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Social Intolerance and the Collision of Cultures The more open-minded among us have grandiose hopes that the meeting of new and different cultures will permit a fair exchange of goods and ideas to the betterment of all. But the lesson most often taught by history is one of fear, violence, mischaracterization, and de-humanization. For fair exchange to be possible, or likely, there must first exist commonality between the two colliding cultures. And should the two societies be similar enough to cooperate without strife, the less they would have to teach each other. A premise that can be easily garnered from history is that the clash of cultures will lead to conflict in proportion with the magnitude, and severity of said differences. Facilitating the inevitable conflict is the truism that a completely tolerant civilization cannot exist. The values spawned from economic and political necessities must by definition nourish a religio-cultural matrix that will assert morality to a degree that must at some point become exclusionary. The more different the culture, the greater the likelihood that one or the other will encounter, or perceive, violations of a fundamental tenet central to their way of life, or understanding of the universe. To utilize historical comparisons, England (and much of Europe) during the Middle Ages was of course, characterized by subsistence farming and a loose caste-like system of landed peasants, entitled knights possessing fiefdoms, and city-dwellers which, being ill-defined under the feudal system, inhabited what would become focal points for the dramatic changes to come. Strife was largely continuous, not just during the Middle-Ages, but onward into the Renaissance period to come later, as discrete nations formalized into better-defined hierarchies. (Abulafia, 1999) Cultural clashes occurred, especially for

Britain, during the raids of the Vikings and culminating in the Norman conquest of the 11th century. In these early disputes involving England, if anyone can be said to have benefited from the cultural contact, it would arguably be the Norse. While both England and the Vikings would eventually stabilize into Christian states with national identities, England was on the receiving end of centuries of Norse violence. Among the differences between England, all of Europe and China at this point would have been the lack of unification. China had been beset by screaming barbarian hordes from Central Asia, and while these enemies were not always repelled successfully; China was able to eventually stabilize under a succession of Imperial dynasties; while the remnants of the old Roman Empire never truly came back together into a cohesive whole. China's cultural contact was largely limited to nomadic raiders and goods flowing over the Silk road, contributing to an attitude of superiority as the penultimate civilization. The eventual stability China achieved, ultimately led to complacency in terms of technological progress; whereas the agony of centuries of European strife pushed them into an ongoing death-struggle to gain military advantage over neighboring realms. China's strife arose from two primary sources; attempts to replace whoever the current emperor was, should the feeling persist that he had lost the 'Mandate of Heaven', and the influx of Central Asian hordes, some of whom eventually succeeded in replacing the Jin dynasty, with what would become the Yuan. (Li Bo, 2001) Through a comparison of Europe and Asia, a pattern emerges from which generalizations can be made regarding two likely outcomes of cultural clashes. In both nations, foreign barbarians with military savvy may press their advantage, ravage and harass the settled

peoples, not because they perceive some particular religious or cultural outrage that drives them, but out of simple greed; contempt for the 'settled peoples' is the only justification needed to take what they are not able to defend - until the barbarians become the settled peoples themselves. This occurred with the aforementioned Vikings, and on occasion, with Mongolian invaders that plundered China only to replace the ruling Dynasty. The other type of clash is one in which a barrier is overcome, and two well-established cultures meet, with values and assumptions so radically different, that both nations will eventually be changed by the contact; in which violence is inevitable. This is closer to what occurred when the British at last reached China. From the 1400's and until the 19th century, China slept through a period of stagnation that could be considered a decline. There was largely a sense of complacency; China had convinced itself that it was the center of the world, that no other civilization truly mattered; so there was no impetus for unusual innovation. British gunboats adjusted this perception when they shattered imperial resistance to the Opium trade with then-modern firepower. Among the factors that contributed to the social clash was, undoubtedly, a British sense of superiority due to their perceived Christian values, in the way that all cultures want to believe their way of life superior. China, at this time, had a more informal legal system, compared to the well-codified British laws concerning property. The British thus, had a strong impetus to use force to protect their investments in the Chinese people themselves as drug-consumers. (Rosenthal et al, 2011) But as a consequence, China could no longer sleep away the centuries believing in their own manifest superiority in the face of European technology. After

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decades of exploitation common where cultures of dramatically different value systems clash, China has been forced to embrace a climate of innovation and advancement that has brought to the Chinese people the elevated standard of living common to Europe. Truly alien cultures will almost invariably generate violence upon meeting; as that which holds civilization together must also forbid certain concepts. Even a doctrine of multiculturalism must at some point exclude cultures that insist on their own domination of all other cultures. An entirely equitable exchange between different societies is not to be expected; but with determination, and savvy leadership, it will be possible to maintain one's integrity while borrowing the advantages of the new society, as the example of China reveals.

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