Obituaries

Harold C. Hinton Remembered (1924–93)

David Shambaugh

With the sudden death of Harold C. Hinton on 24 September 1993 the field of modern Chinese studies lost a prolific scholar, a fine colleague and compassionate individual. Having only retired from active teaching in 1992, Hinton was maintaining his characteristically busy professional life as a writer, lecturer, researcher, consultant, conference goer and paper giver. In between he took the time to explore the Rocky Mountains and American West with his beloved wife Carolyn, from their new home in Estes Park, Colorado. Harold departed before his time and will be remembered fondly by colleagues, friends, family and former students.

As his former student I have taken the liberty of writing this memorial essay on behalf of his many admirers in the China field. Harold was my mentor, colleague and friend. As my undergraduate supervisor at George Washington University, Professor Hinton (a title that still seems more natural) taught me, counselled me and steered me into the field of Chinese studies. In reconstructing and recalling Harold's career for the purposes of this essay, I have benefited from the recollections of several of his contemporaries and colleagues – A. Doak Barnett, Robert A. Scalapino, Allen S. Whiting, Thomas W. Robinson, Michel C. Oksenberg, Jürgen Domes and Robert Sutter. He was a major figure in the field of Chinese studies, and it is thus only fitting that *The China Quarterly* record his many contributions and accomplishments.

Harold Hinton was a pioneer in the study of Communist China, but was more than a China specialist. Harold was an elite member of what is now virtually an extinct species – the well-rounded Asianist. He not only wrote prolifically on the post-war international politics of Asia, but authored individual books and articles on the Indian subcontinent, Indo-China, Korea, Japan, the Soviet Union, Taiwan, the South China Sea and the United States in Asia. His classic *Three and a Half Powers: The New Balance in Asia* (Indiana, 1975), was both an innovative scholarly monograph on the evolving balance of power in Asia, and a widely-adopted textbook at the time. The range of professional journals in which his numerous articles appeared is testimony to his regional breadth: *World Politics*, *Orbis*, *The Annals* of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, *Asian Survey*, the *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, *Korea and World Affairs*, and many others.

In his studies of Asian international relations Hinton combined a rigorous empiricism with an analytical framework grounded in Morgenthauean Realism. For him the attributes of power and the patterns of national interactions were the paramount variables, but he never neglected the role of nationalism, leadership or elite perceptions. In

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Hinton's analyses the objective measures of power always had to be weighed against the subjective interpretations and applications of it. But without the facts, no theory was sustainable for him. He was manic about collecting data, and his analysis proceeded inductively from fact to argument – what he termed the "criterion of sufficient cause." He was also fastidious about geography, and carried around an encyclopedic knowledge of Asian frontiers and terrain. He kept detailed maps and produced them at a moment's notice. His personal files were voluminous. They were filled with thousands of newspaper cuttings from around the world; excerpts from *FBIS*, *JPRS* and their predecessors; interviews and memoranda of conversations; official pronouncements and unclassified government documents; and primary language materials. His marshalling of evidence in support of his theories was sometimes unorthodox, but he always had a source to back up his assertions.

As a result, Hinton was valued for his independence of judgment, even if it was often anti-Communist in its orientation. His anti-Communism was well-known, but in retrospect not unfounded. Like Franz Michael, his recently-deceased colleague at George Washington, Hinton was an unrelenting critic of the repression inflicted by the Communist regimes in China, North Korea and North Vietnam. At a time when some of his colleagues were praising the socio-economic wonders Mao's China had brought, or amidst the euphoria of the Nixon opening to China, Hinton judiciously reminded the field and the public of the horrors that the Maoist regime had inflicted on China.

While anti-Communist, Hinton was not an ideological zealot nor an ardent Cold Warrior. Allen Whiting reflects that "Harold's subtle and sensitive interpretations were far removed from the crude Cold War rhetoric that passed for analysis at the time." Hinton's anti-Communist proclivity did not lead him to be a blind supporter of the Vietnam War. Nor was he an unqualified supporter of the regimes in Taipei, Seoul or Saigon. As an astute student of Asian nationalism, he was always dubious of the thesis that Hanoi acted as a proxy for Moscow and Beijing. He knew better. Just as he was one of the first to identify the fissures in the Sino-Soviet relationship, Hinton knew that Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese had their own agenda. This judgment led him to caution against the American build-up in South Vietnam and extension of the war throughout Indo-China and near the Chinese border. He was similarly judicious in his support for the Nationalist regime on Taiwan, believing that its existence should be protected by the United States, but not at any cost.

Hinton's independence of judgment and views sometimes brought disagreements from colleagues, but he always ensured that they remained on an intellectual plane. As Robert Scalapino recalls: "My primary recollection was that he never held differences of opinion against any individual; he was uniformly courteous and considerate of everyone. The academic world could use more individuals of his integrity and character." Thomas Robinson similarly remembers that

Many did question his interpretations, as being too one-sided or supposedly too right-wing. But in retrospect his viewpoint has, with some exceptions, stood the test of time. He was a strong anti-Communist, of course, and much the product of his time. But, surprisingly, that did not color his analysis. In the long run his work and his approach (which was as much anti-social science theory as it was anti-Communist) have been about as high in quality and staying power as any in the China field. Most of us will not be so lucky as that.

Hinton's interest in international affairs developed early. His father was a foreign correspondent for *The New York Times*. Harold was born in Paris and spent his youth there and in London before the family moved back to New York and then Washington. Hinton entered Harvard College on a prestigious scholarship in 1941, but soon adjourned his studies to join the war effort. He probably developed his interest in China and Asia during the Second World War, where he served in the U.S. Army in the Pacific from 1943 to 1946. He was on the first ship of American troops to reach Korea following the Japanese surrender. He worked as a military historian on Okinawa and in Korea. In this capacity he authored eyewitness accounts and chronicled the occupation. His interest in Korean affairs never dissipated.

After the war Hinton resumed his studies at Harvard – completing the requirements for a B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. in an astounding five years! For his abilities Hinton was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in 1946. Trained as an historian, he wrote his doctoral dissertation under John King Fairbank's direction on the decline of the Qing dynasty as seen through the imperial Chinese grain tribute system (1845–1911). After graduation Hinton quickly gravitated to the study of the new Communist regime in China. He entered the field at a time when the study of "Red China" was a professional liability to aspiring academics. As Allen Whiting recalls, "Harold was an invaluable colleague at a time when McCarthyism shrunk the China field to a faithful few."

His first teaching job came in 1950 at Georgetown University, where he founded the Asian Studies programme and taught until 1957. During this period, Hinton was invited as a visiting professor to both Oxford University (1953) and Harvard (1956). In 1957 he left Georgetown to succeed Doak Barnett as convener of the China programme at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute, and subsequently taught at Columbia University from 1960 to 1962. One of his first students was Michel Oksenberg, who remembers that "Harold was a very popular teacher at Columbia. He was very kind and considerate of new recruits into the field. I particularly recall his personal warmth and sound advice." Oksenberg also recalls that even after leaving Columbia to return to Washington in 1962, where he taught at Trinity College and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), he would commute to New York monthly to participate in the Columbia faculty seminar on modern China. In 1964 Hinton was recruited by Kurt London to join the faculty of the new Institute of Sino-Soviet Studies at George Washington University. Hinton was one of London's first and prized recruits. There he remained as

professor of political science and international affairs until his retirement in 1992.

Throughout the decade of the 1960s Hinton also directed the Asia programme at the Institute of Defense Analyses, a Washington think-tank. There he wrote several important works on Sino-Soviet relations, establishing himself as a leading authority on the subject. Because of this expertise Hinton frequently served as a consultant to the U.S. Departments of State and Defense, U.S. Information Agency, The Rand Corporation, Stanford Research Institute, and other agencies. He believed in, and personified, a close interaction between the world of policy, intelligence and academia. Because of his connections in Washington, Hinton had unusual access to policy-makers and intelligence officials. Robert Sutter recalls

> ... the important role he played as the leading China foreign policy academic in Washington at the time of intense U.S.–Soviet maneuvering over China in the late 1960s. Harold was one that the Soviet embassy would talk with in an attempt to ensure that their side of the dispute [with China] got to important Americans. He was one of the Americans who were approached by the Soviets in 1969 with the proposal that the U.S. and USSR "cooperate" in working against an obstreperous China, and with the query as to what might the U.S. reaction be if the USSR judged it had to attack China and destroy its nuclear capabilities. In sum, his stature at that time was such that Moscow knew that his perceptions and opinion carried real weight in the policy-making circles of the United States.

At George Washington Hinton taught a wide variety of courses on China and Asia. I took every one. He not only taught me about Chinese but Japanese, Korean, South-east and South Asian politics as well. He always appeared in class, as everywhere, impeccably dressed in a finely tailored suit, and during the Christmas season always sported his red plaid waistcoat. He lectured completely without notes, not even an outline. This was testimony to his truly extraordinary recall. Memory is a tremendous asset in academic life, and Hinton was blessed with an exceptional one. He would randomly rattle off the date of this or that *People's Daily* editorial, leadership appearance, Politburo meeting (and outcome), demonstration, *coup d'état*, purge, treaty, economic output figure, military deployment, weapon capability, and so on. He could actually chronicle the Cultural Revolution on a daily basis. His command of his subject matter was intimidating. His course syllabi were encyclopedic (I still refer to them). His lecture style was straightforward, but peppered by his dry wit. I will never forget his admonition that "Burma is so non-aligned that it does not attend Non-Aligned conferences!" Or upon hearing Mao Zedong's instructions to Hua Guofeng "With you in charge I'm at ease," Hinton quickly retorted, "I'm glad *he* is!" Jürgen Domes recalls that during the Cultural Revolution Hinton had displayed in his office a mock big character poster which read "The East is Red, but the West is Expert." Hinton was unfailingly receptive to students, always listening politely as they stammered through their questions and answers, and he always gave generously of his time during office hours (he

always maintained a second private office off-campus where he would take sanctuary to write). He demanded high-quality written work from his students, constantly pushed for improvement, and paid as much attention to clarity of expression as content. He challenged his students, imparted his knowledge (and numerous anecdotes) to them, and supported them in their subsequent careers. One cannot ask for more from a professor.

Also at George Washington, Hinton ran the East Asia Colloquium, a weekly gathering of select Asianists from around the Washington area. Thomas W. Robinson recalls that "It became *the* center in Washington of government–academic–think-tank interaction on Asia. Significantly, it did not outlast Hinton's time at the university. Harold was a solid rock at George Washington and it is impossible to think of the Sino-Soviet Institute and its many accomplishments without at the same time referring to Hinton." Having attended many and addressed a few of these colloquia, I remember those gatherings well. They frequently brought into Room 708 many more bodies than there were seats.

Above all professionally, of course, Harold Hinton will be remembered as a specialist on Communist China's politics and foreign relations, and here he had few rivals. He was a pioneering scholar and field-builder. Doak Barnett recalls that

> Harold Hinton was a pioneer in the study of Chinese foreign policy and one of a small group who were the first to devote themselves to the serious study and analysis of the Chinese Communist regime's policies toward, and interactions with, the rest of the world. His research was comprehensive ... and he was extraordinarily assiduous in gathering data from Chinese and other sources – in a period when reliable information was scarce.

His book *Communist China in World Politics* (Houghton Mifflin, 1966) remains a classic and was the first major study of the foreign relations of the People's Republic. His other major text on Chinese foreign policy, *China's Turbulent Quest* (Indiana, 1970), became the most widely adopted textbook on the subject during the 1970s. Further monographs included *Peking–Washington: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United States* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1976); *The Sino-Soviet Confrontation* (Crane, Russak, 1976); *The Bear at the Gate: Chinese Policy Making Under Soviet Pressure* (Hoover Institution, 1971); *Korea Under New Leadership: The Fifth Republic* (Praeger, 1983); and the aforementioned *Three and a Half Powers*. When he died, Hinton was working on a comprehensive volume on Chinese foreign policy entitled *China's Long Ascent: The Foreign Policy of a Dissatisfied Power*. His last publication is his perceptive chapter "China as an Asian Power" in *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1994), edited by Thomas W. Robinson and myself. Unfortunately, Harold passed away without knowing that we had dedicated the volume to him and Allen Whiting, as pioneers in the study of China's foreign relations.

Hinton's studies of domestic Chinese politics were equally significant. Michel Oksenberg considers Hinton to be "... among the pioneering

scholars of Chinese bureaucracy and administration. His 1960 *World Politics* article on inner-Party politics during the Great Leap Forward was the first of its kind, and his overview of the Chinese political system in George McT Kahin's *Major Governments of Asia* was arguably the best such essay at the time." His *Leaders of Communist China* (Rand Corporation, 1956) and *An Introduction to Chinese Politics* (Praeger, 1973 and Holt, Reinhart & Winston, 1978) typified his approach to Chinese politics. Harold was a quintessential Pekingologist. His focus was largely at the elite level, and no occurrence escaped his attention. He could tell you who held what position at what time, their policy proclivities, their background, when they appeared in public and next to whom, what skeletons they had in their closets, and whether their star was currently rising or falling.

Harold's other major contribution to the field was his compilation of handbooks. In 1978 he edited *The People's Republic of China: A Handbook* (Westview, 1978), which remains to this day an excellent guide to various aspects of contemporary China. But by far his most noteworthy contribution in this category is his seven-volume *The People's Republic of China: A Documentary Survey* (Scholarly Resources, 1986). This invaluable set covers the period from 1949 to 1984, and is arguably the most comprehensive compilation of its kind. It systematically chronicles a wide range of key documents, articles, editorials, speeches, name lists, meetings, treaties, activities of leaders, and social and economic data. Allen Whiting opines that because of these volumes, as well as his earlier works, ". . . all in the field are indebted to Harold for having provided an accurate record from which to begin their own research."

These were Harold Hinton's lasting professional contributions. His scholarship will long outlive him. So will memories of Harold as a person. He was an extremely compassionate man and a practising Christian. I will never forget walking with him on the streets of both Washington and Taipei when he would stop to give to beggars. All who knew him remember that a real warmth lay behind a seemingly gruff exterior. He never condescended to anyone, dealing with all in a fair and friendly manner. As Michel Oksenberg recalls,

> He was a tough minded analyst, somewhat opinionated and iconoclastic, but as a friend, teacher and colleague, he had an endearing quality to him. He always had a grin and encouraging remark. His distinctive, slightly breathless voice echoes in one's mind. Harold's passing makes one think of an almost bygone era of China-watching. Harold's and other's writings during the 1950s shaped the generations of China scholars recruited into the field during the 1960s and 1970s. These generations are now in their forties and fifties, and the legacy of Hinton and his colleagues can be found in the work they carry on.

As one who was greatly influenced by Harold Hinton's teaching, writings, advice, and friendship I know that my feelings are shared by many others in the field.