Watch the Ball, Ignore the Feints  
  
 When I was between ten and fourteen years old, soccer was my favorite sport. I was an above-average player because at that age, I was taller and could run faster than many of my classmates. On a good day, my reasonably good ball control allowed me to dribble past many opposing backs. I still remember vividly that during one scrimmage I was so full of myself that on a whim I tried to dribble past five opposing players all by myself --- I think I got past four of them before they finally ganged up on me and robbed me of the ball.   
 There was another boy whose athleticism and ball handling skill was heads and shoulders above everyone else. His surname was Fan. He must often have played outdoors, because he sported a golden brown tan beneath a spare crewcut. He had a compact lithe frame with washboard abs and a razor-straight back which he carried like a soldier on parade. It was common knowledge that on the track field he could beat anyone in our class in any run of any distance. On the soccer field, he could dribble and dance past most players with his quick feet, feinting left while moving right or apparently rolling right before switching to the left with a drop of the shoulders. In front of goal, his shot rocketed forward like a cannon-ball, often to the back of the net.  
 There seemed no way to stop him. I still remember one time I faced him one on one near midfield with all of our defenders out of place, knowing that if he got past me, he would have a free run at goal. Now I am not a “dirty” player by any measure, and I can honestly say that I have never intentionally stretched out a leg to trip someone. But I was very determined to stop him or at least slow him down, so as he came towards me with the ball, I quickly formed a plan. Sure enough, with a quick feint which threw me off, he proceeded to run past me. He was almost clear by the time that I turned back, stuck out my arm and grabbed a fistful of his shirt to pull him back bodily. Surprised at my audacity, he raised a hue and cry but the opportunity at goal was gone. Despite the ensuing foul against our team, I was smiling inside.  
 In any game when we played against Fan, we always assigned our best defender to guard him, with the understanding that one or two additional team members would come help. One of our defenders was named Tsai. He was skinny and smaller than Fan and me and was not considered to be that good of a player. When teams were chosen for scrimmages, he was never chosen first, but also never last because he played with heart could kick the ball a good way upfield, making him a more than decent defender.   
 We soon noticed that Tsai was rather effective against Fan. In one on one situations, Fan still got by Tsai a small percentage of the time, but more often than not Tsai managed to kick the ball away from him. That was far better than the rest of us could do.   
 We could not understand why more skillful and speedier players than Tsai fared worse than him when defending against Fan. So one day we asked Tsai to tell us his secret when guarding Fan. He hemmed and hawed for a bit, and finally confessed that he did not really know. When we pressed him further, he finally said, “When I see Fan dribbling towards me with the ball, I just run up as fast as I can to kick the ball away from him, and I try not to pay attention to any of his feints”. So that was Tsai’s secret. By ignoring Fan’s feints which tricked other players into throwing their weight the wrong way, and only concentrating on the path of the ball which is, needless to say, the true object of the game, Tsai was able to get the better of Fan a good fraction of the time.

Therein lies a lesson for all of us, I think. In soccer, success lies in ignoring the body feints to aim directly for the ball. Drawing a parallel in life, it means to put little weight on what someone says or professes to believe in words as compared to what they actually do and choose in life.  
 In society, people will say many things. Very rarely, you will meet a liar who will tell outright lies; this is rare precisely because it is difficult to tell such lies without being caught. More often, people will tell you things they believe on some level, but which deep down, they may actually have doubts about.   
 Sometimes this happens to serve a larger cause which they think they believe in. The years between the ages and ten and fourteen for me coincided with a period of great turmoil in China known as the Cultural Revolution. Living in Hong Kong, which is located on the south-eastern edge of China and which depended on China for much of its water and food supply, we were inevitably affected. The large scale labour riots in 1967 really shook people’s faith in whether the British colonial government could hold on and maintain stability in Hong Kong. There were many who professed their belief that the Chinese Communist government had made wonderful advances in China especially in alleviating widespread poverty among the peasant classes. It was also easy for them to point out that the British government had obtained its lease to govern Hong Kong as part of an unequal treaty with China signed after the infamous Opium Wars. These wars were essentially fought by Britain against China to enable the continuance of a very lucrative opium trade for Britain. The Ching Dynasty, the Chinese government at the time, had tried desperately to stop widespread drug abuse and addiction associated with opium use because it seriously weakened and corrupted every level of society. But upon losing the Opium Wars, they had no choice. So British rule over Hong Kong was built on very shaky moral grounds and one could see why calls to overthrow the British colonial rule in favor of a Chinese government could gain considerable traction, especially if one forgot the Communist flavor of the government but only concentrated on its ethnic Chinese origin.   
 While the riots went on, many heated debates simultaneously took place in various newspapers, which were increasingly polarized and identified as either left wing -- supporting the Chinese Communists, or right wing --- opposing them. In one famous horrifying incident, a right wing columnist was ambushed and burnt to death in his car by leftists, which shows you how much passions had been inflamed.   
 During all this, I noticed that almost every week or so, the newspapers would carry an article about swimmers who tried to swim from China across Deep Bay or Mirs Bay to sneak into Hong Kong. These swimmers were mostly young men aged 18 to 25 who believed that they could brave the 8 hour swim across cold waves and adverse tides. Naturally they chose night time to avoid the border patrol. But even so, they could not always escape the attention of sharks and barracuda which lurked in these waters. Many never made it because they were actually weaker swimmers than they realized, and their bodies were found washed up on the shore. A few were unlucky enough to be attacked or mauled badly by a shark or barracuda, and even if they survived lost a finger or some other body part to amputation, but their exploits would make the news which I read. The luckier ones were seen and rescued by fisherman, by the Hong Kong Marine Police, or else, aided by favorable currents, managed to climb onto Hong Kong’s shores under their own power. There were some estimates that in 1970 during the months between January and October, some 16000 Chinese swimmers escaped to Hong Kong, of which only a quarter were detected, while the rest slipped into the colony and merged with the population.

This was a veritable mass exodus, and the point is that the traffic was completely one way: out of China into Hong Kong. There was not a single instance where someone risked life and limb to go from Hong Kong to China.