

## **Scholarly Notes:**

### **Commentaries on China, Turkey, the former Yugoslavia and Acoma**

**By Daniel A. Metraux**

The past ten months have provided me with an extraordinary opportunity to travel to Turkey, China, the former Yugoslavia and the Acoma nation in New Mexico. I wrote a series of short essays about each trip for a British on-line travel magazine, Travelmag (travelmag.co.uk). While only two of these essays cover Asia directly, they introduce the reader to a broad range of interesting topics.

#### **China: Astonishing But Troubled Rising Star**

Even though I have been teaching Chinese history at the college-level for nearly three decades and have heard about the rapid changes occurring in the “Middle Kingdom,” I was totally unprepared for the entirely modern evolution of the Chinese state when I visited Shanghai and Chengdu in March 2005.

The rapidity and completeness of this change became evident when I participated in a college fair designed to recruit able Chinese students to attend an American university. I brought a video tape to show off the beauty of Mary Baldwin College, but was unable to do so because nobody in China seemed to have a VCR. If I had brought a DVD, there would have been no problem, but it seems that the Chinese have made a huge leap from primitive communications technology to the most modern DVD equipment, completely by-passing the VCR age.

I am told that one may find plenty of impoverished and less developed areas across rural and small-town China, but there is very little of this in evidence both in Shanghai and in Chengdu, a huge city in SW China and capital of Szechuan Province. There are a few historic districts left in Shanghai including the famous bundt left over from the colonial era, but virtually everything else has been ripped down in favor of row upon row of public housing projects and over 3100 skyscrapers with many more being built every year. Chengdu, a city of ten million, had fewer skyscrapers, but there were many shimmering glass towers, new apartment blocks, and very little of anything old except a sprawling Buddhist temple full of very devout Sunday

worshippers. Both cities have exquisite ultra-modern airports that would make the American traveler stare in utter astonishment. Department stores in both cities are amazing.

My views of streets in southern China a decade or more ago rendered an abundance of bicycles and motor bikes, but there were only a small handful of bikes and motorcycles and an abundance of cars, most of them shiny and new, driving haphazardly all over the place in Shanghai. There were far more bikes and motorcycles in Chengdu, but the streets were clogged with midday automobile traffic.

China has become the manufacturing engine for the entire world and is already beginning to reap some of the benefits of this success, but there is a heavy price to pay.

There is clearly a rapidly growing gap between rich and poor which belies the egalitarian goals of the Maoist revolution. Even more noticeable is the awful pollution. It was supposed to be a sunny spring day when I visited Chengdu and a few beams of sunlight did filter through the dark smog hiding the blue sky, but when I looked up at the sun, all I could see was a small orange ball obscured in clouds of filthy air. I am told that walking through Chengdu on any given day is like smoking two packs of cigarettes which must cause health problems with the majority of people who seem to smoke heavily there.

Pollution in Shanghai was even worse!

I was amazed at the high educational level of the 40 young women I interviewed in Shanghai and Chengdu on behalf of my college. Of course, it was a self-selected group representing the cream of modern Chinese society, but each student was fluent in English (so much better than any of the hundreds of Japanese students I have interviewed over the years) and far more aware of world politics than most if not all my American college students. Many had traveled or studied abroad, mainly in Europe. Interestingly, when I asked them which modern (now dead) Chinese leader they admired the most (Mao, Chou En-lai, Deng Xiao-ping, Chiang Kai-shek, and Sun-Yat-sen), the landslide winner was Chou followed by Deng, Mao and a virtual tie between Sun and Chiang. They all agreed that Taiwan is an integral part of China, but they had no problem with the current Taiwanese regime staying in power as long as it too acknowledged that it was ultimately a part of greater China.

The only political poster I saw anywhere was in a small picture shop in Shanghai where I was greeted with a huge smiling face of John Kerry. When I told the proprietor that I had voted for Kerry and have a strong dislike for Bush, he said most of his friends felt the same way. We

shook hands and parted smiling. The students also expressed a distaste for Bush and recent acts of the US government, but also expressed deep admiration for the US and its people and said that they were most anxious to live and study there. I was told that one has virtually complete economic freedom in China and that anybody could freely express political opinions as long as one did not criticize the Chinese government and its leaders in an open loud manner. It was correctly pointed out that Shanghai voters select municipal council members through heavily contested elections.

Where is China going as a world power? It rather reminds me of Germany in the years before World War I when it was the new power boy on the block and blundered around challenging the established world order. China's ultimate destiny is uncertain, but it will without doubt become a major economic and military power in the very near future.

Over the centuries tens of thousands of foreign merchants have come to China to sell their wares by trying to penetrate the China market and it caused me to smile to realize that I was now a part of this old tradition. But unlike the past when few Chinese wanted or could afford foreign goods, many Chinese actually want and can afford the product I was selling—an American education.

### **Can Turkey Remain a Secular Society?**

Istanbul is one of great multicultural meeting places in the world, but it is also the cultural capital of a country that is divided by two colliding worlds. This schism in Turkish society is not between East or West, wealthy capitalist or beggar, or between that which is traditional or modern. Rather, the clash is between two very contrasting views of life—one which is secular with a strong emphasis on individual rights and freedom but also afflicted by the inherent insecurities that come with these liberties and the other a religious way with all of its certainties and controls.

This dichotomy in contemporary Turkish society is especially evident among its women. Even when walking down the main street of a conservative city such as Kayseri in central Turkey at noon on the first Friday of Ramadan, one saw the full range of female dress from young women wearing tight jeans and tee-shirts to others sporting headscarves, long raincoats, and even a few black shrouds. Today there are a great many Turkish women of all ages involved in public life in business, academia, the arts, all the professions and even politics

including a relatively young woman who became Turkey's first woman prime minister for several years in the mid-1990s. But there are also thousands of young women imbued with strong traditional Islamic values who have opted for a more traditional family-based life that includes the wearing of full black shrouds in public.

The cultural clash in Turkey is the result of a revolutionary secular modernist movement started by the Republic's founder, Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) in the mid-1920s. Kemal was a successful career military officer who in the waning days of the Ottoman Empire had been very much influenced by the French military tradition of the Sultan's army. Here he acquired such secular values as patriotism and nationalism, liberty and fraternity and the rule of law, values that had emerged from the French revolutionary tradition.

The Kemalists wanted a total social, economic, and political transformation of Turkey from a traditionalist Islamic empire state facing towards the Middle East into a powerful and modern secular state closely engaged with the West. According to one Turkish historian, Feroz Ahmad, the Kemalists saw the salvation and security of their Republic coming from its adoption of "the materialism of the West, its technology and its modern weapons, along with its broadest ideas, so that society would be transformed in the broadest sense. This meant creating a secular society in which religion would be controlled by the state rather than separated by it. For them, modernity implied a broad totality and included political and cultural, as well as economic, dimensions. They wanted to accomplish both modernization and modernity, by radically reforming their traditional patriarchal society."<sup>1</sup>

Today Turkey's secular establishments, backed by the protective guidance of the armed forces, continue to ardently pursue an ardent Western-oriented development of the Turkish state. By all accounts they have been very successful. While Turkey certainly lags far behind most of the European Union which it hopes to join in a few years, it is rich in resources and has fast becoming a modern industrial power on the verge of a vigorous takeoff (indeed, Turkey today reminds me very much of Japan in the late 1960s or Korea in the late 1980s). Turkey also has made impressive strides towards the democratization of all aspects of its society—a fact made evident when my son David and I had a friendly long chat with young women members of the Turkish Communist Party who were demonstrating on one of Istanbul's major boulevards against their nation's proposed entry into the European Union.

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<sup>1</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey: The Quest for Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 84.

On the other side of the equation, however, is an increasingly vocal and powerful Islamic movement that seeks to reverse Turkey's journey towards secularism. Leading the movement are Islamist politicians who have formed their own party and who briefly controlled the government a few years ago. The Islamist network in some respects parallels the evangelical Christian movement in the United States today. It includes professional and business associations, women's organizations, academic groups, Muslim human rights associations, cultural organizations, television channels, and media publications.

A Turkish Islamist scholar, Adil Ozdemir, states that it is "an Islam that has been literally or conservatively interpreted, an Islam of the extended family and an agricultural society. The traditionalists are concerned about personal limits, especially prohibitions on alcohol (but not cigarettes) and on gambling. Sexual activity is ideally kept to a minimum. Women's place is preferably with the home and children, and women should be covered in public except for their faces and hands. The man is the head of the household and responsible for the sustenance of those who live in it. Traditionalists are also sensitive about the legitimacy of banking interest. They are concerned about preserving their heritage, which means Islamic and Ottoman values."<sup>2</sup> Islamists ask why they are suffering socially, economically, and politically, why schools are so shoddy, and why there is such neglect of the poor in Turkey today. They seek a Turkey with enhanced moral values and a greater concern for the welfare of all its citizens.

Polls today indicate that the secularists have the support of about sixty percent of the population, but that the Islamic side is gaining. Who controls this debate will also control the future of Turkey. The country's emergence as an open democratic society will make the debate fascinating to watch.

### **Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation, Birth of New Hope**

Dubrovnik. There is perhaps no more beautiful city in Europe. Perched on a rocky coast on a tiny spit of land, this ancient port sits below towering hills and the crystal clear blue waters of the Adriatic. Looking out over the water there is an endless chain of green islands sparkling in the most admirable sunset imaginable. The city itself is a medieval masterpiece. The best way to see the city is to spend the two or more hours that it takes to walk on the walls

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<sup>2</sup> Adil Ozdemir and Kenneth Frank, *Visible Islam in Modern Turkey*. Istanbul: Sev Printing and Publishing, 2000. Chapter 1.

surrounding the old part of the city. Below there are traditionally paved streets, spires from churches and cathedrals, and the ever-present harbor, mountains and sea.

A more careful inspection of the city, however, will bring evidence of the ugliness of war. Many buildings bear the scars of bullets and grenades and there are certain parts of the Old Town where only the stone foundations of houses and businesses remain. Slightly more than a decade ago Dubrovnik was the sight of a combined attack from above by soldiers from neighboring Montenegro while allied Serbian navy vessels pounded the city from the sea. The city was under siege for many months and suffered badly, but it survived when the Serbs and Montenegrans finally retreated.

Plitvice Lakes National Park, deep in the northern mountains of Croatia, is, like Dubrovnik, a famed UNESCO heritage site. This marvelous green wilderness is filled with incredibly clear lakes, dozens of major waterfalls, and a great array of beautiful birds and exotic fish. But, like Dubrovnik, the Plitvice region was the scene of vicious fighting in the early 1990s as both Croatia and Serbia fought to claim the area as their own. Initially, the Serbs were successful, but later the rebuilt Croatian army swept back and drove the Serbs away for good.

Lake Bled is the crown jewel of Slovenia. Tucked under Austria, this tiny Alpine nation saw a brief spate of fighting as it declared its own independence in 1990, but the Serbs and Croats were too busy fighting each other to bother the well-armed Slovenes. Lake Bled, surrounded by the Julian Alps, looks like a scene right out of the movie *The Sound of Music*.

After journeying throughout Serbia-Montenegro, Croatia, a corner of Bosnia, and much of Slovenia with a group of students and on my own in May, 2005, one can say conclusively that, at long last, peace has returned to the Balkans. There has been no fighting for almost a decade, borders are open to commerce, hundreds of thousands of tourists—mainly German and English—are flooding the region, and there is a growing sense of prosperity—less so in Serbia-Montenegro, but certainly in Croatian cities like Dubrovnik, Split and Zagreb and in Slovenia. Relations between the regions newly independent countries appear to be returning to normal complacency.

The Balkan region has always seen its share of troubled chaos. The Balkan peninsula, much like the Korean peninsula in Asia, is a border region surrounded by what were great powers including the Ottoman Turks, the Habsburg empire, mercantile Venetians and Hungary. From the 1500s up through World War I these and other powers sought to expand their borders,

power and wealth at the expense of each other and of the people in the region. Generally the Habsburgs and Hungarians controlled the north while the Turks dominated the south. The politics of the region were compounded by the fact that the people of the Balkans, including Serbs, Slovenes, and Croats, also competed against each other and with the outside powers for regional; power and autonomy.

Nationalism was one of the key forces influencing European affairs between the French revolution and World War II. Nationalism found an early voice in larger nations like France and, a bit later, Germany and Italy that could come together as one people without significant or lasting outside interference. The collapse of the Russian, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires in 1918 should have led to the release of the pent-up nationalism of the people of the Balkans and elsewhere in central and eastern Europe, but such feelings were still-born with the creation of the Soviet empire and such multi-cultural states as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia by 1919.

Yugoslavia was created as a noble experiment to give a larger voice to the small scattered peoples of the Balkans. There was an-ongoing (and very realistic) fear that since so many Serbs and Croats lived in each other's cities and regions and because areas like Bosnia had such a mixture of orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosnians, that a prolonged civil war and blood bath would result. Six republics (Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Macedonia) were given limited autonomy within the Federal state of Yugoslavia.

The death of Yugoslavia has hardly pre-ordained. Post World War II Yugoslavia developed (and some would say, flourished) with the rule of Marshal Tito and the Yugoslavian Communist Party. Though nominally a communist state, Tito remained free of Soviet control, had strong ties with the West<sup>3</sup> and fostered the development of privatized small and medium enterprises. The result was that parts of the old Yugoslavia, especially Slovenia and northern Croatia, whose economic development and wealth approached that of its central European neighbors. But even though Tito sought to employ a policy of mediation and neutrality among the vying national groups in his federation, the country was showing signs of severe strain by the time Tito died in 1980. Reforms of the constitution in the early 1980s designed to weaken Serbia's dominance over the other republics did little to mollify the growing nationalism of the

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<sup>3</sup> I remember once wandering through the halls of the State Department in 1979 when suddenly I was pushed aside by Secret Service agents to make way for Tito and Secretary of State Vance who walked vigorously by.

other states and their wish to be free of Serbian influence once and for all. But what made the situation even more difficult were the activities of nationalist leaders like Tudjmann of Croatia and Milosevic of Serbia, who stirred nationalist feelings, determined to create independent states, and then led military campaigns to expand the power of their states at the expense of their neighbors.

Slovenia was the first state to declare its independence. Slovenia's northern location away from Serbia and Croatia and the fact that these two states were so obsessed with each other meant that neither could pay much attention to the Slovenes. War then broke out between Croatia and Serbia with the Serbs seizing northern parts of Croatia and holding Dubrovnik under siege for seven months. The worst fighting, however, occurred in Bosnia, which forms a geographic wedge between the Serbs and Croats. Bosnia had a very multi-ethnic population including a plurality of Moslem Bosnians (descendents of Serbs and Croats who converted to Islam under Turkish rule) and large Croatian and Serbian communities.

Both Serbia and Croatia attacked Bosnia alleging that they had to protect their "countrymen" in Bosnia. Both states carried out the cruelest forms of "ethnic cleansing" and sought to expand their territory at the expense of Bosnia. It took the outside intervention of the US and NATO to bring the fighting to a halt and to restore order in Bosnia. A renewed attack in the mid-1990s by Croatian forces led to the recapture of territory taken earlier in the north by Serbia. The fighting generally ended by 1998.

But during the period of Bosnian resistance a number of Arab "freedom fighters" as well as agents of Al Qaeda are said to have entered the country to assist not only in the defense of the country, but also to renew and harden the Moslem faith of many of the citizenry.

Many foreign reporters in the 1990s discussed what they called the severe religious implications of the war, but none of the people I met in the Balkans said that religion was a factor. The war was about power, land and money. I found very little sign of religious animosity between anybody.

At present it seems that all of the people we met in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Slovenia have put the war period securely behind them. They are living for the present and the future and not on the seeds of the past. The ruins of war are being quickly repaired and the tourists have returned to Dubrovnik, the rest of Croatia, and Slovenia in droves. Slovenia has already joined

the European Union and Croatia expects to join soon unless the recent rejection of the EU constitution by French voters further complicates matters.

We talked with many Croatians concerning their feelings about Serbia and the war. The overwhelming consensus is that the war was an unavoidable nightmare, necessary to sort out the independence process, but now that it is over, they don't bear many grudges against the Serbs. Several hundred Serbs live peacefully without recrimination in Dubrovnik and the beautiful small Orthodox Serbian cathedral there was open in all its splendor when I dropped by for a visit. I also visited a small modern and very busy mosque in Dubrovnik.

The focus in Croatia is on the future. Croatians relish their newfound freedom after more than a thousand years of outside rule. They are enjoying their new prosperity fueled in part by high tech and the entry of hundreds of thousands of European tourists entranced by the sheer beauty of the country. The country is also an emerging democracy. While we were there I witnessed active mayoral campaigns in three cities, shook hands with several of the candidates, and attended a lively festive rock concert in Zagreb sponsored by one of the candidates. I hung out for several hours on the big parklike plaza in front of Zagreb's central station one day watching voters enthusiastically approaching each of the four campaign stands of the major candidates. I returned home with a lot of campaign materials as souvenirs, cheered to see home-grown democracy at work.

One day I visited a small corner of Montenegro, which is still joined with Serbia to form the rump state of Yugoslavia. The contrast between Montenegro and Croatia is huge. The parts of Montenegro I visited are supposed to be among the more well-to-do of the country, but there were very few tourists, huge old factories sat vacant, towns looked worn out and the people appeared to be quite depressed. It was an entirely different world than the Dubrovnik that I had left just 40 kilometers behind. I saw several English signs with an American flag logo stating that AID is sponsoring some form of economic development in the region, but there were no signs of any activity.

The locals I met were very friendly to me as an American and expressed a fervent hope for peace and prosperity in the future—but their future looks very bleak when compared to Croatia and Slovenia.

We spent only a very short time crossing over and stopping in a tiny sliver of Bosnia, but even here the contrasts were evident. Bosnia suffered the most damage from the war and is

slowly putting itself back together again, but one wonders if this tiny nation has the viability to survive as a modern state. There is greater prosperity and a greater sense of hope than in Serbia, but it clearly lags behind Croatia.

The best long-term hope for the Balkans is its acceptance by and entry into the EU, but this process will not be easy for Bosnia, Serbia-Montenegro and Macedonia.

It will take time and patience, but the future does look good. But if you want an inexpensive vacation in a most beautiful land, be sure to travel to Croatia with a sidestep into Slovenia.

### **Acoma: Native American Sky Culture**

Visiting New Mexico offers the opportunity to view a state that is in many respects more foreign than any other. There is a very real blending of local Indian, Spanish-Mexican and Anglo cultures to produce a society that is both unique and rather awe-inspiring. This development has occurred in several stages with the Spanish invasions of the 1500s and 1600s and the American invasion that began in the mid-1800s.

Fortunately, each group has also managed to retain its distinct identity and sense of real community.

There are 18 Indian pueblos (distinct communities / reservations) in New Mexico ranging from a few hundred to several thousand acres in size. Each pueblo is considered an Indian “nation” with a certain degree of sovereignty including its own legal system, courts, and tribal police who seem to spend much of their time patrolling highways that run through their pueblo and giving speeding tickets to unsuspecting “foreign” drivers. Those pueblos with casinos seem to be prospering—there are new community and health centers, schools, good roads and many modern homes. Pueblos without casinos have fewer modern facilities and more residents living in worn-out trailers.

Visitors to New Mexico who want to view traditional Indian culture would do well to the Acoma pueblo. Acoma is an ancient “sky city” located at the top of a four hundred foot high mesa deep in the desert 65 miles west of Albuquerque. It was founded almost a thousand years ago by the Acoma Indians who are said to be related to the Hopis, who also reside in mesa-top villages to the west in Arizona. Acoma is one of the oldest if not the oldest continuously inhabited communities in the United States.

Acoma pueblo is built like a virtual fortress, a native-American version of Gibraltar or Quebec. Until modern times there was only a very tenuous foot path to the top making the community almost impossible to attack. There are approximately forty acres of land on the mesa crammed with a wide variety of streets, one to three story adobe homes some of which date back centuries, and a magnificent old Franciscan mission church and convento dating to the early 1600s. Most of the thousand or more Acoma people live elsewhere on the pueblo with access to electricity, running water and the other basic luxuries of life, but between thirty and forty residents still live atop the mesa in their ancient village without any power or modern sewage -- very proud to maintain their old way of life.

The whole community is suspended in an incredible time warp. The ancient pueblo homes with mica windows, the rock cisterns, the winding streets, the ancient San Estevan mission with its unique cemetery—all this provides the visitor with a fairly untarnished glimpse at an ancient civilization that continues to thrive to this very day.

The Acoma exhibit a tremendous sense of pride in their history and culture and still very much view themselves as a distinct people and nation.

Acoma was first visited by white men in Coronado's Expedition in 1540. Spanish Captain Hernando de Alvarado wrote in his journal that his soldiers had "found a rock with a village on top, the strongest position in all the land, well fortified, the best there is in Christendom." The first attempt by the Spanish military to assault the great fortress of Acoma failed in 1598, but in 1599 a large and well-armed Spanish assault team finally managed to climb to the top and take the city. Then the slaughter began—the sad legacy of Spanish rule in the southwest. The Spaniards burned the town, killing more than 600 Acomas and taking nearly 600 prisoners. It is said that seventy captured warriors were confined in a small kiva from which they were taken out one by one, murdered, and thrown from the cliff. The Spanish marched the remaining 500 captives to the Spanish settlement at Santo Domingo to stand trial. They were found guilty of killing a number of Spanish attackers. All males of more than twenty-five years of age were condemned to have one foot cut off and to give 20 years of personal service to the Spanish. Younger males and all females were doomed to servitude.

Eventually enough Acoma were allowed to return to their town for the community to survive, but they were forced to live in perpetual servitude under the sharp eyes of their Spanish masters. Indians were enslaved to labor for the Church and Crown and their native religious

practices were forbidden. The huge San Estevan Ray mission became the symbol of Spanish rule on the mesa. All the natives were forced to convert to Catholicism. Ironically, virtually all Acoma remain Catholics to this day although they also remain true to native religious traditions as well.

There was a uniform Pueblo revolt in 1680 all across New Mexico which took the lives of 500 Spaniards and drove the rest from the land for over a decade, but when the Spanish returned to Acoma in the early 1690s they were unable to take the citadel. A more peaceful Spanish administration coaxed the Acoma out of their fortress in 1699 and persuaded them to work with them under far better conditions. The Spaniards introduced horses, cattle, sheep, fruit trees, new customs and Catholicism. There began an amalgamation of Spanish and Indian cultures which so typifies New Mexican life today.

Ironically, in addition to their Catholic faith, most Acoma bear Spanish names, but I was told that few if any of them speak Spanish today.

When the United States seized New Mexico in the late 1840s, the Acoma found themselves with new masters who basically left them alone. Three centuries earlier the Spanish king had provided land grants to each pueblo which the U.S. has honored to this day. Interestingly when the Indian governors of seven New Mexican pueblos went to visit President Lincoln in Washington in 1863, the President presented each governor with a silver-headed cane as a token of their right to sovereignty. Today the cane is handed down to each elected Acoma governor at his inauguration.

The Acoma seem to live pretty decent lives today. The casino located right off US Route 40 brings in a healthy income for the pueblo as is evidenced by a new hospital and school. Housing conditions look good from the outside and there is little of the squalor found on some other pueblos. The tourism industry is huge, but well managed.

We also encountered many happy Acoma cows who dared to cross the roads while we approached the pueblo. Native potters make splendid ceramic products, but they were generally too high priced for our wallets.

Acoma is one of the most beautiful and interesting places to visit in the Southwest. Unlike the pueblo ruins found elsewhere, one can observe a modern Native American culture that has worked hard to preserve its way of life and which is growing in size and in prosperity.