



# CHINABOUND

A FIFTY-YEAR MEMOIR

JOHN KING  
FAIRBANK

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*A Cornelia & Michael Bessie Book*



1817

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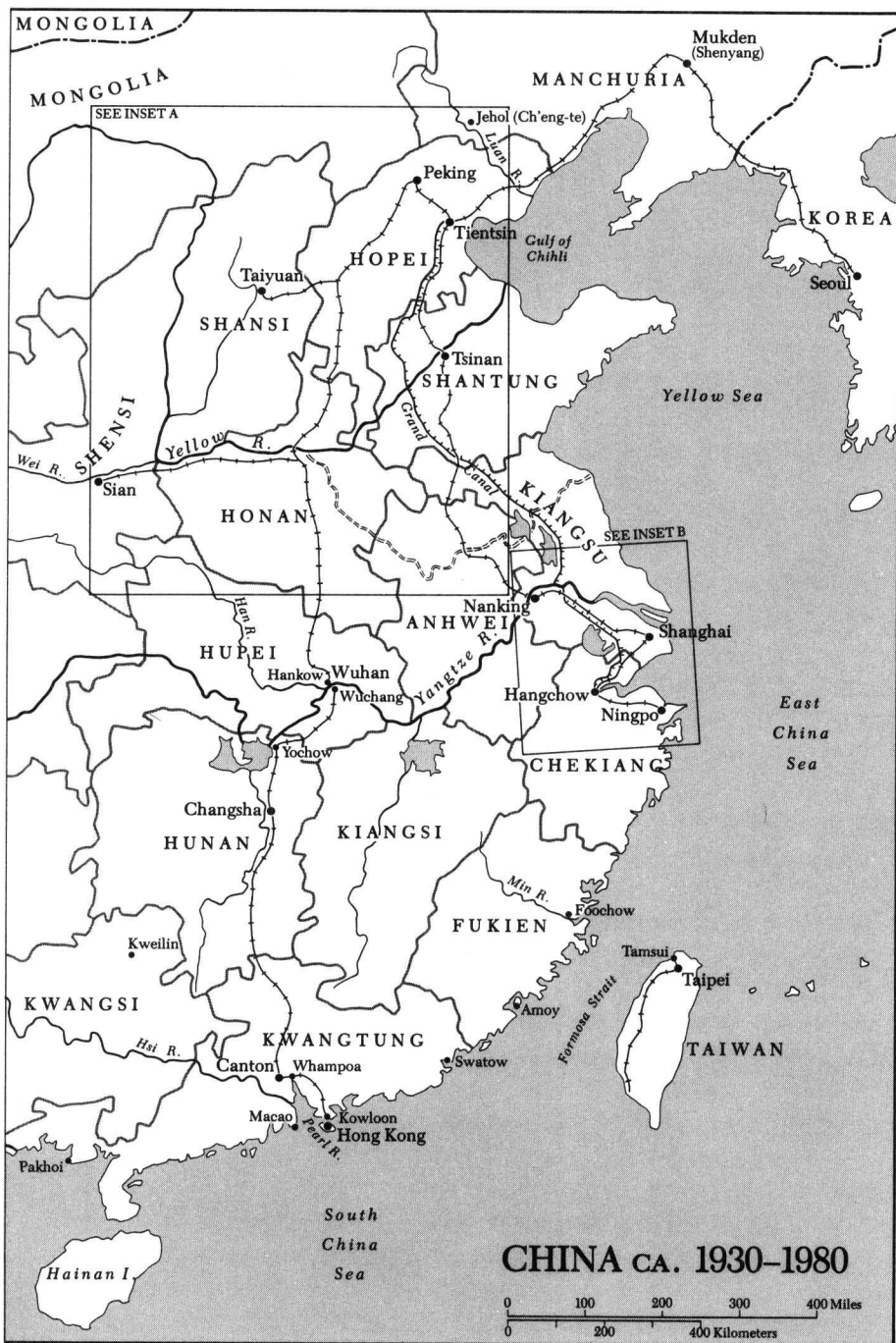
**CHINA BOUND**



*Other books by John King Fairbank*

- The Cambridge History of China*, general editor with D. Twitchett  
Vol. 10, *Late Ch'ing 1800–1911, Part 1*, ed. 1978  
Vol. 11, *Late Ch'ing 1800–1911, Part 2*, ed. with Kwang-Ching Liu, 1980  
Vol. 12, *Republican China 1912–1949, Part 1*, ed. 1982
- The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs 1868–1907*, ed. with K. Bruner and E. M. Matheson, 2 vols., 1975
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- Chinese-American Interactions: A Historical Summary*, 1975
- China Perceived: Images and Policies in Chinese-American Relations*, 1974
- Chinese Ways in Warfare*, ed. and contrib. with F. A. Kierman, Jr., 1974
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- The United States and China*, 1948 (4th rev. ed., 1979)

*For*  
**WILMA**



## PREFACE

THROUGH THE TELEPHONE on my desk I could speak to millions and millions of individuals in other countries whose speech would be unintelligible to me. Fortunately they don't call me nor I them. But the potentiality is there, as are the media and the missiles that now make the world a global village. This shrinkage of the globe we live on has made it more necessary to understand the other nations, and for the past fifty years I have been trying to understand China. The gradual enlargement of my circle of knowledge about China has of course also enlarged the circumference of my ignorance which surrounds it. Questions multiply faster than answers. But the effort to understand China better is now under way on a wide scale and is even seen to require that we understand ourselves better too. One cannot study China for long without becoming interested in, or amazed, annoyed, or appalled by, Chinese-American relations. In fact the student of China soon realizes he is functioning as part of the Sino-American relationship, just as any historian now recognizes that he inevitably contributes a good deal of himself to the history he writes. This line of thought justifies my writing about myself, which I wanted to do anyway.

Alas, when a historian starts his autobiography, the first thing he discovers is that he is still writing history. "The facts" still have to be carefully selected and then exemplified and organized in periods to represent general themes. It's as bad as writing a textbook. You have



to summarize large masses of action, but not befuddle the reader.

The story I have to tell can be sketched quickly: I grew up in South Dakota when it was still a cultural frontier, so I came back East for education. From being a student in five places I learned how to make my way in a new environment according to its criteria. By chance I became interested in specializing on China and during four years there (1932–35) I absorbed some appreciation of Chinese motives and principles of conduct. Later, teaching history at Harvard (1936–41), I acquired an image of China's modern revolutionary process. Going to China again in wartime (1942–43, 1945–46), I got an impression of the Chinese revolution's spirit as well as its appeal and its methods. I became convinced not only that it was one of the great revolutions but that it would win out. Back at Harvard (1946–52) I felt research and education on China were a national necessity to help the American public accept the facts of life in China. I skated through the McCarthy era without much damage but was appalled at the size of the problem of Sino-American relations, so I joined in the development of training, research, and publication at Harvard and in the China field generally. The rapprochement with China since 1972 has left us facing many of the same old problems come round again.

I hope this personal record will offer some useful perspective. We are going to need all we can get.

*Note:* Passages indented are what I wrote at the time in letters, journals, or memoranda.

### *About the Author*

John King Fairbank, a specialist on China and member of the Harvard faculty since 1936, became Francis Lee Higginson Professor of History at Harvard University in 1959 and for eighteen years (1955-73) was Director of Harvard's East Asian Research Center (now renamed the John King Fairbank Center for East Asian Research). He retired from teaching in 1977.

Professor Fairbank went to Peiping in 1932 as a Rhodes Scholar and later was Lecturer at Tsing Hua University. He spent 1952-53 in Japan. In 1960 and 1964 he traveled through Southeast and East Asia, and in 1972 he and his wife spent six weeks in the People's Republic of China. In 1979 they returned for another visit in April, and he accompanied Vice-president Mondale in August.

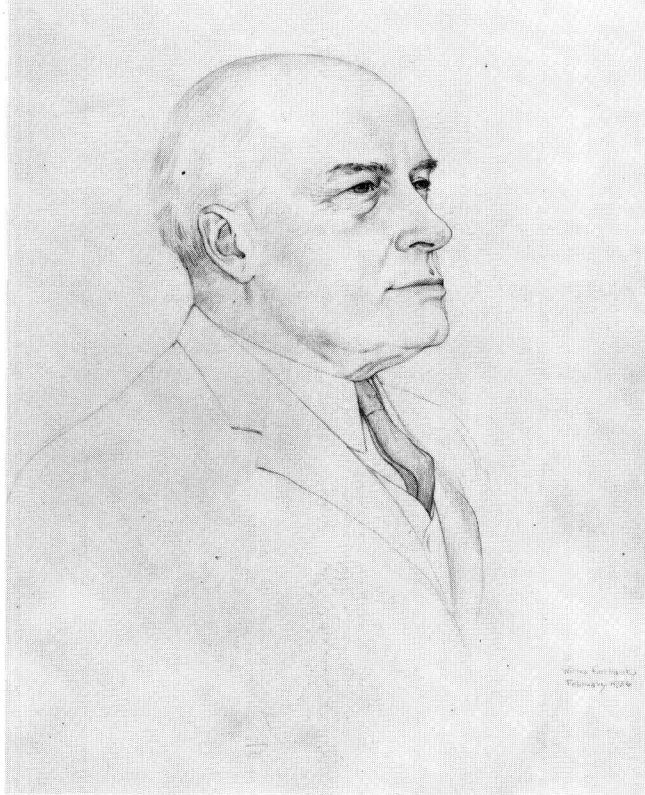
During 1941-46, Professor Fairbank served with the Coordinator of Information and Office of Strategic Services in Washington; was Special Assistant to the American Ambassador in Chungking; and in the Office of War Information, Washington, D.C. He was Director of the United States Information Service in China, 1945-46.

Born in Huron, South Dakota on May 24, 1907, he attended the public schools of Sioux Falls, South Dakota and Phillips Exeter Academy, the University of Wisconsin, Harvard and Oxford (Balliol College). He is a member of Beta Theta Pi (Wisconsin) and Phi Beta Kappa (Harvard) and has twice received a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Professor Fairbank is the author of *The United States and China*, first published in 1948, with a fourth revision in 1979; and a long list of other publications (see front of book).

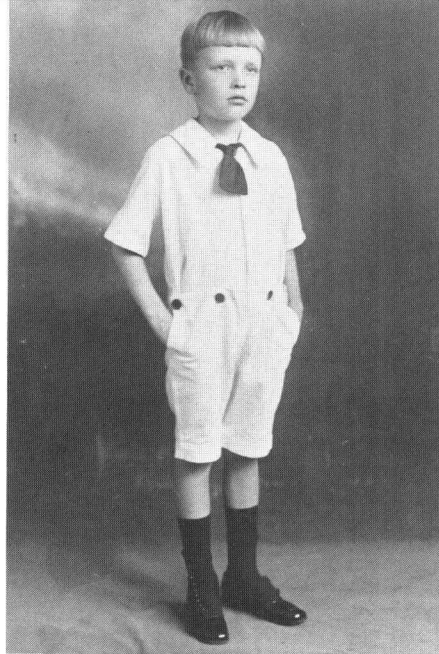
In 1959 he was president of the Association for Asian Studies and in 1968 president of the American Historical Association. He is honorary chairman of the China Council of the Asia Society and has served on a number of committees of the American Council of Learned Societies and Social Science Research Council. He is a fellow of the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Massachusetts Historical Society.

As a young instructor at Harvard in 1939, Professor Fairbank joined his colleague Edwin O. Reischauer in inaugurating their joint survey course on East Asian Civilization. He became the first head of the Regional Studies program on China in 1946 and was chairman of the Faculty Committee on the Ph.D. in History and Far Eastern Languages from 1956-73. He has received a dozen honorary degrees, including one from Harvard in 1970.



Arthur Boyce Fairbank 1873–1936  
and Lorena King Fairbank 1874–1979  
(pencil portraits by Wilma Fairbank,  
1936)





Age 7—my mother dressed me nicely



Age 10—my father built me a fort



Age 18, at Phillips Exeter Academy—  
winner of a trip to England, 1925





Sir Charles Kingsley Webster, professor of international history, who suggested I study China



Wilma at a temple in the Western Hills, Peking, 1934

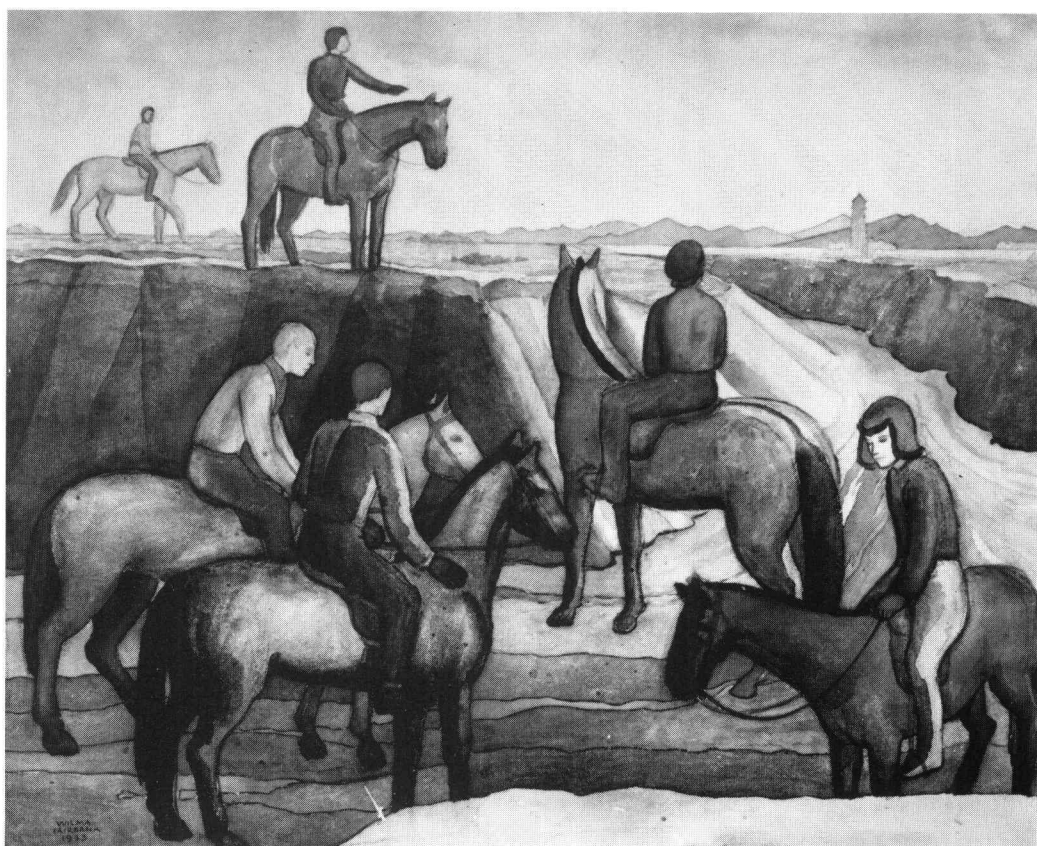


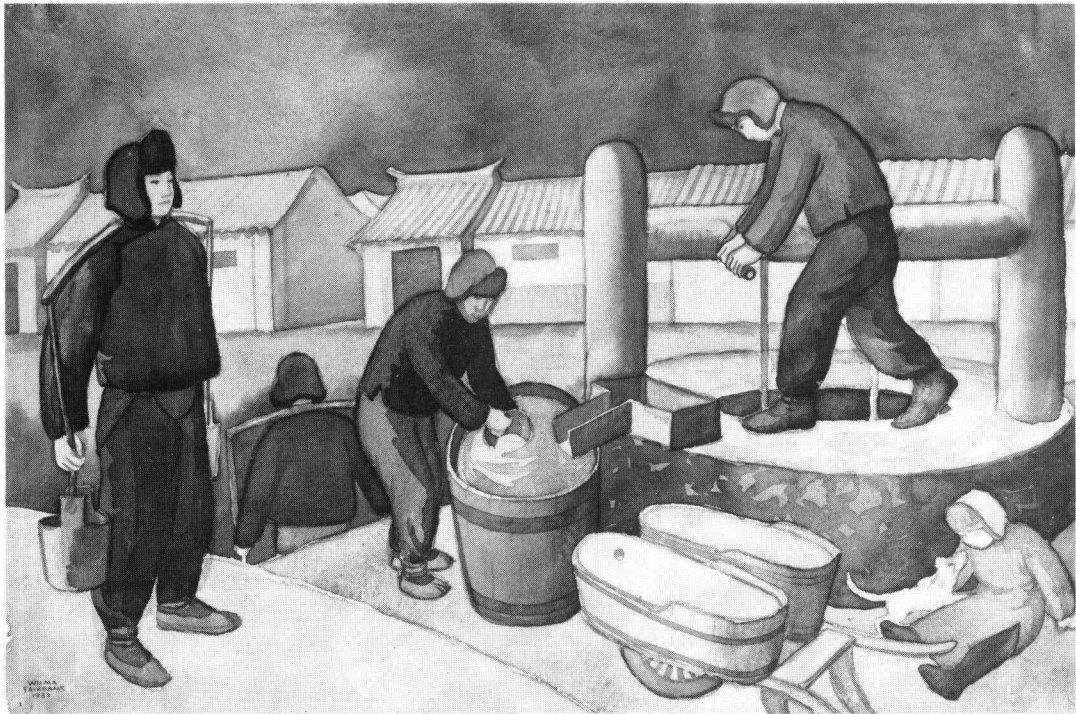
JKF—horseman



My reluctant teacher Kuo Yu-hsiu

Foreigners on Mongol ponies exploring the Peking countryside (*watercolor by Wilma*)



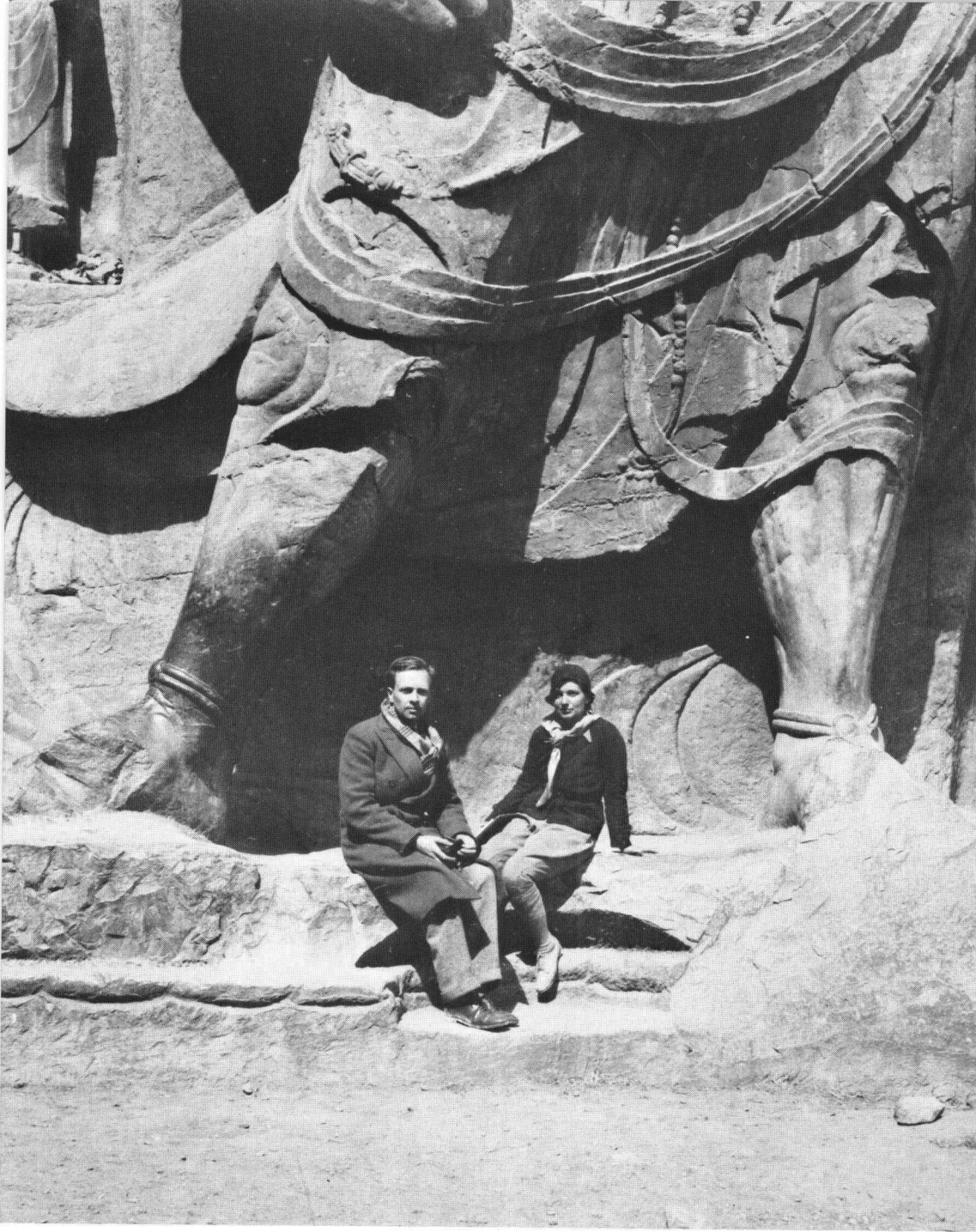


Peking's muscle-power water supply, delivered in barrows and buckets (WF)



Informal portrait, Peking, 1935 (WF)





At the feet of a Buddhist guardian of the rock-cut caves at Lung-men,  
Honan Province, 1933





Chinese friends: Liang Ssu-ch'eng and his wife Phyllis (Lin Whei-yin), historians of Chinese architecture, on a field trip, early 1930s