

Beijing on the Potomac

China is invading Washington—from think tanks to law firms to lobby shops. And it causes lots of arguments: Is it friend or enemy? By Neil King Jr.

When China and the United States finally buried their long grudge and opened diplomatic relations in 1979, the Chinese hung their flag in Washington outside the drab façade of the former Windsor Park Hotel. And into its 400 cheaply remodeled rooms, where Connecticut Avenue

bends before shooting across Rock Creek Park, dozens of Chinese diplomats settled in—spouseless, many in crisp Mao suits—for what turned out to be a long stay.

To American eyes, China in those days was vast, mysterious, faintly menacing, and very far away. Even five years later, Americans were still importing just a few hundred million

dollars' worth of goods from China every month, cheap stuff like umbrellas and radios. China was a nice bulwark against the Soviet Union, maybe a future playground for American multinationals, and a trendy place to visit if you could get a visa and go hike the Great Wall. But that was about it.

Fast forward to today, go

about a mile north up Connecticut Avenue, and take a left on Van Ness. That big construction site, between the embassies of Israel and Singapore, is the new face of China in Washington. Or it will be when the glass-infused, I.M. Pei-designed showcase—250,000 square feet, \$200 million—opens sometime in 2008. “China is the most important country the US will have to deal with this century, so it only figures it should have an embassy as good as anyone’s,” says C.C. Pei, son of the great Chinese-born architect who came out of retirement to help on the project.

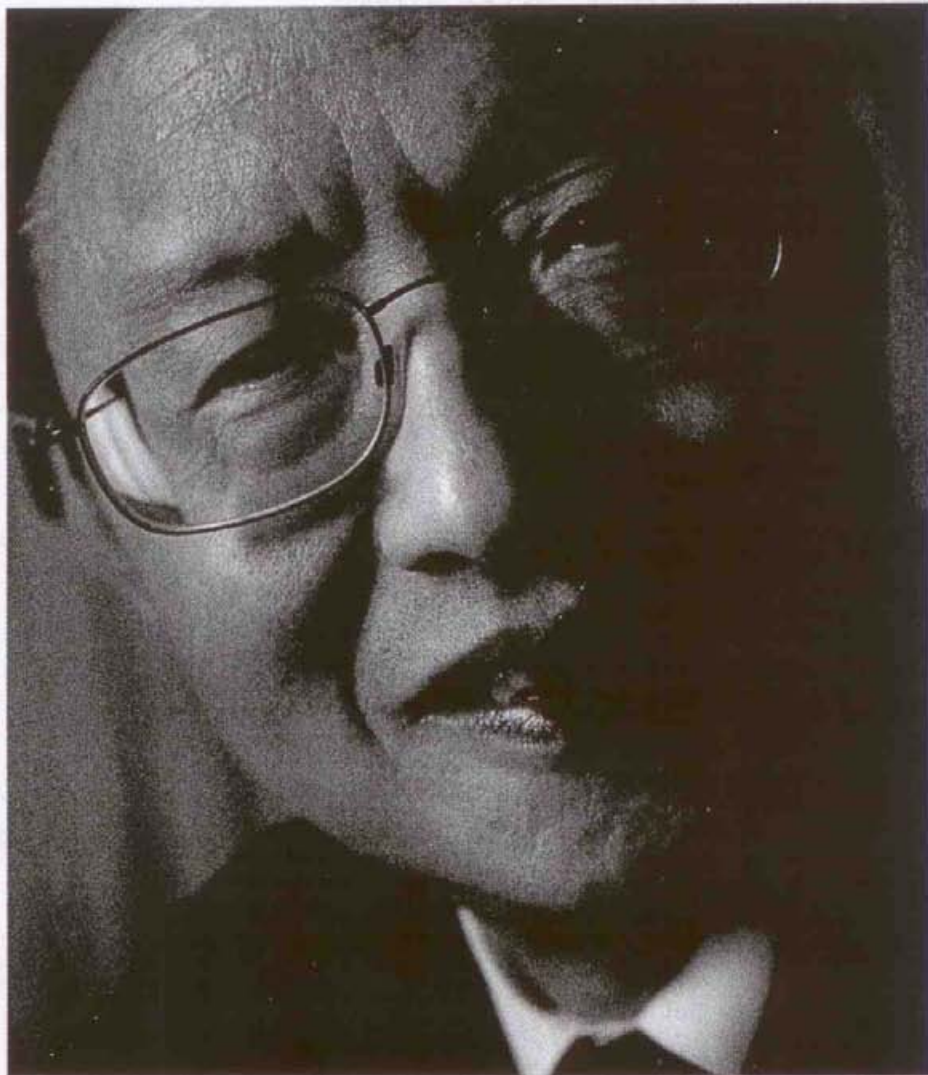
China’s debutante moment on the Washington diplomatic scene has been a long time coming—and is still far from complete. But it’s fitting that China should be moving into a glitzy new embassy, because the country’s position within the American firmament couldn’t be more different from what it was even a decade ago. The United States this year stands to import nearly \$1 billion a day in goods from China. And we’re not talking GI Joes but high-end auto parts, computers, microchips, washing machines, designer clothing, you name it. Chinese companies are investing in the United States—China’s Lenovo Group took over IBM’s personal-computer business in 2005—stirring a furor in the process.

And in Washington, from think tanks to law firms to lobby shops, there is now a booming China business. Minds may be fixated on the looming threats from North Korea and Iran or the chaos in Iraq, but the big-money bets in Washington are falling increasingly on China.

UP ON CAPITOL HILL, China now warrants two full-time congressional commissions to probe its economic and social peccadilloes—a dubious distinction no other country shares. Two congressional caucuses have sprung up to stir alarm, or deepen understanding—take your pick—over China. Together they have more than 100 members.

The US Chamber of Commerce now has 17 people in its Asia shop, mostly devoted to the huge China market. The Brookings Institution recently inaugurated its august-sounding John L. Thornton China Center, funded by a \$12.5-million bequest from the former Goldman Sachs president, with veteran China hand Jeffrey Bader at the helm.

The Bush administration seems to have half a dozen strategic dialogues with Beijing going at any one time. And at the Pentagon, where many eye the Middle Kingdom as the next big menace, China serves as the primary justification for all kinds of big-ticket buys, be they submarines or



Now on his fourth posting to the US, Chinese ambassador Zhou Wenzhong is known for being politically savvy. His latest mission? Tamping down America’s unease over China’s rise.

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long-range bombers.

Amid all the hubbub, it’s fair to say that no other country in US history has occupied such a strange straddle as China. We depend on it and fear it. China is seen as both a stealer of US manufacturing jobs and a provider of endless cheap goods for America’s middle class. It is both a purloiner of US intellectual property and a supplier of key technologies, a bogeyman for Pentagon planners and a beacon for US foreign investors and retailers. If home-mortgage rates remain decent, it’s thanks in large part to China, whose massive appetite for US debt keeps a lid on domestic interest rates. China’s foreign-currency

holdings topped a whopping \$1 trillion last fall, about ten times the United States’ holdings.

So perhaps it’s no surprise that in DC and the heartland, the span of public opinion toward China borders on schizophrenic. Two years ago, the Committee of 100, a group made up of top Chinese-Americans, released a poll on American attitudes toward China. Asked their impression of China, the general public was generally positive: six in ten said they viewed China “favorably.” Business leaders came in at 63 percent. But on Capitol Hill, eight in ten staffers held unfavorable views. More than a third of those staffers considered China a “serious military threat” to US national security.

Across the nation’s capital a debate rages, and has for years, over the true nature of China. Friend or foe? Embraceable or best hedged against? Land of opportunity or long-term threat? No other country has loosely arrayed “teams” in Washing-

CHINA IN WASHINGTON: A WHO'S WHO GUIDE

ton that in the simplest of terms are for or against it. In one corner you have the Blue Team, the threat crowd, pessimists at the Pentagon or within Washington's think tanks—or newspapers—who argue that China looms as the one power determined to take America down a notch both economically and militarily. In the other corner you have the Red Team, derided by the Blues as "panda huggers": certain businessmen, scholars, and State Department types who say that China is mainly about self-advancement and means the United States no harm.

And while the Reds may be on the rise at the moment—witness the ascent at Treasury of a true China-embracer, ex-Goldman Sachs chief executive Hank Paulson—one never knows when sentiment will swing back the other way. "The one thing all sides can agree on is that we are missing the definitive empirical proof that either side has figured China out—has divined its innermost nature—and can declare victory." That from Michael Pillsbury, a longtime Pentagon adviser on China who is claimed by the Blues, largely loathed by the Reds, but who insists he's a mix of both—a Purple, let's say. President Bush himself appears to be a Purple, as does his top diplomat, Condoleezza Rice. Both praise China as a potential partner but look warily at its growing strength.

WHICH BRINGS US to that ultimate symbol of communist China's presence in Washington: the panda. Those first pandas are worth remembering because they were at the time the quintessential goodwill gesture, rather like Japan's gift of all those cherry trees around the Tidal Basin, except a lot more dramatic. When Chairman Mao gave Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing to President Nixon in 1972, Americans went wild, cramming the National Zoo for weeks on end. The People's Republic of China had arrived in the nation's capital dressed, of all things, in irresistible black and white.

Worth remembering because it has been, to put it mildly, a rough ride since then and anything but black and white. Charles W. Freeman Jr., a legend on the China front since he served as Nixon's chief US interpreter on that trip to China in 1972, can recall pretty much the exact day when the pandas arrived and the day the Chinese took over the Windsor Park Hotel and then turned it into an embassy some six years later. A former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, a former top Asia hand at the State Department, Freeman is still a student of China's many contretemps in Washington—and a China supporter.

"It's fair to say that it took the Chinese a long time to figure out that we have three



PANDA SLAYER

The Heritage Foundation's **John Tkacik**, a former State Department diplomat in China, ranks among the city's loudest China critics, accusing the Chinese of everything from rampant spying in Silicon Valley to saber-rattling over Taiwan. China, he warns, could soon become the preeminent military force in the Pacific—an assessment many others dismiss.



MR. CHINA

Former Goldman Sachs president **John Thornton** made a fortune in investment banking, dropped out at 49, and now devotes his time almost entirely to China, whose rise he describes as the signature event of the 21st century. He gave \$12.5 million to Brookings to form the Thornton China Center and now teaches for half the year at Beijing's prestigious Tsinghua University.



BOMB THROWER

No one sends chills down the spines of Washington's China scholars and think-tankers quite like the blustery *Washington Times* scribe **Bill Gertz**. Tidbits in his weekly *Inside the Ring* column have been known to derail government promotions and thwart careers. Gertz is a top promoter of the "China threat" theory—he wrote a book on it.



FREE TRADER

The fast-talking **Myron Brilliant** runs the US Chamber of Commerce's expanding Asia shop, where he spearheaded the business community's hard-fought battle to win permanent favorable trade status for China in Congress in 2000. Next up: A Brilliant-backed plan for a multimillion-dollar center in Beijing to promote US companies and products.



CRITIC ON THE HILL

Beijing has plenty of skeptics in Congress, but none rivals new Speaker of the House **Nancy Pelosi**, who made her name in 1989 lambasting the Chinese govern-

ment's bloody crackdown at Tiananmen Square. Pelosi staged her own protest on the square in 1991 and has since bashed Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II for meeting with Chinese leaders. Many wonder if she'll use her new perch to steer Congress on a tougher course toward China.



Andy Marshall



Michael Pillsbury

THE HEDGERS

The Pentagon's arch futurist, **Andy Marshall**, and his longtime adviser, **Michael Pillsbury**, are the prime proponents of the China hedge theory—that whatever China's long-term intentions, the US military would be wise to prepare for the worst. The two often talk strategy over Peking duck at Chinatown's Full Kee restaurant.



TOP ENGAGER

After Robert Zoellick left as number two at the State Department last year, Treasury secretary **Hank Paulson** took over the China portfolio with a vengeance, launching a new economic strategic dialogue with Beijing and becoming the administration's go-to guy on all things China. It figures: As CEO of Goldman Sachs, Paulson put huge emphasis on China work and traveled there dozens of times.



Chuck Schumer

MONEY CHANGERS

Senators **Chuck Schumer** of New York and **Lindsey Graham** of South Carolina have threatened, then backed off on, legislation to slap hefty tariffs on Chinese imports so many times that they are household names in China. But the drive to prod Beijing over its monetary policy has lost steam. Last year the senators actually went to China to see the place firsthand and, well, came away better informed.



Lindsey Graham

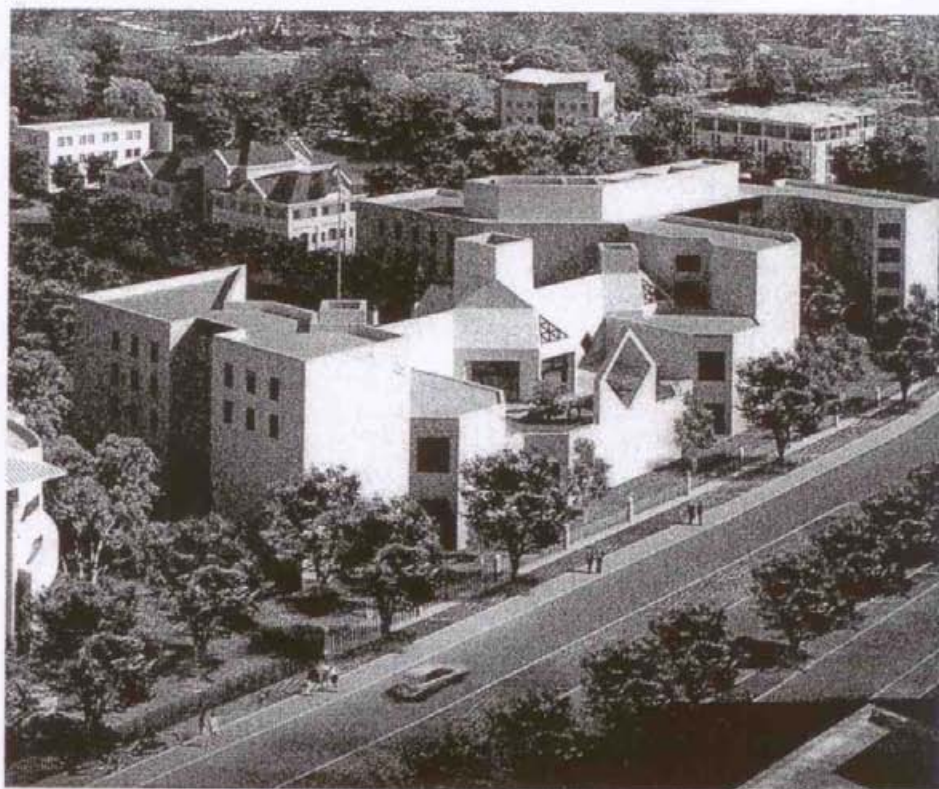
branches of government," he says, speaking by phone from Beijing. "In a way they are still figuring it out." And the weirdest feature of all? "The strangely independent nature of Congress."

China has, at best, a weak fan base in Congress, and always has. "Fickle," Freeman calls it. The Tiananmen Square crack-down in 1989, the missile-firing flare-up over Taiwan in 1995, the spate of often flimsy espionage allegations during the late Clinton years: All of it left China's image in tatters on Capitol Hill. Then came the loud and rancorous debate in 2000 over whether to bless China with most-favored-nation status in the run-up to China's joining the World Trade Organization. The tempest went on for months in Congress, with pro-China heavies like the US Chamber of Commerce, the US-China Business Council, and the Business Roundtable duking it out with the more skeptical labor and human-rights groups. China won in the end by 40 votes in the House and far more in the Senate, but for a while it looked like a cliffhanger.

SO, FIVE YEARS later, does China have a lot more friends in Congress? The US trade deficit with China, after all, has soared since 2000 from \$83 billion to an anticipated \$230 billion in 2006. Beijing's ambassador to the US, the veteran America hand Zhou Wenzhong, puzzles over that question for a minute during a chat one morning at the embassy. He rubs his chin. He sips his tea. He shifts in a formal chair at the far end of a formal Chinese-style reception room. "We have converging interests," he offers. "So to that extent, yes, we have allies in Congress."

Pressed to name one, Zhou (pronounced "Joe") thinks for a second and says, "Well, there's Senator Byrd." Senator Robert Byrd? The curmudgeonly 89-year-old from West Virginia who has voted against basically every trade deal that's ever come before him, including the pivotal 2000 vote on China? Byrd, who railed against the "influx of Chinese goods" during his reelection campaign last fall? Byrd, one of the staunchest protectionists on Capitol Hill?

The Byrd mention is funny—or sad—on a couple of levels. China is now America's fastest-growing export market and our second-largest supplier of goods after Canada, having summarily shoved aside Japan and then Mexico over the last two years for second place. So imagine the ambassador from Japan or Mexico or Canada having to hem and haw over naming a single solid friend in Congress, and you get a feel for how strange, even precarious, China's position in Washington really is.



Chinese-born architect I.M. Pei came out of retirement to help design the \$200-million stone and glass embassy that will be the new face of China when it opens in DC in 2008.

China "should have an embassy as good as anyone's," says C.C. Pei, son of the famed architect.

But the Byrd mystery may not be so mysterious after all. Pleasant, well-combed, sometimes acerbically funny, the 61-year-old Zhou is known around Washington as one of China's most astute envoys when it comes to the cliché of all politics being local. And what senator is more deeply local than Robert Byrd? It turns out that Zhou and Byrd have had various chats about potential Chinese investment in West Virginia, possibly in the state's coal industry. There is also some ongoing scientific cooperation between West Virginia and a Chinese institute doing interesting things with converting coal into gas or liquid forms of energy.

Meanwhile, Byrd asked the Government Accountability Office to investigate the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, a congressional shop of inquiry that Byrd himself helped found in 2000 and is known now for its critical reports on China's economic and military ambitions. Rumors are flying that the commission may be on its last legs.

Zhou gave Byrd "a beautiful framed

handmade Chinese shirt," says Byrd spokesman Tom Gavin, while Byrd gave Zhou various copies of his books. "It's an open door, and Senator Byrd is looking to be a friend of China," says Gavin.

MOVING CRITICS INTO the "friend" column is of course the job of any ambassador. Zhou has overseen an expansion of the embassy's congressional-affairs office, now at about a dozen diplomats, and has urged his deputies to get out more, be seen, mix it up. China, in turn, has begun to send a much higher caliber of diplomat to Washington, including, most recently, the foreign-policy and Washington expert Su Ge, who ran the congressional shop until he became the ambassador to Suriname last fall.

One result is the fact that Chu Maoming, the embassy's latest laconic spokesman, actually calls reporters back from time to time or responds to an e-mail. Both are startling developments in the evolution of an embassy long known for its studious silence. Chu has even been known to do lunch and to put forward other embassy officials to do the same. I went on the road with Ambassador Zhou for two days in Iowa in 2005, cruising around in his van, sitting in on meetings. His astonished staff said, without offering clear proof, that it was the first time in the history of China that a foreign reporter had gotten inside

a Chinese delegation. Now that's a long time.

Other signs of the charm offensive aren't tough to find. Bonnie Glaser, a longtime China scholar at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies, marvels at how Chinese diplomats are now taking think-tank types out to lunch—"at places like the St. Regis and the Mayflower," she says, adding that the Chinese "are becoming much more discriminating in their tastes." Glaser has her own principal contact at the embassy, as do most scholars in Washington who specialize in China. "He took my whole family out to dinner with his wife and daughter," she says. "Completely unprecedented."

Every year for more than three decades, Jan Carol Berris, vice president of the New York-based National Committee on US-China Relations, has held an ever expanding picnic at Battery Kemble Park in DC. Last fall's picnic was an eye opener, she says. More than 200 people showed up, and about a third of them were from the Chinese Embassy: kids, spouses, diplomats. "They certainly worked the crowd," she says.

ZHOU IS NOW on his fourth posting to the US after earlier stints in here and in Los Angeles and San Francisco. As a student at England's Bath University and the London School of Economics, he started his career as a high-level government interpreter, including working for state leader Deng Xiaoping. Since then Zhou has had to send sharp arrows America's way at some very prickly moments. After an American spy plane crash-landed on an island off China's mainland in 2001, it was Zhou—in Beijing at the time as deputy foreign minister—who demanded that President Bush apologize for the incident, which involved the death of a Chinese fighter pilot. Bush, instead, passed along his "regrets."

Zhou's latest stint in DC has been all about tamping down unease over China's rise—its "peaceful development," as the Chinese call it—be it in Omaha or among staffers on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. His main message to the American public: "China is your friend."

Dispatched to Washington in April 2005, Zhou established himself as a man on the move. His mission: to meet every member of Congress (he claims to be nearing the halfway mark), make himself a fixture within the administration, and to tout China's charm and peaceful intentions. He has since taken that message from the cornfields of Iowa and Kansas to the more distant reaches of New England and Alaska.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 135)

EGG FU POLITICS

A few local Chinese restaurants are known for more than duck with orange sauce. Here are places that also have geopolitical claims to fame:



Yenching Palace, a Connecticut Avenue landmark, is known as much for its historical roles as its egg rolls.

Full Kee (509 H St., NW; 202-371-2233). This cash-only, Formica-tabletops place in DC's Chinatown is a longtime favorite of FBI agents and top Justice personnel. Pentagon futurist Andy Marshall often dines there with adviser Michael Pillsbury, author of several books on the Chinese military. Folks recommend the clams in black-bean sauce, but there also are sautéed frog's and pig's knuckles.

Joe's Noodle Shop (1488-C Rockville Pike; 301-881-5518). A strip-mall hole in the wall on Rockville Pike, Joe's is a frequent haunt of CIA and Pentagon China watchers, so be careful what you say over some of the area's best bowls of spicy Szechuan noodles.

Yenching Palace (3524 Connecticut Ave., NW; 202-362-8200). The seemingly eternal Yenching Palace on DC's Connecticut Avenue likes to strut not only its red neon sign but also its historical significance. It boasts of playing a central role in defusing the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, when US diplomats met there secretly with envoys sent by Russia's Nikita Khrushchev. Nine years later, it played host to Nixon's top diplomat, Henry Kissinger, when he was in talks with China over normalizing relations. The restaurant still touts reviews from the 1960s, having fallen off most lists of the area's culinary hits.

Mr. K's (2121 K St., NW; 202-331-8868). The aptly named restaurant on K Street in downtown DC is evidently a good place to cut an arms deal, because the place is frequented by Taiwanese diplomats and US defense contractors, who often sit at the same

table and talk about submarines and helicopters. (But don't tell the Chinese Embassy, whose diplomats also list Mr. K's as among their favorite places.) Beyond that, it's plenty fancy and pricey, with linen tablecloths and a sorbet course to cleanse the palate.

Peking Gourmet Inn (6029 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church; 703-671-8088). The archaically named restaurant at Balleys Crossroads may as well be called the Bush Chinese Joint, so often has the Bush family dropped by for its Peking duck and other delicacies. (Chinese officials prefer to call it the Beijing Gourmet Inn.) Visitors will find plenty of Bush images and references, as both presidents Bush have taken up its chopsticks, as have Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, and other Bush notables. It's a sprawling place with room even for Democrats.



The walls of the Peking Gourmet Inn are filled with photos of the Bushes and other VIPs who've put this popular Falls Church restaurant on the map.

Chinese diplomats are now taking think- tank types out to lunch at places like the Mayflower.

He started 2006 in Chicago, where he talked oil cooperation at the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. He took the same theme to Dallas. Then it was off to Memphis to visit the pandas and tell the locals: "We want to do business with you." Last spring he made his way into comedian Stephen Colbert's monologue at the White House Correspondents' Dinner: "Ambassador Zhou Wenzhong, welcome. Your great country makes our Happy Meals possible."

Zhou's transcontinental diplomacy is a retail operation. In Atlanta last November he announced that China would soon open a consulate there and promised to back any request Delta Air Lines might make for a direct link from Atlanta to Beijing—a highly coveted commodity. He usually hauls along a bevy of economic attachés in case local businesses raise complaints about operating in China.

Zhou cuts a somewhat dashing figure, with his penchant for white scarves and barbed jokes, but he can still be a deliverer of stiff party-line messages from Beijing. A crowd in the sticks of Iowa or Georgia never knows when he's going to launch unannounced into a stem-winder on Taiwan. Any amendment in Congress seeking to improve ties with Taiwan is enough to get Zhou up to the Hill twice a day if need be to push back.

FOR ALL THE progress, a general clumsiness on the PR front is still true for China writ large in Washington. Veteran China hands tell stories—on deepest background—of China's longstanding penchant for delivering testy formal protest letters over even the smallest perceived slights. The brouhaha in 2005 over whether Chinese energy company Cnooc Limited might gobble up Unocal stirred a flurry of such protests, as have the repeated threats by some in the Senate to impose stiff tariffs on Chinese imports unless Beijing loosened controls on its currency. "The Chinese Embassy can be pretty ham-handed at times," says one top Senate staffer, who claims to have a file stuffed with barbed embassy letters.

The Cnooc tiff in the summer of 2005 set off a squall on Capitol Hill and showed how unprepared Beijing was to respond. Lawmakers within days were describing Cnooc's \$18.5-billion bid to buy Unocal as a threat to US national security. Chinese officials, stunned at the backlash, got testy in return, accusing Congress of singling out China for rough treatment.

Chevron, which had already bid \$17 bil-

lion for Unocal, revved up a big lobbying effort to crush the Cnooc offer. Cnooc tried to go mano a mano on the lobbying front, hiring its own stable of lawyers and arm twisters, but by late July it was all over. Cnooc pulled its bid and went home.

Ironically—if only because the deal was already in the works at the time of the Cnooc stink—China that same month finally gave in to local culture and hired its own lobbying outfit, Washington heavy-weight Patton Boggs. Pundits heralded the signing as a sea change, as Beijing for ages had sniffed at influence peddling as contrary to communism. But by Beltway standards the retainer, \$22,000 a month, was a pittance. Nor has the contract grown much. Congressional staffers say that Patton Boggs has served mainly as a writer of letters and an opener of doors on Capitol Hill—doors, some say, that China could just as easily have opened on its own. Patton Boggs declines to talk about its work.

So for the moment, China's leap into the lobbying world looks more like a hop. "We are still experimenting with this," says Ambassador Zhou. He acknowledges that lobbyists "can help in communications" and are useful in interpreting the strange ways of American political culture. But he's not predicting a boom in Chinese spending on lobbyists anytime soon. "We are not in a hurry," he says.

China may have more than the usual share of enemies around town, but it also has some defenders, which is partly why Beijing has gotten by with so little of its own PR. One case in point is how for much of last year, Democratic senator Charles Schumer of New York and Republican senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina threatened to whack China with a 27-percent tariff on all Chinese imports unless Beijing loosened its exchange-rate policy. (Many critics contend that China's low-valued yuan has made Chinese imports unnaturally cheap.)

But while Schumer and Graham played chicken with their bill, corporate powerhouses like Boeing and Motorola and groups like the US Chamber and the Business Roundtable pushed back. By summer the senators had stuffed their bill back in the bottom drawer, though they could pull it out again at any time.

BENEATH THE BOILING Red versus Blue/Friend versus Foe debate, there's another reality. China the idea, the inescapable force, is now omnipresent in Washington. Within government, the China portfolio no longer resides primarily at the State Department or the Pentagon. It is increasingly at Energy, too, the Department of Agriculture, the Federal Reserve, and the Securities and Exchange Commission, to say nothing of Treasury, Commerce, Labor, and the US Trade Representative's office. Insiders say that the CIA has more than 100 analysts devoted to China—a figure the agency itself declines to confirm.

To drive home the point of China's centrality, Treasury secretary Hank Paulson last fall took nearly a third of President Bush's Cabinet on a jaunt to Beijing to kick off the first round of his new "strategic economic dialogues" with China.

The same Sino-fever can be found at the think tanks. Brookings is bulking up its China focus and plans soon to open its first office abroad—in Beijing. The Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute have boned up on the China side, though with a far more skeptical eye. Glaser at CSIS notes how at her shop, "it now seems that everyone is doing a little bit of China," including people who are otherwise studying aging, the space program, the Middle East, or energy.

Other organizations exist primarily, or in some cases entirely, to raise alarms over China. Care for a quick glimpse of the ultimate Blue Team view? Check out the Web site of the International Assessment and Strategy Center (strategycenter.net), run by longtime China critic Arthur Waldron.

China has caused a few deep ruptures within groups. The most noteworthy brawl broke out within the 112-year-old National Association of Manufacturers, a lobbying group that represents thousands of US companies, from little ball-bearing makers to goliaths like Boeing. When Senators Schumer and Graham were pushing their bill to punish China over its currency, much of NAM's small-fry membership wanted to join the fight. The big members, outfits like General Motors and Caterpillar with sizable interests in China, said no. NAM decided to sit out the fight.

Beijing has won a bevy of backers in one smaller tussle that's of importance to many in Washington. In March, China will allow one US air carrier to open another direct flight to China. Oddly, US carriers now offer nonstop passenger service to China from only three US cities: Chicago, San Francisco, and Newark, New Jersey. So last fall, legions of former US secretaries of state, trade representatives, members of Congress, and think-tank types threw their

weight behind United Airlines, which is trying to win a nonstop flight to Beijing from Washington Dulles. The Department of Transportation was expected to announce the winner by the end of December; the other airlines competing are American Airlines (Dallas), Northwest (Detroit), and Continental (Newark), which wants to fly nonstop to Shanghai as it now does to Beijing.

AFTER NOVEMBER'S US ELECTION, Zhou and others at the Chinese Embassy spent days scratching their heads over what it all meant. It wasn't all good news. The new House speaker, California Democrat Nancy Pelosi, may be an upstanding mother of five, but for China she is also the woman who in 1991 unfurled a pro-democracy banner in a protest in Tiananmen Square. Every year since then she has given barbed speeches on the anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown, earning her huge respect among the embattled Tibetans, Uigurs, and Taiwanese.

Most of the new Democrats who tilted the balance in both the House and Senate arrived in Washington highly critical of free trade, and with no immediate love for the Chinese economic dynamo.

China's latest mission statement is to create a "harmonious society" at home

The US elections had Chinese officials scratching their heads. It wasn't all good news for them.

and promote harmony abroad. Zhou often uses that line, too. It's proof to some that, ideologically, China is moving out of communism and into Confucianism. "But by harmony we don't mean uniformity," Zhou says, sipping his tea in the embassy. "It's harmony in diversity." Which is another way of saying China wants harmony, but not the one-size-fits-all version that the US has in mind.

Zhou expects China to find another brand of harmony out on DC's International Drive, as soon as the new embassy is ready. The embassy, he says, "will be a reflection of the growth in our relations." Beijing has imported hundreds of workers from China to build the embassy and is housing them at the Days Inn Gateway on New York Avenue. China has rented the motel, all 195 rooms, until 2008.

C.C. Pei sings the praises of the embassy's abundant glass and sloped roofs,

its stone-clad exterior, its "axiality." He hopes the building will make a statement on contemporary Chinese architecture, though the schematic drawings offered up by Pei Partnership Architects reveal a sprawling edifice that's a little on the clunky side.

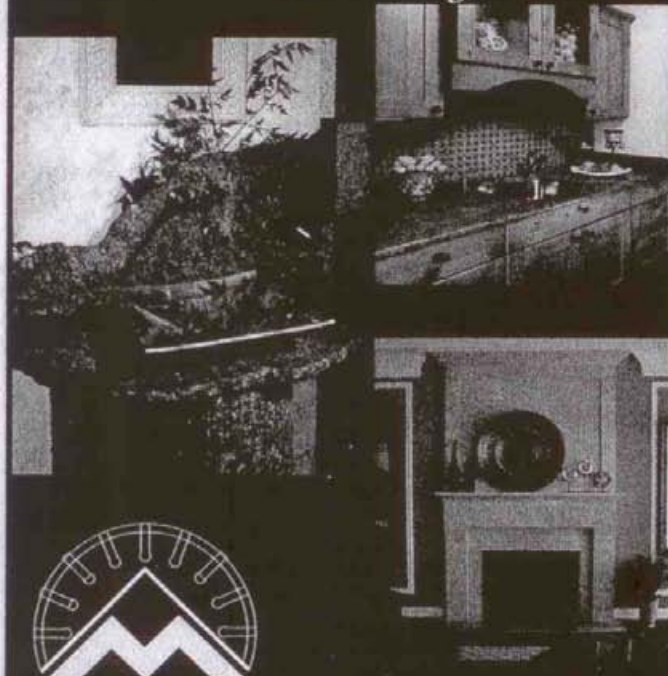
The subplot here is that China isn't all that keen on the site it found to build its new diplomatic palace. China is an economic powerhouse, an emerging superpower, so why should it be wedged into the few remaining lots in a diplomatic compound that's home to more-diminutive countries like Jordan, Israel, Singapore, and Egypt? Well, it was the best the State Department had to offer.

As with so much else on the China front in Washington, there's the requisite shadow, even here. Zhou longs for other sites, places of more beauty or prestige. "I wish we could have a spot along Massachusetts Avenue," he says, wistfully. "I really like the spot where the Italian embassy is . . . Or the new Swedish embassy. They have a really nice spot, right there along the river." **WI**

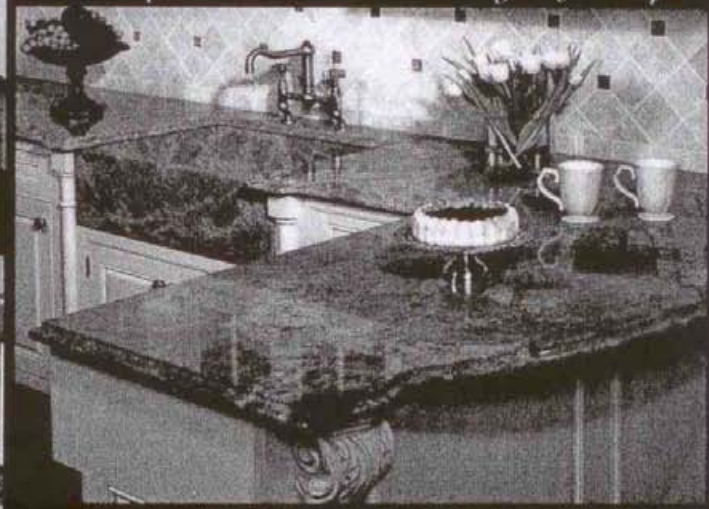
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