet unplanned potential conference, thus creating *face* and graciously bestowing its gift on us, the newcomers to the scene.

The first linguistic use of the concept may be traced as far back as the Warring States Period (475-200 BCE), when a king in one of the warring kingdoms swore never to see his mother “on the face of the Earth” because she had betrayed him in favor of his brother. However, it would be a disgrace for a Chinese never to see his mother. Therefore to circumvent his oath, the King dug a tunnel between his palace and that of his mother, so that he could still visit with her, though not “on the face of the Earth.”

A famous saga in Chinese history, still regularly enacted in Chinese operas, was recorded by a historian of the Western Han Dynasty (100 BCE). The Emperor Shihuangdi unified China around 200 BCE, but died soon thereafter. Two leaders contested for his empire. One was Liu Bang, a lowly district administrator. The other was Xiang Yu, a warrior of noble lineage. Their two armies fought fierce battles in North China between the Yellow and the Yangtze Rivers. Notwithstanding early impressive victories, Xiang Yu was defeated and left with only a few of his followers. He could have returned to his native stronghold south of the River (an area described at that time as the land “East of the River”). However, according to the “Grand Historian” Sima Qian (ca. 145-ca.89 BCE), he was humiliated and would not have “face” to meet with his people. He chose instead to commit suicide by his own sword (*Shi Ji* 7).<sup>3</sup>

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of the English Language* (2nd ed.), the term *face* was first used in the English language by the English community in China in 1876, referring to the behavioral modes of the Chinese to avoid incurring or inflicting embarrassment, disgrace or humiliation. An example of Western perceptions of *face* in interactions with Chinese is a description at the end of the nineteenth century by American diplomat and Presbyterian minister Chester Holcombe (1842-1912):

- 692 -

Among the Chinese, etiquette may almost be said to take precedence of morality in importance. So far as rigid adherence to outward forms may go, as a nation they excel all others in the art of politeness (1895, p. 261).

Much of the falsehood to which the Chinese as a nation are said to be addicted is a result of the demands of etiquette. A plain, frank “no” is the height of discourtesy. Refusal or denial of any sort must be softened and toned down into an expression of regretted inability. Unwillingness to grant a favor is never shown. In place of it there is seen a chastened feeling of sorrow that unavoidable but quite imaginary circumstances render it wholly impossible. Centuries of practice in this form of evasion have made the Chinese matchlessly fertile in the invention and development of excuses. It is rare, indeed, that one is caught at a loss for a bit of artfully embroidered fiction with which to hide an unwelcome truth. The same remark holds good in regard to all manner of disagreeable subjects of conversation. They must be avoided. Any number of winding paths may be made around them, but none must ever go directly through (pp. 274-276).

### Contra-face: Humiliation

Psychoanalysts and cultural historians penetrate appearances and explore dialectically the hidden meanings of the manifest surface. The other side, the dark side, of an acute cultural sensibility to *face* is a high cultivation of the strategies of disgrace and humiliation destroying *face*. Alf Gerlach (2010) has referred to the “enormous sadism marking the public humiliation” (p. 158). In fortunate cases, significant others will respond to public shaming by affirmations of love and worth.

I would like here to draw on Yu Hua's great contemporary Chinese novel, *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* (2003).<sup>4</sup> Yu describes the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) as it struck a typical Chinese family. One day posters appeared on the street denouncing Xu Yulan, wife of Xu Sanguan and the mother of three boys, as a “broken shoe, a shameless tramp,” a prostitute since age fifteen;

- 693 -

“you could sleep with her for just two *yuan* a night ... the men she had slept with would fill up ten whole trucks” (p. 165). In short order half of her hair is shaved off *yin yang* fashion in a “struggle session.” She is so shamed she feels “it would be better to die” (p. 167). She is made to stand on a stool all day in the busiest part of the shopping street with a sign around her neck reading XU YULAN PROSTITUTE.<sup>5</sup> Her feet swell and her legs ache. “She had to stand with her head bowed in front of her, because criminals were expected to bow their heads in just such a manner” (p. 168). The family is required to have “struggle sessions” of denunciation at home in which she says, “I know you all hate me. You've lost a lot of face because of me” (p. 177).

Her sons are intimidated and refuse to bring her food. Her husband's loyalty alone sustains her. He packs plain rice “without any extras” into a little aluminum lunch box, but worries that he would be seen as “shielding the enemy.” At the bottom of the lunchbox he hid red braised pork he cooked for her. When no one is listening he whispers to her: “I made it for you in secret. Even the kids don't know. I hid the good stuff under the rice. No one's looking now. Have a bite” (p. 172).

The cruel sadism of her public humiliation brings forth loving tenderness of Xu Yulan for her husband. In one of the most moving expressions of mature love in literature, she tells him:

When my feet are swollen, you pour a basin of hot water for me to soak them in. When I come home late, you've kept some dinner under the quilt because you were afraid it would get cold. When I'm standing out there in the street, you're the one who brings me things to eat and water to drink. Xu Sanguan, as long as you're good to me, I'm not afraid of anything in the world (p. 169).

Freud (1907 [1906]) said: “The healing power of love against a delusion is not to be despised (p. 22).”

- 694 -

### Self Psychology

“Face” has correlations to the psychoanalytic understandings of self-esteem and narcissism of Heinz Kohut (1923-1981). Self-esteem and self-cohesion are the central paradigms of the therapeutic clinical theories of self-psychology. Kohut (1971) singled out the painful events in childhood when “the child's legitimate claim for the approving attention of the grownups had not been responded to, but in which the child had been belittled and ridiculed at the very moment when he most proudly had wanted to display himself” (p. 232). People with narcissistic vulnerability seek external supplies of

self-confirmation, praise, and emotional supplies from their environment. They are hypersensitive to criticism, to any fantasied or perceived lack of interest, or absence of praise, from those who are viewed as peers or authorities.

When these ideas are applied to the historical experience of the last 150 years, we can understand the Chinese reaction to insults, defeats and humiliations as rage at not receiving appropriate respect—a rage that can only be acquitted by revenge, by reversing the shame, and publically defeating and humbling the Western imperialists. There is a compelling need to wipe out and reverse the low self-esteem by control of Chinese territories and borders and the demand for foreign recognition of Chinese strength, importance, and uniqueness. Feelings of past humiliation can cause a hypersensitivity to perceived real or imagined slights and the need to turn a painful passive experience into an active sense of mastery and superiority (Kohut, 1972).

I wish to elaborate on the appropriateness of applying clinical diagnostic categories to groups. History and psychoanalysis are sciences that use what Max Weber (1958) termed “theoretically constructed” or “ideal” types (p. 323)—models that are abstracted from reality and therefore may illuminate other realities. Said Weber: “They enable us to see if, in particular traits or in their total character, the phenomena approximate one of our constructions: to determine the degree of approximation of the historical phenomenon to the theoretically constructed type” (p. 324). Thus, if various clinical categories throw

- 695 -

light on cultural conduct and interaction, as I believe Kohut's self-psychology does on the cultural uses of *face*, it moves our understanding further to use the explanatory models or ideal types of related disciplines, especially in matters of emotions and behavior.

## Modern Historical Traumas and Chinese Self-Esteem

Beyond the fact that the Chinese experienced traumas in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century when China was invaded and partially occupied by the Western powers and Japan, there is a deeper historical background or origin that is important. Chinese culture has a long and distinguished history. When China was occupied and even ruled by foreigners, Mongol and Manchu, its culture developed mainly in the Central Plains and was not changed by the invaders. On the contrary, the Chinese cultivated and assimilated them, though they had their own languages and cultural tradition. The Chinese, especially the Han aristocrats, considered themselves as superior to others, often seeing foreigners who had not benefitted from Chinese culture as “savages” or “barbarians.” China's original name is composed of two characters “*zhong guo*,” meaning the “Central Kingdom (or country).” The Chinese regarded themselves as the center of the world, thus developing in their unconscious a compensatory self-importance and arrogance about themselves. When they confronted the advanced Western steel gunboats and firearms and were defeated by the “uncultivated savages,” they experienced painful feelings of loss-of-*face* and the trauma of humiliation.<sup>6</sup>

The sequence of humiliating traumas of foreign incursion and exploitation of China by the Western powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries included the Opium War in 1839, which ended with the ceding of Hong Kong to Britain in 1841. The first American treaty with China, the Treaty of Wanghsia of 1844, signed by the Imperial Commissioner Ch'ying and Caleb Cushing for the United States, placed American residents under extra-territorial civil and criminal jurisdiction of consular and mixed courts.

- 696 -

During the Second Opium War Anglo-French Forces invaded China in 1860, and occupied Beijing. The Old Summer Palace in a northwestern suburb of Beijing consisted of many beautiful buildings that held 3,500 years of cultural treasures spread out over many lakes and gardens. The English Minister Plenipotentiary, Lord Elgin, of Parthenon marble fame, ordered the palace sacked and burned. It was burned down after being on fire for three successive days and nights. When the Eight-Power Allied Forces again invaded Beijing during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 they plundered and set the 13 buildings that remained standing on fire. Not all Westerners approved of this culture-destroying vandalism. The ever-compassionate Victor Hugo wrote a parable:

One day two bandits entered the Summer Palace. One plundered, the other burned. Victory can be a thieving woman, or so it seems. The devastation of the Summer Palace was accomplished by the two victors acting jointly ... All the treasures of all our cathedrals put together could not equal this formidable and splendid museum of the Orient. It contained not only masterpieces of art, but masses of jewelry. What a great exploit, what a windfall! One of the two victors filled his pockets; when the other saw this he filled his coffers. And back they came to Europe, arm in arm, laughing away. Such is the story of the two bandits. We Europeans are the civilized ones, and for us, the Chinese are the barbarians. This is what

civilization has done to barbarism. Before history, one of the two bandits will be called France; the other will be called England.<sup>7</sup>

The mission of British General Charles George Gordon (1833-1885)—known as “Chinese” Gordon—to Beijing in 1880 was an egregious example of European arrogance that showed no sensitivity to Chinese *face*. According to Lytton Strachey (1918), in an interview with the Chinese ministers Gordon used a tone and language “such that the interpreter shook with terror, upset a cup of tea, and finally refused to translate the dreadful words; upon which Gordon snatched up a dictionary, and, with his finger on the word ‘idiocy,’ showed it to the

- 697 -

startled Mandarins” (p. 188). The 1894-1895 *Jiawu* War with Japan and the concluding 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki (which ceded Formosa, the Pescadores Islands, and the Liaotung Peninsula to Japan, recognized the full independence of Korea, and included a large cash indemnity to Japan) is regarded in a culturally China-centered East Asia as an inferior former “student” striking the “teacher”—an extraordinary public humiliation (Gries, pp. 70-72).<sup>8</sup>

In 1897, Germany occupied Kiaochow Bay and Quingtao, and extracted the exclusive right to build railways and mines in Shandong Province. The Russians extorted a 25-year lease of the southern Liaotung Peninsula, including Dairen and Port Arthur. France received a 99-year lease of Kwangchow Bay and the right to build the Hanoi-Yunnan Railway that was completed in 1910. The Boxer Rebellion (1899-1900) when eight foreign powers sent an international expedition that seized Tientsin and Beijing, ended with humiliating foreign control of maritime and native customs and the salt monopoly. The American “Open Door” policy of 1900 was a U.S. bid not to be excluded from the economic concessions and control of factories, steamships, mines, railways, and political spheres of influence that European powers and Japan were securing in China. To summarize, the contempt, brutality, and indignity that came with foreign interventions and international expeditions, treaty ports, foreign “concessions” on the Chinese coast and up the rivers, “gunboat diplomacy,” control of tariffs and customs, railway and mining concessions to foreign investors, all contributed to a special Chinese sensitivity to the psychological issues of *face* and shame before the world. The 1923 program of Doctor Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) defined the *Sanmin Zhuyi* (Three Principles of the People) as nationalism (*minzu*), democracy (*minquan*), and the People's Livelihood (*minsheng*), representing an early attempt to raise Chinese autonomy and self-esteem. Sun Yat-sen became an acknowledged part of the inspirational historical legacy of both the Kuomintang Nationalist and the Chinese Communist Party.

Among these emotionally charged assaults and insults, undoubtedly the greatest Chinese historical trauma was the humiliation by the Japanese Imperial land, naval, and air invasion, conquest, and occupation of all of eastern China

- 698 -

and a large portion of northern, central and southern China in the years 1931 to 1945. In this period Japan invaded and colonized Manchuria following the Mukden Incident in 1931. The Japanese invasion of Northern and Central China began after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937. Japan eventually held every important strategic objective in China from the industry of Manchuria to Beijing and Shanghai, and the southern ports of Canton and Hong Kong. The weak, incompetent, and corrupt Nationalist government proved incapable of defending Chinese territory. China—an undeveloped, pre-industrial land facing a world-class industrial power—had no air force, no navy, and an under equipped, demoralized, ineffective army. The Kuomintang army was like a sieve through which the Japanese moved in South China in 1944-45. All of Eastern China was open to the Japanese at their will. In their book written during the war, Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby (1980) described the Chinese Army as: “a pulp, a tired, dispirited, unorganized mass, despised by the enemy, alien to its own people, neglected by its government, ridiculed by its allies. No one doubted the courage of the Chinese soldier, but the army had no mobility, no strength, no leadership ... Corruption in the Chinese forces was a cancer at the heart that infected every limb” (pp. 132, 139). They sardonically wrote: “The manners of the Kuomintang in public were perfect; its only faults were that its leadership was corrupt, its secret police merciless, its promises lies, and its daily diet the blood and tears of the people of China” (p. 256).

On October 1, 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong in Beijing's Tian An Men Square proclaimed the People's Republic saying: “The Chinese people have stood up!” (*Zhong guo Renmin Zhan Qi Lai!*). He was “repairing” centuries of hurt and shame. Now China had arisen and stood as an equal before the peoples and nations of the world. The new Chinese national anthem was:

Stand Up! Stand Up!  
Not willing to be a slave people.  
(*Qi Lai! Qi Lai!*  
*Bu yuan zuo nuli duh renmin.*)<sup>9</sup>

- 699 -

I was in Beijing on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this event in 2009 and witnessed footage of this speech replayed on all TV monitors and media to a euphorically celebrating city.

On the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1950 Chinese entry into the Korean War, to the month only one year after the proclamation of the Peoples' Republic, Xn Yan, of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's National Defense University, said:

It was undoubtedly a great victory that China fought the troops of the US, the strongest power in the world, back to the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. The success ensured a peaceful development environment for China and the Chinese army's international prestige was successfully built through the war ... The New China demonstrated its fighting capacity through participation in the Korean War (*Global Times*, 2010, October 27).

Note that the emphasis is not on any perceived threat to China! The *post hoc* justification and interpretation of the Chinese participation in the Korean War is entirely on China's "prestige" and demonstration of "fighting capacity" to the world—issues of *face* rather than any vital national interest.

## **Face in Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy**

An explicit case of how historical Chinese humiliation was invoked with great force in the present was the May 8, 1999 American bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in which three Chinese were killed.<sup>10</sup> Although President William J. Clinton admitted the bombing was a "tragic mistake" and delivered his "regrets and profound condolences" to the Chinese people, the Chinese press did not publish Clinton's apologies until 11 May. Instead Beijing's *People's Daily* published an editorial entitled "This is not 1899 China:"

This is 1999, not 1899. This is not ... the age when people can barge about in the world just by sending a few gunboats ... It is not the age when the Western powers plundered the Imperial Palace at will, destroyed the

- 700 -

Old Summer Palace, and seized Hong Kong and Macao ... China is a China that has stood up; it is a China that defeated the Japanese fascists; it is a China that had a trial of strength and won victory over the United States on the Korean battleground. The Chinese people are not to be bullied, and China's sovereignty and dignity are not to be violated. The hot blood of people of ideas and integrity who opposed imperialism for over 150 years flows in the veins of the Chinese people. U.S.-led NATO had better remember this.<sup>11</sup>

The Belgrade bombing, in this official Chinese government view, was not an isolated event that may or may not have been intentional. (I agree that hitting the code room of the Embassy makes it a hard sell as an "accident.") Rather, the bombing was specifically cast in the context of the looting and burning of the Old Summer Palace in 1860, the Boxer Rebellion of 1899, and the foreign invasion of Beijing, making this the latest in an historic procession of insulting Western aggressions against China. Demonstrations that amounted to a riot occurred outside the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. Violent demonstrations do not exist in China without government permission. Organized busses brought students in from the universities.<sup>12</sup>

What appeared to the Chinese as another case of aggressive American imperialist bullying came shortly after the Belgrade Embassy bombing. A slow U.S. surveillance plane collided with a Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) J-8II interceptor jet fighter buzzing it over the South China Sea on April 1, 2001. The Chinese jet fighter split in two, killing Wang Wei, the Chinese pilot. The cumbersome U.S. Navy (EP-3E Aries II) aircraft made it safely to an emergency landing on Hainan Island off the South China coast. The landing was without permission because the radio was out. China held the twenty-four American servicemen, including three women, for eleven days while the U.S. surveillance plane was stripped. Chinese military officials boarded the grounded U.S. plane and removed equipment from it despite U.S. protests. The Chinese held the plane for three months, after which it was disassembled and the pieces were flown back to the U.S.

- 701 -

China asserted it was the "victim" in the spy plane standoff. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said China had every right to examine the plane because the U.S. spy plane "rammed a Chinese plane in the air" and then entered Chinese air space without permission and landed at a Chinese airfield. The official Chinese Xinhua news agency quoted President Jiang Zemin as saying: "The United States should apologize to the Chinese for this incident and bear all responsibilities for the consequences of the incident" (*Eckholm*, 2001, April 4). The official Chinese news media also featured the wife of the Chinese pilot, Wang Wei, who was made a national hero. Chinese television gave prominent

treatment to an angry letter Wang's wife wrote to President George W. Bush and she was shown being greeted by China's Defense Minister (Eckholm, 2001, April 8).

Regarding the collision, Secretary of State Colin N. Powell declared: "We have nothing to apologize for" (Sanger, 2001, April 4). American Congressional opinion concurred:

WASHINGTON (CNN)—Sen. Joseph Lieberman, the high-ranking Democrat from Connecticut, said the U.S. Navy spy plane that made an emergency landing in China was damaged due to an "aggressive game of aerial chicken being played by the Chinese air force. When you play chicken, sometimes you get hurt." Lieberman's comments were some of the most forceful among legislators on Capitol Hill who ratcheted up their rhetoric Wednesday on the standoff. Lieberman, a member of the Armed Services Committee, said despite what Beijing says, the United States has nothing to apologize for. "There's no reason why our plane would have tried to ram into a jet. They were tracking us. They were being aggressive," Lieberman said. Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Indiana, criticized Chinese leader Jiang Zemin for leaving on a trip to South America with the standoff unresolved. "That sort of cavalier attitude is not really helpful," he said (CNN *Inside Politics*, 2001, April 4).

The Hainan Island incident was resolved by a carefully negotiated "Letter of the Two Sorrys" written by the United States to China. The letter was sent by the United States Ambassador

- 702 -

Joseph Prueher to Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan of the People's Republic of China. The delivery of the letter led to the release of the U.S. crew from Chinese custody, as well as the eventual return of the disassembled plane. The letter stated that the United States was "very sorry" for the death of Chinese pilot Wang Wei, and "We are *very sorry* for entering Chinese airspace and making an emergency landing on Hainan Island without verbal clearance ..." (Lindsey et al., 2001, April 12). There was further media discussion over the exact meaning of the Chinese translation issued by the U.S. Embassy. A senior administration official was quoted as saying "What the Chinese will choose to characterize as an apology; we would probably choose to characterize as an expression of regret or sorrow" (*Taipei Times*, 2001, April 12).

This is a case where specific values of self-esteem, *face*, and functions of apologies across cultures vary. The American response to an accident, in the spirit of both Roman and Anglo-Saxon law, is to find the unique single cause, to consider intent, assign culpability, and make the necessary reparation. Even where there is a search for multiple causation and comparative degrees of responsibility, as in "contributory negligence," there is an attempt to assign specific quantifiable degrees of responsibility to different people, usually with monetary consequences. The meaning of an apology to Americans is the acceptance of responsibility. The U.S. apologized to China for the Belgrade bombing and paid compensation. In this case Americans viewed the "hot-shot" Chinese pilot Wang in his F-8 fighter as at fault. They saw no fault of their own, so felt no apology was in order.

The Chinese understanding of an accident is more holistic, focusing on consequences rather than culpability and seeking harmony and the restoration of balance, and it can embrace contradictions in the spirit of the tensions of Taoist *yin* and *yang*, in a larger contextual emotional field that includes the *face* of the parties involved. American missionary Arthur H. Smith (1894) wrote over a century earlier:

It is as necessary for the "peace talkers" to take as careful account of the balance of "face" as European statesmen once did of the balance of power. The object in such cases is not the execution of even-handed justice,

- 703 -

which, even if theoretically desirable, seldom occurs to an Oriental (sic!) as a possibility, but such an arrangement as will distribute to all concerned "face" in due proportions (p. 17).

Of *face work* Goffman (1955) said: "Resolution of the situation to everyone's apparent satisfaction is the first requirement: correct apportionment of blame is typically a secondary consideration" (p. 223). The accident occurred while the U.S. was engaging in the surveillance of China over international waters off of her coast. This incident shortly followed the 1999 American bombing of the Belgrade Chinese Embassy. A Chinese pilot was dead. The American refusal to apologize appeared arrogant. A full American apology was demanded to right the balance of *face* before global opinion and to restore the balance in the Chinese-American relationship. Again, to quote Goffman forty-six years earlier: "The imagery of equilibrium is apt here because the length and intensity of the corrective effort is nicely adapted to the persistence and intensity of the threat" (p. 219). American and Chinese policymakers and media need to be aware of cultural differences—in this case the precise meaning and value of *face*, blame, equilibrium, and apologies to the other side.

## Conclusion

The 150 years of imperialism, 1800-1949, which included insult, contempt, and defeat, constituted a deep and lasting trauma to Chinese self-esteem and *face*. The massive and repetitive humiliations and the large and small indignities of imperialism in nineteenth and twentieth century China, especially the Sino-Japanese War and occupation, 1931-1945, left lasting scars on Chinese collective self esteem and heightened sensibility to issues of national *face* in a culture that initially developed and over many centuries refined the concept of *face*. It is as though the Chinese government, speaking for the Chinese people, is saying to the world:

- 704 -

*We claim a special imperative that no foreign incursion ever impinges on China again. Stay away from our borders, out of our territory, our air space, and our rights! We insist on equality, respect for our status, and parity in the world as a nation. We will proudly defend the sovereignty of our territory and China's dignity, and we crave recognition as a great power in the world.*

The scars of 150 years of Western colonialism are not healed. That narcissistic injury must be redressed by the West's acknowledgement, respect and admiration in the way Matteo Ricci did in the seventeenth century. The wounds are quickly re-opened, and sometimes manipulated, by awareness in the present of intense feeling states and painful helpless anxiety stimulated by encounters that evoke Chinese history and culture, oral tradition, and family memory. Chinese foreign policy defends against loss of *face* and is determined to avoid re-living past humiliations. Historical injuries are re-ignited and re-enacted with a new proud outcome of Chinese self-esteem and *face* in current negotiations with foreigners and in contemporary Chinese foreign relations.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See "Matteo Ricci," Joseph Hsing-san Shih, S.J. (Ed.) in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

<sup>2</sup> The IPA Mandate of the China Committee (December 2008), which we have executed, is "to advertise the possibility of training as an IPA psychoanalyst; providing advice to those interested in training; creating a curriculum for training; setting up a system of admission and progress evaluation for candidates; and developing an ongoing research reflection into the problems encountered and their solutions." See Sverre Varvin & Alf Gerlach, A. (2011).

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Professor David Yu of UCLA for this reference.

<sup>4</sup> The novel appeared in Chinese in 1995.

<sup>5</sup> This particular form of public humiliation is reminiscent of the Nazi public degradation of Jews and their friends during *Kristallnacht*, November 9-10, 1938. See Loewenberg (1987).

<sup>6</sup> I have benefitted from the interpretations of Luo Fengli, Chinese Academy of Social Science, Beijing, May 15, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Hugo, Letter to Captain Butler, "Expédition de Chine," November 25, 1861. Reprinted in *UNESCO Courier* 38 (November 1985), 15.

<sup>8</sup> Japan gave up the Liaotung Peninsula, yielding to a tripartite intervention by Russia, France, and Germany. This antagonism of Russia and Japan forms a part of the background to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05.

<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to my colleague Professor Phillip Huang and Anna Sophie Loewenberg for translating "Qi Lai!"

<sup>10</sup> For the 1999 Belgrade Embassy Bombing and the 2001 Hainan Island incident, I have relied on the interpretations of Gries (2004), a carefully researched study. See pp. 1-2, 13-17, 109-111.

- 705 -

<sup>11</sup> Translation by Gries (2004), p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Eyewitness account of Anna Sophie Loewenberg, Beijing, May 8, 1999.

## References

Brucker, J. (1912). Matteo Ricci. *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Vol. 13). New York: Robert Appleton.  
*CNN Inside Politics* (2001, April 4). Lieberman: China played 'aggressive game of aerial chicken.'



- Eckholm, E. (2001, April 4). Collision in China: The overview: China faults U.S. in incident, suggests release of crew hinges on official apology. *The New York Times*.
- Eckholm, E. (2001, April 8). Collision in China: The overview: Chinese insisting U.S. must do more to end standoff. *The New York Times*.
- Freud, S. (1907 [1906]). Delusions and dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*. *Standard Edition* (Vol. 9, pp. 3-95). London: Hogarth Press. [→]
- Gerlach, A. (2010). Psychoanalyse in China-Ein Modernisierungsprojekt? In *PSA-Info: Informationsschrift für Ausbildungsteilnehmer und Kandidaten der Deutschen Psychoanalytischen Vereinigung* 64, 155-163.
- Global Times*. (2010, October 27). Korean War worth the cost for China, p. 10.
- Goffman, E. (1955). On face-work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. *Psychiatry* 18 (9), 213-231.
- Gries, P. H. (2004). *China's new nationalism: Pride, politics, and diplomacy*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Holcombe, C. (1895). *The real Chinaman*. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co.
- Kohut, H. (1971). *The analysis of the self: A systematic approach to the psychoanalytic treatment of narcissistic personality disorders*. New York: International Universities Press. [→]
- Kohut, H. (1972). Thoughts on narcissism and narcissistic rage. In P. H. Ornstein (Ed.), *The Search for the self: Selected writings of Heinz Kohut: 1950-1978* (Vol. 2, pp. 615-662). New York: International Universities Press, 1978. [→]
- Lin, Y. (1939). *My country and my people*. New York: Reynal and Hitchcock.
- Lindsey, D., et al. (2001, April 12). War of words. *Salon.com*.
- Loewenberg, P. (1987). The Kristallnacht as a public degradation ritual. *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (Vol. 32, pp. 309-323). London: Secker & Warburg.
- Sanger, D. E. (2001, April 4). Collision with China: The Washington view: Powell sees no need for apology, Bush again urges return of crew. *The New York Times*.
- Smith, A. H. (1894). *Chinese characteristics*. New York: Fleming H. Revell.
- Strachey, L. (1918). *Eminent Victorians*. (2003 ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taipei Times*. (2001, April 12). China, US agree on freeing plane crew. Retrieved from <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2001/04/12/81342>
- Varvin, S., & Gerlach, A. (2011). The development of psychodynamic psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in China. *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 8 (3), 261-267. [→]
- Weber, M. (1958). Religious rejections of the world and their directions. In H. H. Gerth & C. W. Mills (Eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology* (pp. 323-359). New York: Oxford University Press.
- White, T. H., & Jacoby, A. (1980). *Thunder out of China*. New York: De Capo Press.
- Yang, M. C. (1945). *A Chinese village: Taitou, Shantung Province*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Yu, H. (2003). *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* (A. F. Jones, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

- 706 -

## Article Citation

**Loewenberg, P.** (2011). Matteo Ricci, Psychoanalysis, and *Face* in Chinese Culture and Diplomacy. *Amer. Imago*, 68(4):689-706