

Another 'China expert' misses the mark

by Mary M. Burdman

Legacies, A Chinese Mosaic

by Bette Bao Lord

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Mrs. Bette Bao Lord wrote this book about Chinese who lived through the Cultural Revolution, and about her own reunions with family when she returned to China as an adult, after leaving Shanghai for America as a child of eight. She returns to China again in 1985, as the wife of U.S. Ambassador Winston Lord. There, she makes many friends who confide to her the unspeakable things which they suffered. The people whose lives she recounts emerge vividly on the pages. But something is not right.

Mrs. Lord is the wife of one of America's leading "China card" players. It was Winston Lord, she boasts, who accompanied Henry Kissinger (that evil, greedy profiteer) as his special assistant on Kissinger's first secret trip to Beijing in 1971—when the Cultural Revolution was at its depth, something which did not deter Kissinger.

Lord served with Kissinger again in 1972, and finally was appointed U.S. Ambassador by Ronald Reagan. Winston Lord, whom his wife describes as "the quintessential WASP," left his office in April 1989. There are indications he did not appreciate President George Bush's claims to be a "China hand." Lord deplored the Brent Scowcroft mission to Beijing in December 1989, but only because, Lord said in January, it "has also stirred up passionate and damaging debate in the United States about China policy for the first time in 20 years."

This is the problem. With all her horror at what her friends in China had suffered, the last thing Mrs. Lord would want to do is stir up debate about U.S. China policy. She is proud of being "devoted to forging links between China and America," because she, like so many others in the Anglo-American Establishment, ultimately considers the communist regime in China inevitable. For all her tributes to the courage of so many Chinese people, she misses entirely the real lesson of 1989: The revolution that began in China spread to Eastern Europe, and is now spreading to the Soviet Union itself. Tiananmen Square gave the East Germans the

determination to win.

The greater lesson behind this, is how Tiananmen Square happened at all. The real story of the Cultural Revolution—given the far better name "Cultural Holocaust" by Belgian writer and anti-"China expert" Simon Leys—is yet to be told. Not only were millions of human beings maimed, tortured, and murdered; this was an all-out effort to murder one of the world's great civilizations, by its own youth. How could the young people become Red Guards, and imprison and torture their teachers, their relatives, their elders? How could they, as Mrs. Lord describes again and again, ransack houses, destroying families' every work of art, every photograph, every possession, in an insane attempt to eliminate China's history? These youth were brutalized by their own profound ignorance and by growing up in a China in which tens of millions had already been murdered by the insane economic policies of Maoism. But it is not only Maoism that is to blame.

Mrs. Lord leads each chapter on each Chinese life, with a short "news" flash on the events of the Beijing Spring. She cannot, however, account for how, after the Cultural Holocaust, the Beijing Spring could have ever happened. Was it due to Deng Xiaoping's decade of "reforms" as she claims? I doubt it. "One of the boldest experiments ever tried—the transformation of a billion lives," she writes. "Deng Xiaoping was steering the country away from fanaticism and dogma towards pragmatism. . . . How tragic that the architect of reform had become a victim of the very success of his policies."

This is the flaw of all the Establishment's China experts, Chinese or otherwise. Deng did not make a bold experiment; he attempted to apply the worn-out "free-market" policies which are failing so appallingly in the United States and Britain, and unleashed what one Thai observer called "corruption unprecedented in world history" in China. Forty years of communist rule, capped with Deng Xiaoping's "pragmatism," have created the greatest crisis in modern Chinese history.

Mrs. Lord left China days before the massacre, she wrote, sure that bloodshed had been averted. Friends from Beijing called after the massacre, and said: "Please tell Americans that after the sound of gunfire has ended, and the fires have been extinguished, Chinese will be dealt a fate far more agonizing. The party has had no previous experience in crossing the river of reforms. It has groped for stepping-stones along the way. But in what they plan, once the fighting has stopped, the party has had a lifetime of experience. Warn Americans not to be fooled. . . . Those men are masters at orchestrating a misery all the more insidious because it is silent and invisible."

She and her husband, Mrs. Lord wrote, were "profoundly touched" by the Chinese people's "capacity to endure. . . . They lived in a country of limits," the limits of scarcity, of traditional China, and of communism. Enduring limits, however, is not what gave birth to the Tiananmen demonstrations.