China Hand
An Autobiography

John Paton Davies, Jr.
RETURNING TO AMERICA,
AND THE CHINA LOBBY

The satisfying and civilized manner in which to approach New York is on the deck of a ship. None of this being trussed to a seat, hunched and craning to peer through a small window in the sky at a tipping and revolving cityscape. Nor a lurching rush by the rears of factories and tenements only to be suddenly swallowed in the dark nothingness of tunnels. On the deck of a ship a man is free, on his two feet, breathing real air, and may with leisurely dignity review the city, lined up in splendid array, awaiting his inspection. There is even time to engage in conversation with a landmark before it is out of sight.

As the *Noordam* glided into New York harbor on June 9, 1947, Patricia, Sasha, Valli and I were on deck for the traditional viewing of the Statue of Liberty and the skyline. We passed along the parade line, the downtown skyscrapers all drawn up stiffly at attention. It was a stirring sight.

After some years of moving about Asia and Europe in war and its haggard aftermath, Patricia and I had come back to the land of peace and plenty. We would buy a house and, in Foreign Service terms, settle down for maybe four years until we were assigned abroad again. I had a couple of months vacation due me. We would use that time to visit relatives and friends, and look for a house.

Our first destination was Detroit, where we went to see my Aunt Flossie and show her Sasha. The visit also had an unsentimental purpose—the
purchase of a car. Although the post-war demand for automobiles still exceeded the supply, Flossie had arranged for my purchase of a dashing Mercury convertible, black with red upholstery. In this conventionally rakish conveyance we proceeded from the epicenter of the motor age to a big drowsy farm in Virginia, near Charlottesville.

The owner of the farm was Patricia's friend Florence Fisher, then a spinster, who preferred a rustic life to the enameled society in which she grew up. For us nothing could have been more relaxing—the buzzing midsummer heat of the Virginia plains, the cool of the high-ceiled rooms, the undemanding hospitality of our hostess. But I soon began to chafe under the tranquility. And we had to get to work finding a house. So Patricia and I left Sasha and Valli in the Elysian Fields and drove to Washington in search of a house.

Patricia found one in Alexandria, 1707 Duke Street. It was early nineteenth century Georgian, with a neglected big back yard, gingko, black walnut, apple, cherry and peach trees and a profusion of lilac and other shrubs. The location was unfashionable—an unsightly mixture of shoddy residential and commercial structures. But had the property been in a setting befitting its quality, we would not have been able to afford it.

After moving in on September 30, 1947, bursting with the pride and anxieties of a property owner, I wrote, "Went down to the Government Printing Office and bought an armful of booklets on How to Judge a House, Bricklaying—An Analysis of the Trade, You Can Make it Out of Old Boxes, The Control of Termites, Herbaceous Flowers, etc." Fortunately, the repairs and alterations of the house were being done by professionals. My reference library, however, did give me a feeling of handyman confidence.

Meanwhile, Patricia and I worked as unskilled laborers in cleaning up the yard, pruning and planting. Gardening was new to me, and although mowing the lawn and weeding were drudgery, most of the rest of it was solidly satisfying. Perhaps this was so because, in contrast to sports, gardening is elemental, an authentic cultivation of life.

* * *

Disillusion started when it became evident in 1945 that Allied solidarity, particularly between the United States and the Soviet Union, was dissolving. The American Government had raised hopes during the war that the alliance among the United States, Britain, China and the Soviet Union would endure and guarantee lasting world peace. But Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe and Chinese Communist advances against the Nationalists diluted hope for the future.

The American people came to regard the Red Russians and then the Red Chinese as enemies. For even as we had vanquished one set of foes, we were confronted by a new combination of adversaries. And those who became our enemies seemed no less fanatical and malignant than those repulsed at such agony and cost.

Especially upsetting to Americans was the violent transformation of China. When the Chiangs and their Nationalists, whom Americans fancied as the true Chinese—our Chinese—were being routed by the suspect, un-Chinese Communists, Americans were loath to recognize that this was caused by Nationalist decadence and Communist vitality. Rather than acknowledging that the transformation of China was being wrought primarily by indigenous forces, most Americans felt that, surely, some fell force outside of China must be responsible for so untoward a turn of events. International Communism masterminded from conspiratorial Moscow was a ready explanation.

North Korea's 1950 invasion of South Korea, American resort to arms in defense of the South, General MacArthur's heedless offensive to China's frontiers, followed by Chinese Communist routing of the American divisions, culminating in a frustrating stalemate rather than a proper American victory—this train of events jolted American self-esteem and self-confidence. It also intensified popular hatred of the Chinese Communists and belief that the United States was imperiled by a monolithic Communism directed by the Kremlin.

The Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb in 1949 heightened American anxieties. Americans might then for the first time be killed by hundreds of thousands per blast. People wondered how they could escape fragmentation, incineration and radiation. This was in the days even before intercontinental ballistic missiles, when the delivery of nuclear attacks would have been by aircraft, allowing those in the Washington area probably at least an hour or two of warning.

A Washington friend confided that he was buying just the right place away from the city—close enough to get to before the atomic burst, yet far
enough so as not to be overrun by refugees less alert and well equipped than he. Another friend had built a commodious, reinforced underground shelter to which there would be controlled admission—his family (no pets), a carpenter, a plumber and their wives and children. My friends were not hysterical survivalists; they were sober, intelligent and well-informed. But they were representative of widespread apprehension, even fear.

* * *

The debate over whether to develop a hydrogen bomb, the decision to do so, the awesome tests of thermonuclear weapons only to be followed by Soviet development of such weapons magnified anxieties over nuclear annihilation.

Not only had comrades in arms turned into adversaries and an American monopoly of what was viewed as the ultimate weapon lost to a hostile power, but fear of espionage and subversion also invaded public consciousness. Even before the end of the war, defecting Soviet officials such as Alexander Barmine, Igor Gouzenko, and Victor Kravchenko provided firsthand testimony of the Kremlin’s penetration of democratic societies. Then American and other apostate Communists—Whittaker Chambers, Louis F. Budenz, Elizabeth Bentley, Freda Utley, Professor Karl Wittfogel and others—sounded alarms, proclaiming that Soviet-inspired subversion was rife in the American government, academia, journalism and the arts. They named those whom they regarded as agents or dupes of an omniscient, pervasive Soviet conspiracy.

Through congressional hearings and speeches, particularly by Representative Richard M. Nixon and Senators Pat McCarran and Joseph McCarthy, the accusations of the apostates were amplified and given credence. Chambers’s charges that Alger Hiss had passed government secrets to him when he, Chambers, was a Soviet agent, caught national attention in hearings starring Representative Nixon. And when these accusations were, in the eyes of the public, in effect confirmed in two court trials, assertions that spies infested the State Department came to be widely accepted.

Dawning doubts that the United States was omnipotent and fears of new enemies, nuclear obliteration and Communist infiltration combined to create a state of mind easily susceptible to exploitation. With varying motives, three categories of persons and institutions preyed upon the national anxieties.

One was the Chinese Nationalists. Striving to extract aid from and involve the United States in their decrepit and doomed struggle against the Communists, the Nationalists recognized that rising American apprehensions provided an opportunity to manipulate the American body politic for their purposes. In addition to lobbying for all-out American support, the Chinese Embassy and other Nationalist agencies in the United States, well connected with the American government and press, fostered attacks on Americans who opposed further futile, entangling involvement with the Nationalists. This calumny was directed particularly against those who suggested realistic recognition that the Communists were going to command China’s future.

A second category supported and, in turn, was used by the Chinese Nationalists. It was composed of a mixed, unstructured, freewheeling, variously motivated lot of American publicists, businessmen, military officers, politicians, churchmen and apostate Communists. It was called the China Lobby. The members of this miscellaneous assortment drew their information not only from Nationalist sources but also from collaborating ex-Communists. What the lobbyists had in common was a belief that the United States should sustain the Nationalists and that the American government was, a best, deserting a faithful ally. Most, in their lobbying, attributed this supposed delinquency to alleged pro-Chinese Communist influences in the Department of State, more particularly to some of us who were China specialists.

Prominent in the China Lobby were publishers Henry Luce of Time and Life, Roy Howard of the Scripps-Howard newspapers and William Loeb of the Manchester Union Leader, columnists Joseph Alsop and George Sokolsky, ex-Ambassadors Hurley and William Bullitt, Generals Chennault and Wedemeyer, Clare Boothe Luce and Yale professor David Nelson Rowe. Perhaps the most diligent and evangelical lobbyist was Alfred Kohlberg, a wealthy importer of Chinese laces and embroideries who launched and subsidized a magazine, Plain Talk, regarded as the voice of the China Lobby. The China Lobby members showed no qualms over attacking their government’s policy regarding China. Accepting the Nationalists’ interpretation of the situation in China, and championing the cause of that foreign government, they maintained, in effect, that what was good for the Chinese Nationalists was good for the United States.
As they assumed identical interests between the Chinese Nationalists
and the United States, there appeared to be no question in their minds of
a conflict of loyalties. Rather, a suggestion that Nationalist interests might
not necessarily be in the interests of the United States raised suspicions of
disloyalty to the United States. This was true not only of the China Lobby
but also of a China bloc in the Congress.

Usually relying on information supplied by the Chinese Nationalists
and the China Lobby, these legislators demanded and voted for increased
aid to the Nationalists. And they discovered that accusing the Truman
administration of losing China and harboring Reds in the State Department
satisfied their sense of patriotic duty and generated compliant publicity
that served their political objectives of discrediting the administration and
furthering their own political ambition.

Outstanding members of the China bloc in the Senate were William
Knowland (for his devotion, nicknamed the Senator from Formosa), Styles
Bridges, H. Alexander Smith, all Republicans, and McCarran and James O.
Eastland, Democrats. They were, as the betrayal of China theme was ex-
anded, joined at times by senators who appreciated the effectiveness of
that issue in their political forays against the Truman administration. These
ranged from the reckless barrages of McCarthy to the scattered flak of Rob-
ert A. Taft, an influential conservative who otherwise displayed slight inter-
est in East Asia.

In the House of Representatives, Walter Judd, a former medical mis-
ionary in China, was the most dogged campaigner for the Nationalists and
against the Truman administration. Among those of like kidney were John
M. Vorys and Joseph W. Martin. All three were Republicans. Like the sena-
torial members of the China bloc, they practiced a convenient blending of
what they held to be patriotic principle—equating Chinese Nationalist and
American interests—and partisan politics.

It was, then, in a national mood of mounting public apprehension,
suspicion and anxiety, exacerbated by Chinese agitators, American lobbyists
and hostile member of Congress, that we China specialists of the Foreign
Service went about our business during the decade following World War II.

CHAPTER XXIII

ASSIGNED TO KENNAN'S POLICY
PLANNING STAFF

In August 1947 I reported for duty on the Policy Planning Staff, of which
Kennan had been appointed Director. It was designated by the initials S/P.
The S meant that the staff was part of the Secretary of State's immediate
office and the P indicated the function, policy planning. As director of
the staff, Kennan had ready access and reported directly to the Secretary, Gen-
eral Marshall. The physical location of S/P, next to the Secretary's office,
conformed to this relationship with the head of the Department.

S/P, established on May 5, 1947, was General Marshall's creation. He
was accustomed, from his years as Army Chief of Staff, to thinking ahead
in terms of ongoing campaigns and, in so doing, having at his beck and call
echelons of planners. Certainly, as Secretary of State he had no less need of
forward planning. S/P was therefore told in a departmental order to formu-
late long-term foreign policy programs, anticipate upcoming problems, ex-
amine broad politico-military issues, evaluate the adequacy of existing
policy and coordinate planning with the Department.

The State Department had never had more than occasional ad hoc com-
mittees for peering into the future. And there was a real question how
something as diffuse and anarchic as foreign affairs could be realistically
forecast and programmed. In any event the Department—including the
Foreign Service—had always functioned largely by precedent, esoteric
knowledge, intuition, extemporization and salvage, and rather liked it that