

EPILOGUE

MEASURING THE LANDSCAPE

On 19 March 1951, CP FitzGerald presented the Thirteenth George E Morrison Lecture in Ethnology under the title *The Revolutionary Tradition in China*. A larger, and more popular, venue than the Institute of Anatomy was needed for the occasion and Albert Hall was chosen. Named after the Royal Albert Hall in London and the Consort of Queen Victoria, the British monarch who had proclaimed the Commonwealth of Australia, Albert Hall had been opened by Prime Minister Stanley Bruce in 1928. Located on Commonwealth Avenue between Commonwealth Bridge and what is now the Canberra Hyatt Hotel, the hall was the only major indoor venue for large public gatherings in the city until the Canberra Theatre was completed in 1965. It was an ideal location for FitzGerald's lecture: the previous year, a seventy-eight-year-old Bertrand Russell had told a capacity audience of seven hundred that:

I think we should recognise that the enemy is not Communism, but Russian imperialism. If a country chooses to be Communist, that is its own affair and we have no right to object. ... I think the British Government was entirely right to recognise the Chinese regime in China, and it is absurd that U.N.O. should be disrupted by insistence on retaining the Chinese representative of Chiang Kai-shek's fallen Government.²⁵³

In addition to Morrison, FitzGerald dedicated his lecture to WH Donald, and to Morrison's son Ian, also a journalist, who had recently been killed covering the Korean War for his father's newspaper, the London *Times*. 'As a tribute to the memory of father and son', he told his audience, 'I am going this evening to endeavour to examine the underlying causes of this great upheaval [the Chinese Revolution] and trace the thread of the Chinese revolutionary tradition from earlier times up to the critical moment at which we find ourselves today.'

FitzGerald's thesis was that the Communist revolution accorded with a cycle of dynastic rise and decline that had 'lived for centuries' both in the Chinese historical imagination and political practice. 'Yet this revolution was not made by the Communists', he told the audience:

[I]t was the work of the peasants and the scholars, the combination which had been necessary to all great changes throughout Chinese history. In 1948 the Communists, by offering land to the peasants and peace and good government to the intellectuals, were able to align this combination on their side. The result was not secured because the opposition was Communist, but rather in spite of that fact, but so long as the peasants and scholars of China obtain from a new regime satisfactions which were formerly denied to them, their allegiance to this government, Communist though it may be, is

²⁵³ 'Ferment in Asia Surveyed by Bertrand Russell', *The Canberra Times*, 20 July 1950, p.4.



A photograph of the cultural delegation meeting with Premier Chou En-lai, Peking, 19 May 1956. From the left: William Allen Marshall, William Dobell, Elaine Haxton, Gerald Lewers, unknown, AR Davis (Professor of Oriental Studies, University of Sydney), unknown, Percy Partridge, CP FitzGerald, Chou En-lai. (Courtesy Mirabel and Anthea FitzGerald)

assured. If in the future the pursuit of Communist ideological aims leads to the new regime into courses which alienate the peasants or the scholars, then, and not till then, the regime will be in danger of internal opposition.

To men of Dr. Morrison's generation the future course of the Chinese Revolution would have seemed incredible and repugnant; to his son Ian, who saw at first hand the final stages, it appeared rather as an inevitable explosion generated by forces which had long been gathering strength, and which no individual or group could hope to control. It is useless to argue whether a volcanic eruption is good or bad; it has to be accepted with all its violence and senseless destruction. After the eruption has subsided one may draw near across the hot and quaking earth to measure the changes in the landscape produced by so vast a convulsion.²⁵⁴

The Communist government that had come to power in China, therefore, was likely to remain in power for the time being, and to recognise the People's Republic was simply to recognise a new reality. After hearing FitzGerald's Morrison Lecture Douglas Copland told *The Canberra Times*

²⁵⁴ CP FitzGerald, 'The Revolutionary Tradition in China', reprinted in *East Asian History*, no.11 (June 1996), pp.3-16, at p.16.



that: 'the Australian National University could do nothing more important than to present to the people of Australia a true interpretation of the Orient in the troublesome times.'²⁵⁵ The lecture marked the inauguration of a tradition at ANU to 'measure the changes in the landscape' occasioned by the vast convulsion in China that continues to this day.

²⁵⁵ 'Revolutions in China: Lessons from the Past' and 'Canberra Culture Contrasted with Chinese', *The Canberra Times*, 20 March 1951, p.4.

This text is taken from *China & ANU: Diplomats, Adventurers, Scholars*,
by William Sima, published 2015 by ANU Press, The Australian
National University, Canberra, Australia.