

Obituary

In memory of A. Doak Barnett Born 8 October 1921; died 17 March 1999

Michel Oksenberg

A. Doak Barnett died on 17 March 1999 after a protracted struggle against lung cancer. During this last chapter of his extraordinary life, he retained the same qualities that earned him legions of admirers: courage, humour, curiosity and steely determination.

Doak was born in Shanghai on 8 October 1921. His parents had established the YMCA/YWCA in Hangzhou, and then moved to Shanghai where Eugene Barnett was the leading expatriate official in the National Chinese YMCA/YWCA. As war descended upon China in 1936, the family moved to New York. Doak received his BA *summa cum laude* from Yale in 1942, and after serving in the United States Marines during the Second World War in the Pacific, he returned to Yale for an MA in international affairs.

From 1947 to 1956, as a fellow of the Institute of Current World Affairs (ICWA), an associate of the American University Field Staff (AUFS), and a correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News*, Doak reported on the Chinese civil war and the early Mao years. Until 1949, he roamed all over China, interviewing warlords in the northwest, dwelling in an impoverished Sichuan township, journeying on horseback to the Tibetan regions of western Sichuan (subsisting on hard boiled eggs to avoid prevalent diseases in the region) and witnessing the Communist entry into Peiping. Then, based in Hong Kong, he continued his reporting of developments in mainland China and South-East Asia. He subsequently published these extraordinarily insightful writings in *China on the Eve of Communist Takeover* (1963) and *Communist China: the Early Years* (1964). This near decade of his life was pivotal. He identified his calling as a China specialist and honed his skills as a keen observer and lucid writer.

Barnett returned to the United States in 1956, first serving in the Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State and then becoming a research fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. There, he wrote his influential *Communist China and Asia* (1960), the first comprehensive study of Chinese foreign policy and its implications for the United States. He then became a programme associate at the Ford Foundation and shaped its major decision to nurture centres of Chinese studies at leading universities in the United States and abroad.

In 1961, he joined the faculty of Columbia University as Professor of Government and member of the East Asian Institute. In 1969, he moved to the Brookings Institution as a senior fellow, and in 1982, he became a professor in the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of the Johns Hopkins University, becoming Professor Emeritus in 1989. He transformed each of these institutions into centres of training and research on contemporary China. His Columbia and SAIS PhD and MA students

are now spread across the world: India, South-East Asia, Australia, Hong Kong, the People's Republic, Taiwan, South Korea, Canada, Western Europe, and across the United States, including throughout the American government. He sought to instil in his students inquisitiveness, precision and clarity of thought.

From 1959 until 1993, he published over twenty books and edited seven others. In addition to the three mentioned above, especially noteworthy are *Cadres, Bureaucracy and Political Power in Communist China* (1968), *Chinese Communist Politics in Action* (1969), *Uncertain Passage: China's Transition to the Post-Mao Era* (1974), *China and the Major Powers of East Asia* (1977), *China's Economy in Global Perspective* (1981) and *China's Far West* (1993). For this last and monumental work, Barnett revisited the places of his 1947–49 travels, capturing the changes that four decades had wrought.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, he helped to create several important organizations in the China field. He was pivotal in the 1963 founding of the Joint Committee on Contemporary China (JCCC) and its Subcommittee on Chinese Politics. Nested within the Social Science Research Council and the American Council on Learned Societies, these committees played crucial roles in generating scholarly research. Also in 1963, he helped to create the Universities Service Centre in Hong Kong, which was so instrumental in hosting scholars from around the world when the People's Republic was not open to direct research. He was a founder of the Committee on Scholarly Communications with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC), created to facilitate contact between the scholarly communities of the two estranged societies. He was central to the 1966 establishment of the National Committee on U.S.–China Relations, initially envisioned as a forum for public education and debate about relations between the two countries but which then emerged as a major avenue for cultural exchanges. He also helped to initiate the Council on Foreign Relations Project on the U.S. and China in World Affairs (1962–66), which culminated in an influential series of books on that subject. He was a member of the editorial board of *The China Quarterly* from its inception in 1960 until 1982.

Through the policy advice that he offered, his direct impact on Sino-American relations was also considerable. He was among the first to circumvent the acrimonious 1950s and 1960s debate over whether the United States should recognize the People's Republic of China or continue to recognize the Republic of China on Taiwan, noting that the United States could, and should, have contact with the Mainland short of recognition. He formulated the slogan “containment without isolation,” which earned favourable attention from the Johnson administration. He advised the Nixon administration on its China opening and provided the conceptual basis for the Carter administration's establishment of full diplomatic relations with China. He cautioned against the sale of a new generation of jet fighters to Taiwan in the early 1980s, a position that the Reagan administration then adopted, and his views on how to respond to the

Tiananmen tragedy and human rights violations ultimately prevailed in the Bush and Clinton years.

He brought extraordinary vision, energy and integrity to his endeavours. He successfully linked two very different countries when both were experiencing enormous change. With his great impact upon contemporary Chinese studies and Sino-American relations, it is worth reflecting upon the factors that enabled his record of accomplishment.

First was the devotion of his wife Jeanne Badeau Barnett. Born in Iraq and raised in Egypt, she too was of missionary background. Her father was President of the American University in Cairo. A graduate of Middlebury, Jeanne met Doak when she was a guide at the United Nations. They fell madly in love; Doak proposed by cable from India, and they were married in Hong Kong in 1954. They formed a team.

Second was his clear sense of purpose: to improve American understanding of China and American policy toward China. He instilled a sense of commitment to and pride in that purpose among his colleagues and students.

Third was his belief in the essential goodness and potential of his fellow human beings. He nurtured communities; his trust in others elicited their confidence in him. As a result, he extracted the venom from poisonous situations. In the late 1950s and 1960s, he bound the wounds of the deeply divided academic China community. In the formation of the Joint Committee and the National Committee, he carefully reached out to include scholars from both ends of the political spectrum. He brought reason to the often uncivil American debate on China policy throughout his life.

Fourth, he was deeply rooted in both American and Chinese cultures. Born in China, he was an explorer of its remote areas, connoisseur of its food, drink, ceramics, paintings and furniture. Doak was also well-rooted in American society: immersed in his family and its native place in the pine woods of rural north Florida, a Marine, and an AUFS lecturer at universities across the country.

And fifth, his personality equipped him superbly for the role he had chosen. He was remarkable for the attributes he combined: deeply emotional about China yet carefully analytical; eternally optimistic yet realistic; adventuresome yet cautious; committed yet balanced; modest yet authoritative; tolerant yet demanding; spontaneous yet meticulous; relaxed yet intense; gentle yet tough. In his complexity, Doak embraced the diverse and contradictory dimensions of American and Chinese cultures and was, therefore, able to speak to both with understanding and effect.

In one of my last exchanges with him, I requested his comments on an op-ed piece I had written. He said that he did not think it was optimistic enough. Having ascertained that another friend thought the piece was too positive. I confidently responded to Doak that he had taught me to be balanced, and I wanted to be sure that this piece had that quality. He responded, "Well, Mike, you know you can be too balanced."

I was privileged to be among his first graduate students at Columbia. Through the years, we became close friends. But for the readers of *The China Quarterly*, a community Doak did so much to create, the final words

of his obituary rightfully belong to his close contemporaries, three of whom offered these thoughts:

Doak fought the good fight for a rational and realistic policy toward China. It took decades but finally he won to the benefit of both countries.

ALLEN WHITING

I admired his clear-sighted honesty and more than anyone in the field, his contributions over many years to bringing to countless Americans a clearer understanding of China. I have felt close to him, in admiration of his intellect and his accomplishments, but even more his humanity and steady friendship.

ARTHUR HUMMEL

Doak was a very special, wonderful person. He glowed with warmth and kindness, and we all felt drawn in by his sympathy and friendship. His sparkling smile could light up a room, and his crackling laugh would lift the spirits. Yet he was tough-minded, a clear and disciplined thinker, with solid views and sharp judgements. He never feared to express his opinion. Doak was able to combine gentleness and firmness because he was guided by a solid set of values. He was a dear friend to all of us.

LUCIAN PYE