

Obituary

OWEN LATTIMORE (1900–1989)

Owen Lattimore, the country's leading specialist on Mongolia and Central Asia, died in Providence, Rhode Island, on May 31, 1989, at the age of eighty-eight. Born on July 29, 1900, in Washington, D.C., he established a reputation for solid yet imaginative scholarship—especially for his fresh and perceptive analyses of the Mongols and other nomadic Asian societies. Author of sixteen books on these peoples and on China, he is probably best remembered for his *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1951), still preeminent in its field. With no formal education beyond secondary school (and one graduate year at Harvard), he was a lively reminder that scholarship does not require a Ph.D. He will also be remembered for his political integrity, courage, and willingness to call a spade a spade—qualities that ultimately led him into bitter conflict with the China Lobby and senators Joseph McCarthy and Pat McCarran.

Lattimore lived in China as a child, attended secondary school in Switzerland and England, and returned to China for five years as a businessman and journalist. He then turned to exploration, field research, and writing, making many treks through Manchuria, Inner and Outer Mongolia, and Sinkiang. From 1934 to 1941 he served as editor of *Pacific Affairs* and in 1939 was appointed director of Johns Hopkins University's Page School of International Relations. On President Roosevelt's recommendation, Chiang Kai-shek appointed Lattimore as his political adviser (1940–41). This brief relationship was cordial, but Lattimore encountered scant success in influencing Chiang; what he saw of the inner workings of Chiang's government considerably increased his criticism of the Kuomintang. He then served (1942–45) as deputy director of the Office of War Information, with responsibility for its Pacific operations.

Lattimore's criticism of the Kuomintang earned him the unremitting enmity of Chiang's lobby in the United States, especially one of its leaders, Alfred Kohlberg. When early in 1950 McCarthy sought a name to link to his charge that Communists directed U.S. China policy, Kohlberg supplied him with Lattimore's. McCarthy named him as "the top Russian espionage agent in the U.S." and as "a principal architect" of American Far Eastern policy, one of those responsible for having "lost China" to communism. Unable to make these accusations credible, or the charge that Lattimore was a Communist, McCarthy finally turned over his club to Senator Pat McCarran, who in his own hearings repaired to the expedient of indicting Lattimore for perjury. But even that charge could not be substantiated, a federal judge dismissing it as "so formless and obscure" that if Lattimore had been brought to trial it would make "a sham of the Sixth Amendment."

Ironically, shortly before McCarthy attacked him Lattimore had managed to bring the Dilowa Hutukhtu and two other strongly anti-Communist leaders from Outer Mongolia to political asylum in the U.S. Nevertheless, in the shameful climate of McCarthyism and McCarranism, timid and expedient men yielded to the popular assertion that "where there's smoke there's fire"—and the pall of both senators' smoke lingered long. Lattimore was stripped of his directorship of the Page School, his salary reduced to that of an instructor. Understandably bitter, he finally went abroad, ac-

cepting first a position at the Sorbonne and then the directorship of Chinese studies at Leeds University in England (1963–70). After further research and writing in France and England, he returned to the United States in 1985.

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