Love that China

WHAT WERE they going to tell them down in the middle-west when, for all these years, they'd been telling them that the Communist Chinese were social and political leprous? It wasn't a question that particularly seemed to trouble the United States mass media. Except for the ultra-conservative Press, which is said to have almost totally isolated itself from President Nixon's mission to Peking, the papers merely reported the event without troubling to rationalise too much about the hostile face it represented.

But U.S. television, which must always have an uneasy conscience, felt it necessary to rearrange the perspective on China. And because it's a medium that never seems to understand understatement, it produced some of the most comically showy somersaults in the history of news commentary.

For instance, on the night before the Nixon entourage arrived in Peking the Columbia Broadcasting System networked a one-hour program in prime time called "Misunderstanding China," according to the blurb, documented "the multitude of distorted notions and outright prejudices Americans have had about the Chinese." Fearless and self-searching it was, "Not just Hollywood but all the media, including television, reflect and perpetuate many of our illusions about the Chinese," said Irv Drasin, the producer and writer of the program. "Most of what we think we know about China has been learned not from direct experience or school books but from the popular images of feature films, comic books and magazine adventure stories."

Nothing in the traditional way of American caricature was absolved from blame. Myrna Loy was slapped for wearing a movie version of the Dragon Lady in a way that was "about as close to reality as the Martian man in film and novel." And the producers exhumed that old pop song of the forties "Slow Boat to China" as evidence of the "sometimes patronising, sometimes insulting way in which the U.S. has depicted the Chinese... remarkably, the boat often got no farther than Hollywood." Once we're up, the program became an agonising exercise in self-analysis and masochism. Clips were shown from such movies as "The Mask of Fu Manchu," "The Bitter Tea of General Yen," "The Left Hand of God," "The Mysterious Mr. Wong," and "The Sand Pebbles" as evidence of the American guilt. The film of Pearl Buck's novel "The Good Earth" was described as simplistic and patronising, and even poor old Charlie Chan was exhumed for being forced to speak English "as if he had discovered it in a fortune cookie."

George Orwell would have been fascinated by the CBS translation of his "1984" double-think, and if he'd watched the program Mao Tse Tung might have gathered some marginal notes for his little red book. "Especially in the past 22 years," said producer Drasin, "China has been more a hazy image than a reality in the American mind. Almost everything Americans and Chinese know of each other is what their governments want them to know. The purpose of this broadcast is to see beyond the images and stereotypes and to begin to see the Chinese, and ourselves, more realistically."

To follow, an American rethink on the Japanese. At Cape Town, guerrillas suffering from glandular excesses and all other stereotyped villains of feature film, comic books and magazine adventure stories.

Escapism

IF YOU doubt the existence of the word and the condition theatremen you should cross the treeless plain and see John Joseph Jones in his amphitheatre. It's called the Seddon Vincent Memorial Theatre and it is 17 miles from Perth in the Darling Range among the bauxite and rough-backed jarrabas.

For Mr. Jones, the theatre is a dream incarnate. Conceived in the days when he was a union official, academic, singer and you name it, the theatre is one of those triumphs to a man's determination and vision. It might also be an idea before its time, but that's another story.

The decked seating, the bridges and ramps around the cascading stream and pool were built largely by prison labor as a community project. And, of course, the prisoners were mostly Aborignals, because this item is about Western Australia, the great State On the Move.

When the time came for Mr. Jones to produce his own play "Scour" in the amphitheatre, some parts were given to prisoners in recognition of their help. On the opening night everyone was there, including the chief of the State's Correction Department, Colin Campbell.

Enter Sturt, the explorer. "You will go east and we will go west." And they did. At the time of writing the play is still short of some Aboriginal performers and the police are not amused. The episode could well be included in a new play about W.A. Called "Brockman," perhaps.

Effective canvassing

WHILE he might have meant well, Labor Senator Jim Keating's suggestion in the Senate that Aboriginal land rights protesters be given a permanent building in Canberra was not accepted with complete equanimity among the tent-dwellers opposite Parliament House. The fact is that the encampment has almost become as much an institution as Question Time and, some
would argue, a good deal more effective one. The demonstrators have formed such a strong and effective lobby for their cause (there's a constant drivel of journalists and politicians trooping across the road from Parliament House) that they are unlikely to want to retire to the obscurity of just another of the many lobbyist's buildings in Canberra. The self-satisfied embassy, with a permanent staff of about 15 (and a few more at weekends), has not only built up substantial support in Canberra, it has set up an efficient communications machine to get its message across. Press releases are now put out regularly. They are typed in the "office" — the largest tent — and then distributed to every major newspaper in Australia through the Parliamentary Press Gallery. Inquiries are always directed to the embassy's unofficially delegated spokesman John Newington and Michael Anderson.

The lobby has just received an anonymous donation of $118 and several other sizable amounts. A few dollars come in from sources, which, when asked to visit Parliament House, have been known to refuse without a call on the embassy. Some of the Aborigines have jobs as building labourers and the women as babysitters. More money is being raised by dance concerts, art fairs and it's all pooled for communal use.

Apart from the office, one of the tents serves as a kitchen, which comes complete with cook. Bathroom facilities are a little harder to come by, however, and public lavatories are needed to travel the two miles to the Members' Representative Council office for a shower.

Although it might seem boring to demonstrate for 24 hours a day, the Aborigines and the few whites who have joined them profess to enjoy the life.

Nor are the demonstrators particularly worried about their security of tenure. There have been some isolated rumblings that the Government should move them. Former Prime Minister Gorton asked, with more than a note of sarcasm in his voice, if the Minister for the Interior, Mr. Ralph Hant, had noticed a series of tents pitched on a public lawn in front of Parliament House. "Will future camps be prevented so that the public as a whole may enjoy the environs of Parliament House freely and so that the lawns themselves will not be damaged?" he asked.

Considering that the tent-dwellers are succeeding in embarrassing the Government, the Minister's reply was heuristical for them. Yet, he had noticed a number of tents, but their occupants were quiet, had behaved and co-operated with the police very well, there was no litter and no health problem and, in all, in neither the view the Government had seen any great cause for concern about the Aborigines themselves.

Mr. Hant's rider — that he thought the Government would have to look at an ordinance to ensure that Parliament Place was reserved for its purpose, a place for orderly and peaceful demonstration but got where other people were prevented from using it, seemed designed more to placate the few upset Government Members than being a real effort to get tough.

Canned entertainment

SINCE TV came to Darwin sales of beer have steadily increased. A brewery director has suggested that this is because television drives people to drink. A spokesman for the commercial TV station says the increase has occurred because people like to have a drink beside them as they watch TV. In the pubs, the more reliable sources — the bartenders — say that only the bombing of the breweries would shake the habits of the drinking classes in the Territory.

The commercial TV spokesman says that bottle sales have gone up compared with draught. The brewery says that graphics show a continuing rise in the sales of draught. Stores licensed to sell beer and spirits report that TV has not made much difference.

The consensus in Darwin attributed the usual hard-line in something new but the repetition of canned programs soon took off the edge.

The ABC began television transmitting on August 13 last year and commercial television began on November 11. The commercial company consists mainly of local citizens with a five percent interest held by a local newspaper, linked to the Murdoch group. Programs cover 33 hours a week starting after 5 p.m. and continuing until 10.30 p.m., sometimes a bit later.

Observation suggests that the square eye offers occasional, but only occasional, opposition to the wash-up full of ice and cans. The commercial station's estimate is that there is coverage over 66 miles, including 7,800 out of 9,800 horses, attracting a high percentage of local advertising, including ads for beer.

Numbers game

CANBERRA'S Associated Chambers of Manufactures of Australia has always been a great place for titles. If you asked their Director of Communications (anywhere else he would be the public relations officer) about ACMA's staff he would say it was a subject best handled by the National Director.

The National Director would tell you that there were 25 specialist staff positions. Having noticed about eight rooms and being unable to believe that such prestigious specialist staff would be crammed in three to a room, in the undignified manner of Members of Parliament, the sceptical journalist might then return to the Director of Communications to ask more details about the staff.

After great agonising and apologies about the National Director's "tendency to exaggerate just a little," the Director of Communications would finally produce a list of names numbering nine, including himself, receptionist and stenographer. Each of the dynamic officers of ACMA filled an average of more than three specialist staff positions.

Imagine our interest when we got a press release from ACMA a few days ago announcing a grand new position: Joint Assistant Director of the Central Industrial Secretariat. We thought the nation should learn about this grey eminence.

We tried the Director of Communications. No luck. He had resigned from ACMA, "ages ago" and not been replaced. We asked for the National Director and were reminded that he, too, had retired and was without a replacement. At which stage we have to admit we gave up.

But somebody should believe that ACMA is entirely a hoax. There is still someone there with a revo machine to churn out the Press releases.

The welfare state

IN A CURIOUSLY generous gesture, the N.S.W. Government has announced that pensioners who apply for duck-shooting licences are to be given them free. Nothing, though, for hungry pensioners who want to shoot the pigeons in Hyde Park.

All their own work

More agitated thinking on racial realities is going on in South Africa than in any other country.

—South African Ambassador to Canberra, "Up 7. B. More"

Pack rape has nothing to do with criticism.

—Author Germaine Greer

The Government blandly and arrogantly treats the Opposition with contempt.

—Mr. Fred Dale, Labor MP in the House of Representatives.

Thank God, only odd birds use it (marijuana) in this country.

—Senator Health Minister, Senator Sir Kenneth Anderson.

In the past five years more than 150,000 Australians have come to Fiji and enjoyed holidays among us nickers.

—Fiji Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara.

Finally, I just want to mention an important factor in milk production, and that's the cow itself.

—Mr. G. Dubie, chief dairy, during a dairy products visit to Turkey.

Well, Nixon himself says it is the great event of the century, so perhaps it may be true.

—Japanese Prime Minister, Mr. Sato, on the Peace revision.