



JULIAN SCHUMAN

**ASSIGN-  
MENT  
CHINA**

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING



# ASSIGNMENT CHINA

by

JULIAN SCHUMAN

Foreign Languages Press

First published by Whitter Books, Inc., New York, USA.

Copyright © 1956 Julian Schuman.

Home Page:

<http://www.flp.com.cn>

E-mail Addresses:

[info@flp.com.cn](mailto:info@flp.com.cn)

[sales@flp.com.cn](mailto:sales@flp.com.cn)

ISBN 7-119-03528-2

Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 2004

Published by Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

*Printed in the People's Republic of China*

## PREFACE

*Huang Hua*

It is a great honor for me to write a preface for the new, PFS (China Society for People's Friendship Studies) 50-book series under the general title of *Light on China*. All these books were written in English by journalistic and other eyewitnesses of the events described. I have read many of them over the seven decades since my student days at Yenching University. With some of the outstanding authors in this series I have ties of personal friendship, mutual regard, and warm memories dating from before the Chinese people's Liberation in 1949.

Looking back and forward, I am convinced that China is pursuing the right course in building a strong and prosperous country in a rapidly changing world with its complex and sometimes volatile developments.

The books in this series cover a span of some 150 years, from the mid 19th to the early 21st century. The numerous events in China, the sufferings and struggles of the Chinese people, their history and culture, and their dreams and aspirations were written by

foreign observers animated by the spirit of friendship, equality and cooperation. Owing to copyright matters and other difficulties, not all eligible books have as yet been included.

The founder of the first Chinese republic, Dr. Sun Yat-sen wrote in his Testament in 1925, “For forty years I have devoted myself to the cause of the people’s revolution with but one end in view: the elevation of China to a position of freedom and equality among the nations. My experiences during those forty years have convinced me that to attain this goal we must bring about an awakening of our own people and ally ourselves in common struggle with those people of the world who regard us as equals.”

Chairman Mao Zedong declared, at the triumphal founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, “The Chinese people have stood up.” Today, having passed its 53rd anniversary, we see the vast forward strides that have been taken, and note that many more remain to be made.

Many foreign observers have traced and reported the real historical movement of modern China, that is: from humiliation — through struggle — to victory. Seeking understanding and friendship with the Chinese people, their insight and perspective were in basic harmony with the real developments in China. But there have been others who viewed China and the Chinese people through glasses tinted by hostile prejudice or ignorance and have invariably made irrelevant observations that could not stand the test of time. This needs to be better understood by young people and students, at home and abroad. The PFS series *Light on China* can help them gain an overview of what went before, is happening now, and will

emerge in the future.

Young students in China can additionally benefit from these works by seeing how foreign journalists and authors use fluent English to record and present historical, philosophical, and socio-political issues and choices in China. For millions of students in China, English has become a compulsory second language. These texts will also have many-sided usefulness in conveying knowledge of our country to other peoples.

Students abroad, on their part, may be helped by the example of warm, direct accounts and impressions of China presented by their elders in the language that most readily reaches them.

Above all, this timely and needed series should help build bridges of friendship and mutual understanding. Good books long out of print will be brought back to strengthen the edifice.

My hearty thanks and congratulations go first to ex-Premier Zhu Rongji, who has been an effective supporter of this new, PFS series. They go to all engaged in this worthy project, the Foreign Languages Press, our China Society for People's Friendship Studies, and others who have given their efforts and cooperation.

Chairman Mao Zedong has written: "So many deeds cry out to be done, and always urgently. The world rolls on, time presses. Ten thousand years are too long. Seize the day, seize the hour."

The hour has come for making these books available to young people in China and abroad whose destiny is to build a better world together. Let this series add a small brick to that structure.

*Beijing, Autumn 2003*

Around all of our cities  
there are soldiers, and  
the clash of arms;

so does one feel  
how grand it would be  
could we but forge  
our weapons into tools  
for farmers to use;

so that every inch of land could  
be ploughed with oxen; then, with ploughing done  
silkworms be gathered;

no need for soldiers to weep  
such pools of tears  
for dead heroes;  
rather  
from the men harvesting  
from the women spinning  
would there come back to us  
songs of happiness.

— Tu Fu (712-770 A.D.)

## CONTENTS

1. STRICTLY PERSONAL .....	1
2. WAY OF AN ARMY WITH A MAN .....	4
3. SHANGHAI'S LAST FLING .....	10
4. TWELVE MILLION TO ONE .....	22
5. COVERING THE DEBACLE .....	27
6. FINIS TO FORTY CENTURIES .....	34
7. THE MORNING AFTER.....	46
8. NEW BROOMS—THE COMMON PROGRAM .....	57
9. NEW CHINA FROM A RINGSIDE SEAT .....	62
10. WOMEN RAISE THEIR HEADS .....	77
11. CURTAIN FALLS ON FEUDALISM .....	92
12. PEASANTS INTO PEOPLE .....	102
13. WAR AGAINST DISEASE .....	117
14. UNFINISHED BUSINESS .....	123
15. UNFINISHED BUSINESS II .....	133



16. SPEAKING OF WORKERS .....	143
17. "SEE YOU AND RAISE YOU" .....	149
18. ON A FUSHUN HILLSIDE .....	155
19. WHAT, NO PENTHOUSES? .....	160
20. PRIVATE BUSINESS IN RED CHINA .....	164
21. THE UNRECONSTRUCTED .....	173
22. FRUITS OF DEMONOLOGY .....	185
23. NEWS FROM NOWHERE .....	198
24. WHO "BRAINWASHES" WHOM? .....	213
25. "LOGIC OF DEATH" .....	221
26. LAST LOOK AROUND .....	227
27. WHAT THEY ASK ME ABOUT CHINA .....	240

# 1

## STRICTLY PERSONAL

---

The *SS Lisholt*, a diminutive Norwegian freighter, edged away from her pier in the early December dusk and headed across Hongkong harbor toward the Pacific. Standing at the aft rail, I gazed back across the choppy water for my last view of the Asia mainland.

To my left lay the imposing row of office buildings and warehouses that make up Hongkong's dockside business district. Behind them the scattered lights of the residential area traced a pattern up to the fashionable Peak. To my right stretched the blocks of low-roofed houses studded with new apartment buildings on suburban Kowloon peninsula. Just beyond was the frontier of China, from behind which I had emerged a few days before.

I was homeward bound—home from six years in China, including the first four and a half years of the new Chinese People's Republic.

In those six years an epoch of Chinese history had taken place, virtually under my eyes. I had seen the death throes of Chiang Kai-shek's China, had witnessed the passing of an old order rooted in four thousand years of tradition. I had lived both in the old and with the new. I had eaten, drunk and passed the time of day with British taipans and American diplomats, with Chiang officials, Mao Tse-tung revolutionaries, impartial political grafters, students on the right and students on the left, impover-

ished peasants and black-market billionaires. I had seen fantastic prosperity and unimaginable poverty, often side by side. I had seen pilferage and starvation, panic, street fighting, air bombings and sidewalk executions. And I had witnessed the birth of a new political regime.

Among the many Western journalists who had been present to record the fall of the Nationalists, I was one of the handful who had stayed to witness the evolution of the new China from the old. I was the last of all to leave. I was glad to have been there, to have seen it all and done it all. And now, in this December of 1953, I was glad to be going home.

This is a working journalist's report of what has happened in China. It is a report mainly of things seen with my own eyes, heard with my own ears. I sought both before and after the change in regime, through daily living among the people and daily contact with all classes, speaking their own language and listening to their views, to spell out the meaning of events behind the exterior facade of "news."

Why did the Communists win China? What are they doing with their victory? How firm a hold have they on the allegiance of the 600,000,000 Chinese people? What are the future probabilities regarding their attitude toward the West? Toward Soviet Russia? How much of a threat, and of precisely what kind, do they hold for the United States? What are the possibilities of their overthrow from within? Or from without?

Confident answers to these questions are vouchsafed us from a variety of sources. Most of them, unfortunately, are based on the mental arithmetic of political speculation from such vantage points as New York or Washington. Some are offered by experts at Far East "listening posts" outside China, where little of what is listened to bears any resemblance to what goes on inside. Still others emanate from the supercharged vocal cords of politicians whose estimate of realities is often more the product of fervid wishes than of information.

I do not believe there are any easy answers. There can, however, be informed estimates of realities based on direct observation, combined with a knowledge of historical backgrounds. The importance of such estimates

as a guide to action in place of guesswork, wishful thinking or patriotic slogans must surely be obvious. Whether in troubled peace or on the lethal “brink” of war, the United States cannot effectively deal with a nation of more than half a billion people newly allied to communism without knowing her true condition of affairs. It is one thing to speculate on the kind of China we would prefer; but it would be safer to know her as she really is.

It is for the purpose of contributing toward such knowledge that this book, based on an extended view of the China scene, is written.

## 2

### THE WAY OF AN ARMY WITH A MAN

---

In the spring of 1943, when the Army Specialized Training Program was launched, I was fighting the war from behind my spectacles at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, consigned to limited service as a “record specialist” (uniformed file clerk). Except for the cocktail circuit ridden hard by public relations officers in New York and Washington, an assignment to Fort Hamilton was the softest touch a soldier could hope for in World War II.

My fellow inmates therefore expressed concern for my sanity when I volunteered to leave it for ASTP.

Not that I was likely to encounter any worse danger than exposure to an inferior grade of ice cream wherever the Training Program might lead me. But it was basic to the credo of all enlisted men that Fort Hamilton was the place to aspire to and, once attained, to cling to at all costs. Nevertheless, I was sick of the grinding boredom of my job and yearned for a change.

ASTP wanted young enlisted men who had studied foreign languages to enroll in a nine-months intensive course in the spoken language they had studied. Five years of French—three in high school and two in college—qualified me to apply.

I hadn’t reckoned, however, on the bureaucratic gifts of my First Sergeant, named Gaffney, who suddenly discovered that I was indispensable to him. Three months of nagging and heckling, plus the intervention of the colonel,

were needed to get me clear. When I at last arrived at the testing center at City College in nearby Manhattan, I learned that limited service men had just been eliminated from the language-study portion of ASTP.

Back I journeyed into the vengeful arms of Sergeant Gaffney.

"So you wanna go to school, huh?" he snarled. "Okay, you're going."

A few days later I was on a train bound for Mississippi, assigned to an eight weeks' course in an Army clerk school. It was now the beginning of July. Less than a week after plunging into the mysteries of army clerking, I learned of a new order cancelling the cancellation of limited service men from the language program.

I sweated out my eight weeks in Mississippi, returned to Fort Hamilton, and immediately renewed my application for ASTP. This brought jeers from the ranks and fresh ingenuity on the part of Sergeant Gaffney. I found myself tending shoe stores in the bowels of a depot warehouse.

I juggled shoes, bucked for my assignment, and waited while September and October went by. By this time I was virtually obsessed with the idea of getting into that language program, although the army grapevine now reported an overabundance of linguists.

One brisk November day the order came. This time the embittered Gaffney, like a rejected parent, sent me away with a dire warning:

"You better make it this time! Because if you do or if you don't, you're out of Hamilton for keeps!"

He was right. Soon after my return to City College I was tossed into an assembly line of language aspirants and underwent a ten-day series of general aptitude tests, language aptitude tests, written and oral French exams. After the inevitable waiting period I was informed that I had been accepted and would be assigned to a college class for intensive training.

Heady with success, I renewed old visions of touring France and Europe in a staff car in the wake of the coming invasion, serving as interpreter to a four-star general and drinking in the glories of ancient cultures.

The momentous day came, and with 150 other linguists I was put on a train at Grand Central, heading north. No destination was announced. For

some inscrutable reason we were supposed to be traveling “under sealed orders.” But long before we approached Boston the word was out. Our objective was Harvard.

Again the ritual of waiting. Quartered in McKinlock Hall, in dormitory rooms, we speculated on the enchantments of Paris. In between we took perfunctory drills and marches. After a week we were herded into a hall to receive the word.

A slight feeling of uneasiness came over me as I watched a wiry little man mount the platform. He blinked pleasantly at us from behind bright spectacles. His teeth were large and very white. He was not an American; and he looked anything but French.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I have the honor to inform you that you have been assigned to the study of the Chinese language!”

Say what you like about Army efficiency, I can testify that the language portion of the Training Program was operated like a modern high-speed machine. And it achieved quite astonishing results.

After the first shock had worn off, and we had become used to the idea that Chinese could be spoken at all—let alone learned—our little band of former French scholars settled down to its task. Within a few days most of us were reconciled to our weird fate. By the end of a month many were intensely interested. As for me, I found it one of the most fascinating experiences of my life.

The group of 151 men was broken down into small units of seven to ten, each with its own instructor. All of these were well-educated Chinese, most of them students at Harvard. They were pleasant fellows, but rigorous taskmasters. Nearly all of the first month was devoted to drilling us in the fundamental sounds of the language and the vocal tones that make the Chinese tongue so different from those of the West. From there on the instructors insisted on carrying on their classes in Chinese.

Thus, with escape into English cut off, and with Chinese words, phrases and sentences dinned into our ears several hours each day by instructors and

instruction records, we gradually came to feel at home in the language. Long before the nine-month course was over we were not only speaking it to our instructors and to each other, but were actually understanding a good deal of what was said. Nobody was expected to become fluent, and nobody did. But by the end of nine months most of the students had acquired a solid foundation in spoken Chinese which, once we arrived in China, could be rapidly expanded.

Along with the language study, courses were given by members of the Harvard faculty in Chinese history, economy, geography, art and society. It was made explicit to us, in that busy winter of 1943-4, that we were being prepared for service in China. And, as with many others in the group, that suited me fine. Long before the course ended I had forgotten my preoccupation with things French and had begun falling under the spell that China has exerted over so many Westerners.

Until that time China had been to me, as to millions of other Americans, a shapeless entity lying somewhere in the dimness that began just west of California. Now, in addition to my prescribed reading, I began devouring everything I could get my hands on about China. I went through the novels of Pearl Buck, then gobbled up the personal-experience books of writers like John Gunther, Vincent Sheehan, Edgar Snow, Emily Hahn and the rest. By the time my study courses and my readings were over, China was thoroughly in my blood. With many of my fellow ASTP students, I was eager for the day when we would ship out.

At last, in September, 1944, the course was finished. We were put on a train under special orders, destination secret. Excitement ran high. Embarkation port next stop? When the journey ended we were a little dashed to find ourselves at a camp in Virginia, just outside Washington. But we found that students of Chinese from other universities had been converging here; this gave hope that a big China mission was building.

Soon we were ordered to fall in and hear the time of day from a top sergeant whose encounters with any language, including English, could scarcely have been more than haphazard.



“Okay,” he barked. “From here on out you guys can forget all about your Chinese?”

We were to embark on a new course of training, it appeared, as cryptanalysts deciphering code messages—in English only. The wherefores of it were never explained. Nobody even bothered to ask.

Some of us tried to get transferred to OSS, which we knew was sending men into China. It didn’t work. After undergoing a security investigation and receiving clearance we were transformed into cryptanalysts in twelve weeks, and thus remained for the rest of our Army careers.

Finally we were shipped overseas—to Hawaii. Then later to ‘the Philippines. After V-J Day I was sent briefly to Japan. But never to China.

In March, 1946, I was home again, one of the millions hovering between wartime service and the resumption of a normal life. At the time of my induction I had been a college student. I felt no great desire to go back to it. Nor had I any compelling notions about a particular kind of job. My special field of study—history and sociology —had prepared me for nothing in particular except the ultimate prospect of teaching, in which I now had little interest. I didn’t quite know what I wanted to do, but I knew where I wanted to do it—in China.

My first step was to resume my Chinese studies. Under the G.I. Bill I enrolled in a course at Yale in the written language, including newspaper reading. Along with it I studied Chinese classical literature under Professor George Kennedy and took some advanced speech courses. I tarried at Yale until the summer of 1947, and then decided that it was time to get going. What I would live on when I got to China was far from clear in my mind. But my reading of Theodore White, Brooks Atkinson, Richard Watts, Jr., Robert Payne, and other war-time writers and China correspondents had given me some ideas.

Full of enthusiasm for the life of a roving journalist, but short on experience, I started beating the pavements of New York in the hope of finding a press connection. I hounded the foreign editors of United Press, International News