



Top: envelope from a letter by Soong Ching-ling 宋慶齡 (widow of Sun Yat-sen) to Douglas Copland, 4 November 1947 (the stamps feature Sun Yat-sen, Father of the Republic of China); bottom: envelope from a letter dated 26 March 1948, the day Copland left Nanking (the stamp features Mao Tse-tung, soon-to-be founder of the People's Republic of China). For Soong's letters, see page 81 below. (Courtesy National Library of Australia)

FOREWORD

Geremie R Barmé

Founding Director, Australian Centre on China in the World

This story of Australia's engagement with China and the founding of The Australian National University (ANU) starts in the 1940s during the Pacific war and ends with the opening salvos of the Cold War in the early 1950s. It is a sobering account written at a time when this country again finds itself in a period of transition and vacillation, one that some Chinese commentators call a Sino-Western 'Chilly War' 涼戰.

Over the past seventy years the *Pax Americana* in Asia and the Pacific has been the bedrock of Australian security; the regional arrangements stemming from it have vouchsafed unprecedented levels of trade and prosperity. It has, however, been a fractious peace, one maintained in name despite cloaked enmities and gnawing disputes. It is a peace riven: by decades of national and regional warfare (in Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia); by violent social upheavals (in Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia); and, as a result of simmering disagreements over sovereignty (the Ryukyu Islands, the divided China and Korea, the East China Sea, the South China Sea, East Timor, Papua New Guinea).

In the new millennium, the emergence of an economically strong and regionally confident People's Republic of China has thrown into relief, and doubt, the territorial and political settlement contrived for Asia and the Pacific following the Second World War. Contestation over territory, spheres of influence, economic advantage, identity and alliances has resurfaced. For decades history was kept at bay; today, it cannot be denied. In the new millennium we are living in an unfinished twentieth century.

China & ANU introduces us to the world of those two earlier wars and the few short years between them; it does so as part of 'the litany of Australian discoveries of Asia'.^[1] Even before Federation in 1901, Australia was discovering, forgetting and re-encountering Asia and the Pacific, and tussling with its place in the geopolitics of the region. These repeated discoveries, and the attendant national forgetfulness, was related to strategic, economic and racial anxieties; they reflected both the tyranny of distance and the unease of proximity.

William Sima starts by recounting the attempt to introduce Japanese language teaching in Australia when, during the First World War, this country first had to confront a rising, non-Anglo Saxon power in the region. He traces the efforts of public intellectuals, journalists, diplomats and academics who urged (and helped engineer) the reorientation of Australia towards what for many years would be known as the 'Near North'. Prescient thinkers saw the sweeping potential of the region for Australia's weal, although they were also alert to the looming bane of imperial expansion. They encouraged in government and more broadly in the society a multifaceted approach to Asia and the Pacific — adumbrating what former prime minister Paul Keating called Australia's need to 'find its security in Asia, not from it' — while working to create an institution, The Australian National University, that would aspire to international standards of scholarship.

Sima has delved deeply into the archives to uncover the story of Australia's early official contacts with China and the creation of ANU. He has studied the 'frontline' despatches from China to Canberra composed by extraordinary individuals like Frederic Eggleston and Douglas Copland during and after the war, documents that record their studied views of East Asia and their hopes for a future for Australia in Asia. In the process the author offers a profoundly moving account of a time when men of influence were also men of vision. In the Australia of today, one in which governments and universities 'think small', those figures and their generous spirit of engagement and understanding, political and economic, cultural and scholastic, appears nothing less than miraculous.

When Douglas Copland left China in April 1948 to become the inaugural vice-chancellor of ANU, the China-based British historian CP FitzGerald praised the diplomat for being a rare 'candid friend' of China.[2] Frank and well-intentioned professional comments made to Chinese interlocutors, in- and outside of government, would over the years be the mark of others. FitzGerald himself, the founder, with Copland's support, of the study of China at ANU, would also have a career as a public intellectual. His clarion call to understand and engage with Asia was, as the academic turned diplomat Stephen FitzGerald (no relation to CP) puts it:

a challenge to Australians to come to their senses and consider who they were and where they were and how they should express that, and the touchstone was China.[3]

Writing under the pen name Simon Leys, the ANU Sinologist Pierre Ryckmans would later be famous for his incisive, and wry, analysis of Maoist and Deng-era China. For his part, Stephen FitzGerald, Australia's first ambassador to the People's Republic, would temper diplomatic necessity with professional insight and advocate building a bilateral relationship in the national interest, while other ANU scholars, thinkers and commentators would continue in a tradition of engagement with the Chinese world. Their number includes Wang Gungwu 王贇武, Liu Ts'un-yan 柳存仁, Audrey Donnithorne, Graham Young, Jonathan Unger, Anita Chan, WJF Jenner, John Minford, Richard Rigby and Benjamin Penny, to name but a few, as well as non-Chinese Studies specialists such as Ross Garnaut, Stuart Harris, Peter Drysdale, Hugh White, Katherine Morton, Brendan Taylor, Evelyn Goh, Amy King and Michael Wesley. Over the years they have all contributed to a clear-eyed assessment of contemporary China and the resonances of its traditions, sometimes amidst considerable controversy, both local and international.

Being a 'candid friend' of China as opposed to basking in official Chinese plaudits for being an 'old friend' 老朋友 is not always popular in Beijing. In his 1989 George E Morrison Lecture, *Australia's China*, presented in the wake of the calamitous events in Beijing earlier that year, Stephen FitzGerald was frank about China's cynical use of friendship politics. For his openness he was later told by long-time Chinese diplomat colleagues that he was 'not friend enough' 不夠朋友 of the People's Republic.[4]

Kevin Rudd, an ANU graduate who went on to become prime minister, would famously be an advocate of the need for Australia to be a 'candid friend' in its dealings with contemporary China. Addressing an audience at Peking University in April 2008, he used the obscure term *zhengyou* 諍友 to describe this approach, much to the surprise of his

hosts and to the consternation of Australian commentators.[5] In 2010, the creation at ANU of the Australian Centre on China in the World, an initiative of Kevin Rudd with the university, put into practice the concept of what I call New Sinology 後漢學, the core of which is the academic demeanour of *zhengyou*, a friend who dares to disagree on the basis of principle.[6] It was hardly surprising then that, during his first trip to China as Australian prime minister in April 2014, Tony Abbott would declare: 'To be rich is indeed glorious, but to be a true friend is sublime!'[7]

Candid analysis and new ideas are often unsettling and confronting; a *zhengyou* invites controversy by challenging prevailing opinion and received wisdom. Being a 'candid friend', a '*zhengyou*' or 'true friend' is not a stance limited to interactions with China. Indeed, independent, informed thinking is also the foundation of serious academic interplay with the Australian government and public, as well as with the broader world of scholarship.

The story told in *China & ANU*, however, is not only about the diplomats, adventurers and scholars introduced in the pages that follow. It is part of a much larger history that has unfolded since the end of the conflict in the Pacific seventy years ago.

In the conclusion to the exhibition based on William Sima's work on China and ANU held at the Australian Centre on China and the World from May to September 2015, the curator Olivier Krischer selected an eloquent passage from the historian Wang Gungwu. Speaking at a graduation ceremony in 1986, Wang touched on the origins of the China story at ANU and addressed more broadly the topic of Australia and Asia:

Before the Second World War, only a few perceptive journalists, scholars and officials foresaw what was to come. And it was not until the end of the war that most Australians began to realise that Australia would soon have to deal with most of Asia on its own. They would soon have to think of Asia as several clusters of neighbours, very different in almost every way from Australia and even different in many ways among themselves. It was clearly not easy for most Australians to come to grips with such complex problems. There had, after all, been very little preparation for the new situation and most people were slow to respond.

But it is often forgotten how many Australians did respond and respond quickly and imaginatively. I refer to generations of adventurous Australians who came back from the war and their adventurous younger brothers and sisters who stayed at home and deliberated on the changing international environment. Among other things, that generation involved themselves in the Indonesian revolution; they reported on the war against communism in Malaya and the communist victory in China; they started serious academic study of Asia in Australian universities; colleges and even schools; they grappled with the baffling beginnings of the Vietnam war and, not least they shrewdly observed the rise of the economic superpower, Japan, and coaxed Australians to take advantage of that historic development. Within two decades, these enterprising Australians laid the foundation for a new Australian awareness of how they might live with these disparate

and volatile neighbours.

Let me suggest to you that these changes were not inevitable. They were not merely calculating responses to the hard new realities. What was truly memorable about these early responses was the fact that many individual Australians set off to the new Asia on their own, probing for an understanding of both its ancient cultures and its entanglements with the West. I see this as the spirit of George Morrison, the Geelong boy who travelled to Asia at the end of the nineteenth century, especially among journalists and the creative people who had begun to sense that exciting developments were about to occur to our north. And since 1945, it blossomed among young people, especially the students, who volunteered to work and teach in various parts of Asia for no other reason than that they were curious and caring, or whose minds turned to Asian languages, literatures, fine arts and music, religions and philosophies in search of understanding and their own cultural enrichment.

These individual Australians who sought adventure, took risks and then brought their stories, experiences and creative efforts home, made those first years of Australia-Asian relations remarkable. I wish those experiences were better recorded and appreciated today, not only because they are worth remembering in their own right but also because I believe that they have much to teach us now as well as in the future.[8]

This book is part of The Australia-China Story recorded by the Australian Centre on China in the World. It is one of the many stories at the heart of this country's century-long quest to find a place in the world and, in the process, to enrich not only the nation but also the minds of its people.

— Canberra, September 2015



Notes:

- ¹ Stephen FitzGerald, *Comrade Ambassador: Whitlam's Beijing Envoy*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2015, p.233.
- ² In a letter from CP FitzGerald to Douglas Copland dated 19 March 1948, quoted on page 93 of this book.
- ³ Stephen FitzGerald, *Is Australia an Asian Country?*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997, p.17, quoted on page 110 of this book.
- ⁴ FitzGerald, *Comrade Ambassador*, p.196.
- ⁵ Geremie R Barmé, 'Rudd Rewrites the Rules of Engagement', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 April 2008, online at: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/rudd-rewrites-the-rules-of-engagement/2008/04/11/1207856825767.html>.
- ⁶ Geremie R Barmé, 'New Sinology 後漢學/后汉学', online at: <http://www.thechinastory.org/new-sinology/>.
- ⁷ 'Abbott Tells China He Wants Free Trade Deal but Friendship is More Important', *AustCham News*, 14 April 2014, online at: http://www.austcham.com.hk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/austcham-news_163_Final.pdf.
- ⁸ Wang Gungwu, 'Address at the Graduation Ceremony of the School of Modern Asian Studies, Griffith University, 12 April 1986', quoted in Nancy Viviani's preface to Francis Stuart, *Towards Coming-of-Age: A Foreign Service Odyssey*, Nathan, Queensland: Griffith University, Division of Asian and International Studies, Centre for the Study of Australian-Asian Relations, 1989.

Seal (opposite): Hsu Ti-shan 許地山, the Buddhist scholar whose personal library formed the basis of ANU's East Asian Collection in the early 1950s (see pages 103-104 below), called his study 'The Facing-wall Studio' 面壁齋. This was a reference to the story of Bodhidharma who is said to have meditated facing a wall for nine years 面壁九年 in search of enlightenment. The seal also features Hexagram XV, Chien 謙, 'Humility', from the I Ching 易經 or Book of Changes, an ancient divinatory text. This hexagram consists of the trigram Kun 坤, Earth or Ti 地 above, and Ken 艮, Mountain or Shan 山 below, the two words that form Hsu's personal name, Ti-shan.

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