

CHINA AND VIETNAM — THE MAIN ANTAGONISTS

Vietnam's history has been bound up with that of China from the very beginning and it is a challenge for the conscientious historian to trace the origins of the tension between these two countries to what happened long ago. The further back one goes the more one has an impression of *déjà vu*. Indeed this impression is so striking that one should be wary of concluding too quickly that the Vietnamese and the Chinese are simply conforming to a tradition of conflict passed on to them from previous generations. It is always astonishing to discover to what extent historical events, even very distant ones, still have a considerable impact on states which claim to have radically changed the structure of their society through revolutionary ideology.

In China, as in Vietnam, talk of conflict between them is no longer expressed in ideological terms. The arguments which are used by both sides refer to important events in their history, to current geopolitical considerations and to their national interests. It is just as pointless to carry historical analogies too far, however, as it is to try to minimize the age-old resentment which the two countries feel towards each other.

THE IMPERIAL PAST AND ITS EFFECT ON STRATEGY

According to the representative of the Vietnamese newspaper *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* the Western press often fails to understand the meaning of incidents which take place on the Chinese-Vietnamese border. "For us," he said "it is easier; we know that the Chinese make use of such incidents to mark an anniversary or remind us of an earlier battle, sometimes a