

H-Diplo | Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum

Review Essay 76

Hall Gardner. *Year of the Earth Serpent Changing Colors*. Stuttgart: Edition Noëma, 2023. ISBN: 9783838202426

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19 September 2023 | PDF: <http://issforum.org/to/RE76> | Website: rjissf.org

Editor: Diane Labrosse | Commissioning Editor: Seth Offenbach | Production Editor: Christopher Ball

Hall Gardner, a prominent professor at the American University of Paris whose prolific writings on international relations range widely across the past and present, has drawn on his personal experiences teaching in China in 1988-1989 to produce an interesting hybrid volume.¹ A mixture of memoir and a somewhat autobiographical novel, his book also seeks to analyze China's internal policies and its relations with the rest of the world, and suggest remedies for the ever-growing tensions between China and the West.

The volume's copyright page bears a statement that "This is a work of fiction. Any names or characters, businesses or places, events or incidents, are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental." This begs the question as to how far the background and experiences of the protagonist, Mylex H. Galvin, a radical young American poet and graduate student of English literature, whose teaching position in China is sponsored by a fiercely leftist group, True Friends of the East Wind (TFEW), resemble Gardner's own. Unlike Galvin, before coming to China, Gardner had already earned master's and doctoral degrees in international relations at the Johns Hopkins University's Paul Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. On completing his doctorate, Gardner then spent a year teaching at the Johns Hopkins-Nanjing Center of Chinese and American Studies, a distinct step up from the Language Institute in Beijing where Galvin attempts to teach English. And whereas at the novel's end (spoiler alert), the disillusioned Galvin is thrown out of his PhD program and dies of a drug overdose, perhaps even murdered

¹ His numerous books include Hall Gardner, *Surviving the Millennium: American Global Strategy, the Collapse of the Soviet Empire, and the Question of Peace* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994); Hall Gardner, *Dangerous Crossroads: Europe, Russia, and the Future of NATO* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997); Hall Gardner, ed., *NATO and the European Union: New World, New Europe, New Threats* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Hall Gardner, *American Global Strategy and the War on Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Hall Gardner, *Averting Global War: Regional Challenges, Overextension, and Options for American Strategy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Hall Gardner, *NATO Expansion and US Strategy in Asia: Surmounting the Global Crisis* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Hall Gardner, *The Failure to Prevent World War I: The Unexpected Armageddon* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Hall Gardner, *Crimea, Global Rivalry, and the Vengeance of History* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Hall Gardner, *World War Trump: The Risks of America's New Nationalism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2018); Hall Gardner, *IR Theory, Historical Analogy, and Major Power War* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); and Hall Gardner, *Toward an Alternative Transatlantic Strategy: Biden, the EU, and the "New" Multilateralism* (Paris: Fondation Prospective et Innovation, 2022).

by his former TFEW comrades, Gardner has enjoyed a long and successful academic and literary career, writing hefty volumes and articles on international relations as well as poetry and now a novel.²

Gardner has apparently produced not one but two alter egos. Ironically, the book also features a supposedly famous professor, “Dr. I. C. N. Jabber,” with a freshly minted PhD from “the Alexander Hamilton School of International Studies[,] a university primarily famous for producing, as the joke went, a few Foggy Bottom officials and low-level Company (CIA) types,” as well as fiercely anti-Chinese neoconservatives (“Neo-Martian ideologues”) (137). Just as Gardner did, shortly before the 1988 US presidential elections Jabber lectures to Peking University students, who had invited him to address them without first obtaining permission from the university authorities. Speaking in advance of the presidential election, with some difficulty Jabber attempts to explain the Electoral College system to his largely uncomprehending audience. Galvin assails Jabber’s blithe “assumption that American-style democracy somehow had an answer to the world’s problems,” cautioning that: “The Land of the Free rarely practiced what it preached even though Washington bragged endlessly about supporting ‘Democracy’ and ‘Human Rights’—by way of condemning its rivals” (143). Yet the student newspaper’s subsequent report on Jabber’s talk ignored his qualified praise for American democracy and instead added warnings he had never expressed, to the effect that the rising power of Japan and Germany, the losers of World War II, represented international hazards, and “[o]nly a strong and united China could stop them” (145).

After visiting Vietnam and Cambodia, Jabber returns to Beijing, just in time to comment on the outcome of the presidential election. Having viewed the devastation the Khmer Rouge inflicted upon Cambodia, he recommends that the United States government should recognize Vietnam and help its former enemy to develop. Pressuring Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia, after it had occupied most of the country in 1978, would, he believed, only facilitate the return of the Khmer Rouge, who had China’s backing. Here, one sees the academic specialist in international relations recommending policies that ran counter to the positions of not just China but also the United States, which had effectively endorsed China’s stance on the conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam.

Eventually, Jabber and Galvin clash directly at a party, where Jabber makes jokes about credulous Western intellectuals who uncritically admired Chairman Mao Zedong, China’s dominating leader. Unconvinced by a carefully supervised tour of a People’s Republic of China (PRC) jail, he also condemns Chinese labour camps as no different from those established by Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, or King Leopold II of Belgium, while defending US policies during World War II, including the decision to use atomic weapons against Japan. For good measure, Jabber attacks both China and the Communist government of Cuba for failing to provide basic medical services for their people, while assailing Mao and Pol Pot of Cambodia for genocide.

Gardner also describes the Christmas 1988 clashes between African and Chinese students in Nanjing, something he himself was in a position to witness. A shocked Galvin recalls the African leaders of these protests as saying that the Chinese

saw themselves at the center of the planet, the Middle Kingdom. All foreigners, no matter who, were considered ‘barbarians.’ Africans and other people from the developing world—with no dollars for investment—were considered ‘less helpful’ for the red Empire—and hence inferior to white Americans and Europeans. The Africans felt they were being dumped into a Brave New World antipodal test tube version of Alphas, Betas, Gammas, and Deltas. And they were the ones who were designated as the lowest Epsilon caste for eugenic testing (167).

² He includes some of his poems in the novel. More can be found in Hall Gardner, *The Wake-Up Blast: a collection of poems* (New York: Narcissus Press, 2008).

For Galvin, this condemnation of Chinese racism shatters his belief in the existence of a united global revolutionary movement. When the Chinese police brutally break up the protests, he finds himself “pulled taut to the point of the rupture of his four limbs by conflicting revolutionary values and beliefs. His conscience appeared to be caught between the goals of the victorious Chinese revolution and the aspirations of some of the poorest people on the planet” (170-171). Meanwhile, xenophobic ordinary Chinese applaud the police and hurl insults not just at the African students but at all the foreigners who had for whatever reason come to China.

During his time in Beijing, Galvin develops a close friendship with Tao Baiqing, a young woman who tutors him in the deeper meaning of Taoism and China’s own democratic tradition, dating back more than two thousand years, and propounded in the works of revered scholars and philosophers, including Mencius and Mo Zi. His teacher Tao warns that neither Mao nor Hong Xiuquan, who headed the nineteenth-century Taiping Rebellion, were good leaders, because both were too fond of violence. Condemning contemporary Chinese officials’ near obsessive citing of the wrongs that outside powers inflicted on their countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, she tells Galvin: “This is danger I warn against: Political manipulation of Hundred Years of Humiliation by ideological purists in support of xenophobia and war . . .” (243).

Eventually, Galvin realizes that Tao is deeply involved in the growing student protest movement. When he comes across a group of students meeting in a classroom, he discovers that they are familiar with theories of political non-violence, and they raise the issues of contemporaneous popular struggles in Poland and the Philippines. They also advocate the “rule of law, not rule by man” (268). Their ambition is to achieve what Sun Yat-Sen, leader of the 1911 Chinese Revolution, failed to accomplish, and to gain the rights to free speech, free assembly, and freedom of the press that they believe Americans enjoy. When they ask Galvin his opinion, however, he criticizes the many flaws of American democracy.

Reflecting later on this encounter, Galvin or perhaps Gardner reflects that the protestors perceived their goals in global terms:

What Galvin did not understand is that the demonstrators were not just protecting China’s version of Communism. As a movement of *les indignés*, they were also protesting the corrupt, power hungry, and self-serving kleptocratic elites, the increasingly inequitable compensation, and highly uneven levels of development in all countries—in both state-capitalist and communist-totalitarian societies. In their view, despite its burgeoning support from developing countries and revolutionary movements around the world, the Red Dragon was too corrupt to present itself [as] an example for other countries to follow. . . The goal was to transform China now and the world later. . . (267-268).

Another experience that erodes Galvin’s faith in the Chinese experiment is meeting a well-connected Chinese dissident intellectual, Chia Pao-yu. (He shares the name of the central character in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, a classic Chinese novel written in the eighteenth century, and like his namesake wears a precious jade pendant.) Chia attacks Chinese officials for corruption, including taking bribes from foreign businesses, selling surplus production underground for profit, illicit sales of nuclear material, links to Chinese Triads, and their involvement in the drug trade and money laundering. On environmental grounds, Chia also opposes the vaunted Three Gorges dam. Chia voices numerous further complaints about the incompetence of the ruling regime:

As argued by Victor Hugo, it was clear to Chia that the world’s civilizations could be rated according to the nature of their sewage systems and effective use of water. How effectively a society recycled their water, and how effectively a people drained their waste so that it would

not back up, stagnate, or spread pestilence into the drinking water or air, were the real signs of progress. How a society handled its pollution in general likewise represented a test for the level of a civilization.

A civilization could likewise be rated according to what extent the society provided for the education of all of its members, men and women, and how all members of that society, not just elites, were able to participate in, or influence, the decisions that impacted upon their daily lives.

In the desire to catch up—if not surpass—the Americans and Europeans—and in an effort to avenge China’s ‘Hundred Years of Humiliation’—Beijing had, however, appeared to have forgotten the fundamentals: That no ‘progress’ could be made without first addressing the basic resource and infrastructure issues of water, waste, excrements, energy, industrial pollution, and natural ecology in all forms. Water management, linked to energy production, and education for all—plus popular participation in decision making processes—would represent the real keys to a much better future (277).

Chia anticipates, however, that China’s new authoritarianism will not bring democracy, but will transfer public wealth to private hands, and that China’s supposedly modernizing rulers will become “even more nationalistic and xenophobic than Communist regime itself” (278).

The novel describes in great detail the development and ultimate repression of the Tiananmen protests. Galvin, though not allowed to join the demonstrators, for fear that his presence would be used as evidence of foreign manipulation of the movement, aligns himself with their cause, reflecting:

Even if he was not a citizen of China, and even if he did not possess sufficient courage to sacrifice himself for the cause of China’s democrats, he was now beginning to believe that he was backing the right side against the one-Party dictatorship that refused to engage in deep anti-corruption and democratic reforms. He believed that he was siding with those who spoke with the most sincerity. . . with those who were struggling to achieve a fairer, more just, more open, society. . . (353).

Following the military suppression of the protests, Chinese officials quickly order most Western teachers and students—including Galvin—to leave the country. At Beijing airport he overhears American businessmen welcoming the crackdown, because due to the protests they were losing thousands of dollars every month. This episode drew upon Gardner’s own experiences at Nanjing airport, when he too left China in the aftermath of Tiananmen, and “overheard a few American businessmen wondering out loud why Beijing had not cracked down earlier. They had lost a lot of time and money, they said, during the nationwide protests.”³

Other Americans also come in for condemnation from Galvin. He takes particular exception to Mark N. Hayford, a well-known American correspondent working for *NewsBlitz!!!* magazine (which resembles *Newsweek*), considering him an exploitative and unprincipled careerist, whose reporting from China and elsewhere sometimes took advantage of and jeopardized vulnerable people. The Chinese eventually expel Hayford, after Galvin unwittingly reveals to a government informer that the journalist has been meeting with Chia Pao-yu. Like Gardner, Galvin also assails the U.S. government’s Voice of America radio station for

³ Hall Gardner, “Talkin’ World War III China Blues,” 18 June 2021, <https://www.mcer.com/cn/66096-talkin-world-war-iii-china-blues>, accessed 19 May 2023.

airing broadcasts that encouraged the demonstrators, who then received little concrete American assistance following the crackdown.⁴

Didactic novels that seek to convey a specific political message run the risk of becoming schematic, a trap that Gardner fails to evade. Most of the characters, Chinese and Western alike, are stock figures, there to make or illustrate some kind of point. Besides those mentioned above, we encounter the seductive long-haired Mo Li, a young woman who becomes Galvin's girlfriend and passes on to the Chinese authorities information on other people he lets slip to her. Only later does he realize that she was spying on him. For unspecified reasons, possibly related to efforts to persuade Galvin to purchase the output of Chinese would-be artists, assist with visa applications to the United States, or in other ways "be useful" to himself and his associates, the vice director of a silk factory hosts a lavish banquet for Galvin. An enraged student promptly tells him that this feast, paid for by the factory, is an example of "official corruption" (236), before proclaiming: "It's their government—not ours; but it's our country, not theirs" (237). There is even a reference to the exotic wild-life market in Wuhan that has been alleged to be the source of the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Another of Galvin's contacts is indeed highlighted as being "representative of a paranoid Moscow elite who were very suspicious of both American and Chinese intentions" (211). Vladim, a Soviet diplomat he meets in a Beijing bar, oscillates between urging "We Russians and you Americans should be friends. . . Yes, we *must* be friends" (211), and warning that, if the United States is unresponsive, Russia may be forced to turn to China. Yet Vladim fundamentally views the Chinese with suspicion, asking apprehensively: "What do you do with billion people who want more, more, more? Where is room for them? Where they go? What food they eat? What resources they waste? How many cars? How much petrol for them? How many weapons they want? More and more!!!... Can swarm all over Russia in Far East, like Mongols did centuries ago. They look at Siberia and Vladivostok with greedy eyes like gun barrels. Tsars take lands from them—and now they want lands back" (213).

Gardner attempts to place the events of 1988-1989 in the much broader context of the *longue durée* of China's past. Scattered at intervals throughout in this picaresque novel are accounts of key moments in Chinese history, beginning with the mythical Yellow Emperor and the battles among smaller states that led to the unification of China under the first Han Emperor, Qin Huangdi. Many major landmarks in China's past, both historical and mythical, are described: the establishment of the Silk Road, the reign of Tang dynasty Empress Wu Zetian, the Mongol conquests, the voyages of Admiral Zheng Ho, the seventeenth-century conquest of Taiwan, the Opium Wars, the Taiping rebellion, the Western sacking in 1860 of the Old Summer Palace in Beijing, Japan's military victory over China in 1895, the May Fourth movement of 1919, and the supposedly decadent Shanghai of the 1930s.

When presenting interpretations of these events, Gardner makes extensive use of traditional Chinese imagery of chimeras, mythical animals that are often hybrids of more than one beast, together with the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac, the basic elements (earth, water, fire, air, wood), and the recurrent sixty-year cycles used to divide up time. Specific—and sometimes shifting—colors are likewise associated with these animals and chimeras, while in an exercise in zoomorphology, each country is symbolized by one or more specific creatures of a particular color. Describing the current international situation, for example, Gardner explains that the

proto-alliance between China's [Red-Brown-Black] Dragon and Russia's [Brown-Black Double-Headed] Eagle may be joined by the Persian Peacock and the North Korean Chollima, among other Chimeras—in a very odd menagerie. Their threat: To align as many of the countries once ruled by the White Flame Sun and Moon Flags of Four Khanates of

⁴ Gardner, "Talkin' World War III China Blues," 18 June 2021.

the Golden Hordes as possible—in the struggle against the dominating Outer Space surveillance range of the Balding Eagle’s Arsenal of Democracy as it clutches 13 nuclear arrows in its claws. . . .

It is in apprehension of this Neo-Mongol Eurasian challenge that the Balding Eagle has been boosting its military power and seeking to strengthen its alliances with NATO’s White Compass Rose, Europa’s Red Heraldic Oriflamme, the Royal British Bulldog, Ukraine’s Nightingale, Japan’s Snow Monkey, South Korea’s Siberian Tiger, Taiwan’s Blue Magpie, and Israeli’s Hoopoe tattooed with the Star of David—not to overlook the Land-Down-Under’s Kangaroo (489).

China is further presented as being torn between two conflicting visions and strategies, those of “the backward hinterlands of the old ‘yellow’ civilization and China’s coastal ocean-bound ‘blue’ civilization. In order to advance, the country needed to break out of its yellow hinterland ‘Great Wall mentality’” (262). Instead, China “should be sailing far away from the Yellow River—whose waters, according to the ancient saying, are ‘seven-tenths mud’—and toward the vast ocean of sparkling ‘blue’ water freedom.” Ultimately, this might even “lead to a new form of ‘democracy’—one based upon China’s own civilizational values” (263).

While these complex cosmological and zoomorphological symbols are fantastical, the elaborate allegories surrounding these beasts are at times confusing and distracting, maybe even irritating, rather than enlightening. It is perhaps symptomatic that to support this apparatus, the book includes twenty pages of explanatory notes.

Gardner repeatedly draws the analogy between Chairman Mao Zedong, China’s dominant leader from 1949 to 1976, with Qin Shi Huangdi (r. 221-210 BCE), the first Han Emperor, an autocrat who unified China but governed through fear, executing scholars who sought to moderate his policies and destroying books that called into question his regime’s principles. He notes that “Mao saw himself as the re-incarnation of Qin Shi Huangdi—the dictator who unified all of China by force” (481). During his year of discovery in China, Galvin rather naïvely asks himself: “If the Qin dynasty had become the laughingstock of the world because its rulers had failed to rule with humanity and righteousness, then why would Mao want to compare himself to Qin? Why had Qin become Mao’s most revered hero?” (125). Later, Gardner also compares Mao to the German dictator Adolf Hitler, albeit while placing ultimate responsibility for the rise of both men upon the shortcomings of the Treaty of Versailles negotiated at Paris in 1919 following World War I. According to Gardner:

Although there are significant differences, Chinese Communism and German National Socialism can both be considered different versions of ‘socialism in one country’ with racist overtones of ‘pure’ Han and ‘pure’ German. In addition, contrary to former Communist conceptions of equality, select Chi-com elites are now permitted to profit outrageously much as was the case in Nazi Germany and other fascist states. The proof of the comparison is in the nature of the brainwashing: both Mao’s *Little Red Book* and Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* were distributed to millions to digest page by page so that they would worship and obey their ‘brilliant’ leaders who had promised a ‘better future’—yet in the repressive process of stuffing pure LIES down their starving throats (483-484).

On returning to the United States, Galvin promptly rejects the then extremely popular thesis put forward by the policy intellectual Francis Fukuyama, that the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe meant that history had effectively come to an end, with the entire world embarked on the

path to capitalist liberal democracy, an ideology that now faced no real competition.⁵ Making it still more personal is the fact that he learns his former girlfriend has left him for “a new boyfriend, a Japanese American computer whiz . . . [who] is into IT, that’s Information Technology. It is a revolution that will soon change the world. All work will be much easier, cheaper, more efficient. There will be instant communication for all! It’s the End of History!” (426) Faced with this conflation of optimism over the world’s future geopolitical organization and enthusiasm for the anticipated beneficial impact of technology upon humanity, the jilted Galvin, who “had been as sure as Mr. Sure that his Ex- was smart enough not to fall for someone who believed in such pseudo-‘End of History’ theory,” reflects:

History had already returned with a Vengeance. The violent repression on Tiananmen Square represented a portent that Wars, Repression and Dictatorship would not fade so gently into the night. Although it appeared to be true that no one in China believed in the Red Emperor anymore, Chinese elites would nevertheless continue to sing Mao’s praises for the very reason that they no longer had anyone else to emulate as a fearless leader. The elites and population of the Yellow Earth were still turning to Mao like sunflowers without seeds to the sun (427).

Galvin’s disillusionment with China begins when he realizes that a great many of the people he encounters are trying to import to China those accoutrements of life in the United States—Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald’s, Pepsi, Coke, American-made cigarettes—that he wishes to reject. Nor does he find China the enlightened workers’ paradise that he had anticipated. His reaction to the suppression of the student protests in June 1989 is merely the final step in his cumulative disenchantment with the country’s existing political and socioeconomic system. It is intensified by his belief that China’s elites are effectively working in collusion with foreign capitalists to exploit the masses. There are indeed hints that “Mother Courage,” the charismatic head of the radical True Friends of the East Wind group that arranges Galvin’s trip to China, has been co-opted either by American business interests who expect to profit from better relations with China, or by the US government.

Galvin’s epiphany sheds interesting light on how China, once the darling of the international left, came to shed most if not all of the radical allure it once possessed for idealists in the socialist camp. Some, like historian Jonathan Mirsky back in 1972, began as fervent admirers of the Chinese revolution, but rapidly found their personal experiences of China did not match their expectations. Mirsky later reported on the Tiananmen protests, during which Chinese soldiers broke his left arm and knocked out five of his teeth.⁶ The brutal June 1989 crackdown repelled British leftists. Even figures such as the scientist and historian Joseph Needham, a long-time supporter of the People’s Republic, broke ranks.⁷ Some dedicated British Marxists had already taken exception to China’s new emphasis on economic development and modernization, leading to feuds within the left-wing Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding (SACU), of which Needham was a founder and president emeritus. Almost all, however, united in condemning the repression of the protests in

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History,” *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989), 3-18; also Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

⁶ Jonathan Mirsky, “From Mao Fan to Counter-Revolutionary in 48 Hours (1972),” in *My First Trip to China: Scholars, Diplomats and Journalists Reflect on their First Encounters with China*, ed. Kin-ming Liu (Hong Kong: East Slope Publishing, 2012), 24-28; Jonathan Steele, “Jonathan Mirsky obituary,” *The Guardian*, 9 September 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/09/jonathan-mirsky-obituary>, accessed 21 May 2023; Mirsky, “Tiananmen: How Wrong We Were,” *New York Review of Books*, 20 May 2014.

⁷ On Needham’s decades of support for the Chinese Communists, which dated back to the 1940s and caused considerable damage to his reputation, see Simon Winchester, *The Man Who Loved China* (New York: Harper, 2008), chs. 2-4, 6.

Beijing and elsewhere in China. SACU issued a statement of condemnation and established a “June 4th China support” group.⁸

In the past, Gardner has urged Western powers to come to terms with both China and Russia, something he believed essential if the great powers were to avoid potential nuclear war. He gave particularly high priority to defusing potential flashpoints. He suggested that it might be possible to reach an accord with China over Taiwan that would effectively maintain the status quo, and a regional joint sovereignty accord to resolve disputes in the South China Sea. He also argued that Ukraine should be demilitarized and cede Crimea to Russia in exchange for financial compensation and free-trade agreements with Europe and the United States. For Syria, Gardner would seek to establish a coalition government.⁹

In 2021, Gardner urged that the United States and European Union needed to begin a new diplomatic dialogue with Beijing, one that would convince China that any attempt to annex Taiwan would end disastrously. China must, he argued, end its repression of both the Uighurs and democratic dissent. The United States and Europe should encourage multilateral discussions among Taipei, Beijing, and the ASEAN states to resolve outstanding issues and “establish new multilateral systems of security and regional peace and development communities in the Indo-Pacific region. Accompanying this new rapprochement with China should be a diplomatic offensive toward Moscow in the effort to calm burgeoning tensions in eastern Ukraine, Crimea, and Black Sea regions.”¹⁰

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine took place after Gardner published these proposals, but before this novel appeared in print. It ends with similar prescriptions, urging:

If there is to be a long lasting and a more or less just Global Peace. . . [i]t is crucial that both American and Chinese leaderships take rapid and positive steps, as soon as possible, to transcend their mutual estrangement in a joint self-critical effort to reach out for regional and global peace. Such steps include working together to reconcile Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel; India and Pakistan; North and South Korea; Russia and Ukraine, among many other countries in dispute—in addition to finding a diplomatic settlement to their own dangerous quarrel over Taiwan and that perilous region (486).

In addition, he recommends that China at last face up to the events of June 1989, arguing that

it is finally time to tell the ‘truth(s)’ of what happened more than three decades ago, in Beijing and throughout China, at least as much as possible—in the ultimate hope that Beijing itself can eventually engage in domestic ‘Truth’ and ‘Reconciliation’—much as was the case for South Africa after the overthrow of Apartheid (482).

Around the world, other countries, including the United States, need to be equally decisive in admitting their own past errors and injustices, both internal and external.

Realistically, despite calls from developing nations that wealthier countries pay reparations to atone for slavery and global warming, this international reckoning with historical wrongs seems unlikely to happen. Nor does it seem plausible that China’s government will wrestle with the memory of Tiananmen any time in the near

⁸ Tom Buchanan, *East Wind: China and the British Left, 1925-1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 218, 220-221.

⁹ Gardner, “Talkin’ World War III China Blues,” 18 June 2021; Gardner, *IR Theory, Historical Analogy, and Major Power War*; and Gardner, *World War Trump*.

¹⁰ “Talkin’ World War III China Blues,” 18 June 2021.

future. If the dialogues and conversations Gardner advocates are to be contingent upon such steps, the world can expect a lengthy wait.

According to Gardner, moreover, much more is needed:

[T]he true discovery of America can only take part when the Land of Liberty begins to reform its own relationship with its diverse population in developing a truly participatory Democracy—while concurrently engaging in peaceful diplomatic deliberation with China—while China itself must also recognize its own democratic traditions, stemming from Mo Zi and Mencius. . .

The true development of global society, of true progress, can come about only when all citizens of the world can blossom in pluralistic, power-sharing, and consensual modes of governance in fertile soil—thereby permitting billions of wild daffodils to reveal their hidden talents and most delicate beauty while concurrently fostering a social- and ecological-aesthetic consciousness (487-488).

It is perhaps not surprising that Gardner proceeds to observe:

The dilemma is that the true discovery of each country's true relationship with its own diverse population and with the differing peoples of this planet, coupled with the improvement of their relationship with the rapidly deteriorating natural environment and with the Cosmos—evidently remains a dream to be accomplished (488).

It may indeed be true that any major Sino-American rapprochement is dependent on significant changes in the policies of both nations. Yet it seems unlikely that, at least in the near future, China and the United States—not to mention numerous other states—will overhaul their domestic and international policies along the lines Gardner suggests. It might, however, be possible to begin tackling yet another “dilemma” he discerns, namely, the inability to communicate. In Gardner's view:

Washington and Beijing are literally and figuratively trapped in different zones of time and space and logic in which the gap between American Culture and Civilization and that of Chinese ‘Socialist Spiritual Civilization’ is much deeper and wider than many believe. As Jack London acutely observed in the early 20th century: ‘between (the West) and China there was no common psychological speech. . . There was no intimate vocabulary. . . The two were mental aliens’ (486).

Lacking any “intimate vocab,” and with very little else in common, China and the United States

appear incapable of understanding each other's language, society, and culture [and] their differing forms of governance and foreign policy, nor do they seem capable of reconciling their economic grievances and quarrels. In many ways, their dual pretense to be ‘enlightened’ and ‘superior’ Civilizations—prevents them from truly comprehending each other and from accepting deeper compromises (487).

According to Gardner, to remedy

this alienation, both sides need to engage in vocabulary building exercises and speech therapy. America must reach out to China in true sincerity and China must also reach out to America in true reciprocity. Regardless of their extreme differences, the two states and

societies must learn to share power and work with other countries as well—so that all countries and peoples can prosper from experiencing the best of each—in order to achieve *Tai Ping Dao* or *Apocastasis* (487).

In terms of recommendations as to how this is to be accomplished, Gardner's novel is decidedly light on concrete specifics. The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing restrictions on travel have unquestionably wreaked havoc on all forms of communication and exchanges between China and the United States—and, indeed, between China and numerous other countries. According to a recent report by two leading experts in Sino-US relations, one Chinese, one American, who undertook lengthy visits to each other's countries in 2022, this protracted recent decline in “connectivity” has contributed significantly to the deterioration of ties between China and the United States, encouraging a “vicious cycle” of misunderstanding and estrangement.¹¹ To begin “breaking the ice,” they recommend a package of relatively low-key, pragmatic measures extending across several years to restore “direct connections across the entire span of the two societies.”¹² These include the resumption and expansion of dialogue at both the governmental and non-governmental level; more contacts at all levels of government, including not just executive officials but also congressional, state, and provincial delegations; ending the restrictions imposed on journalists and what they can report; and the restoration of scholarly and intellectual exchanges and contacts of all kinds.

The authors of this report readily admit that these are only first steps in what is likely to be a lengthy process, one that will involve many other interfaces in addition to scholarly exchange. It may indeed be true that—as Gardner often seems to imply—major changes in the governmental systems and policies of China, the United States, or both would be a prerequisite for any real warming in ties. Just how or even when such sweeping changes might be implemented is never made clear. Yet in the interim, as Gardner states rather forcefully, he and a great many others would immensely prefer to avoid World War III. Readers of this novel are ultimately left casting around for pragmatic solutions to the dilemmas it propounds.

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¹¹ Scott Kennedy and Wang Jisi, *Breaking the Ice: The Role of Scholarly Exchange in Stabilizing U.S.-China Relations* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2023), 1-2. See also Scott Kennedy and Wang Jisi, “America and China Need to Talk,” *Foreign Affairs*, 6 April 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/america-and-china-dialogue-need-lack-risk-conflict>.

¹² Kennedy and Wang, *Breaking the Ice*, 26-27.