

Robert Elegant

## But What a School



Born in New York City on March 7, 1928. A.B., University of Pennsylvania, 1946. M.A., Chinese and Japanese Studies, 1950 and M.S., Journalism, 1951 Columbia University, New York. 1994 visiting professor, Boston University. — Books (non-fiction): *China's Red Masters*, 1951. *The Dragon's Seed*, 1959. *The Center of the World*, 1964, rev. ed. 1968. *Mao's Great Revolution*, 1971. *Mao vs. Chiang: The Battle for China*, 1972. *The Great Cities: Hong Kong*, 1977. *Pacific Destiny: Inside Asia today*, 1990. (Fiction:) *A Kind of Treason*, 1966. *The Seeking*, 1969. *Dynasty*, 1977. *Manchu*, 1980. *Mandarin*, 1983. *White Sune, Red Star*, 1986 (published in the US in 1987 as *From a Far Land*). *Bianca*, 1992. — Address: 7 Brown St., Cambridge, MA 01238, USA.

Besides the opportunity to live again in Germany for a time, I was drawn to the Wissenschaftskolleg by the lure of a more leisurely and more contemplative way of life. I further hoped that the noble steel of better minds would strike sparks from the base flint of my own.

All those expectations were to be realized, but not necessarily in the manner I had anticipated.

Yes, life was somewhat more leisurely and somewhat more contemplative for one accustomed to the rapacious demands of incessantly working on a new novel as well as a little journalism. Yet I found myself doing much the same thing while also attending colloquia and making my small contribution to them.

As for the lunches and the dinners, where almost as much intellectualizing as masticating took place, I am daily admonished by my scales. I have, as the Rector, himself not sylphlike, warned, found myself enlarged at least as much corporeally as intellectually. The Wissenschaftskolleg sticks to your ribs, as well as to your cerebellum.

Having been away from academia for some time, I had forgotten the intense concentration that distinguished scholars bring to bear on their specialities. I had also forgotten the ruthless elimination from their minds of subjects not germane to their own fields. Gustav Ranis and I found ourselves virtually forming a *mini-Schwerpunkt*, being virtually the only fellows with a keen interest in East Asia and some knowledge thereof.

I nonetheless found my colleagues always ready to assist me with views and facts to which I would not otherwise have had access. Since my additional project was a novel on the environmental movement, Dick Vane-Wright, Chris Humphries, and their associates were most directly helpful.

Coming to Berlin was a deliberate effort on the part of my wife and myself to shake ourselves out of the perhaps too comfortable life into which we had settled. We are this year at Boston University, where I am a visiting professor in Far Eastern Studies and Journalism.

In its own way, Boston is as stimulating as was Berlin, particularly because there exists at its seven or eight major universities a concentration of Far Eastern specialists, many of whom are old friends. Curiously, Boston is to me as alien as Berlin. Perhaps even more alien, since I had spent some five years in Germany over the last few decades, but no more than a few months in the United States.

Along with my perennial study of the emerging new balance of economic, military, and political power in East Asia, I was able to look first hand at the emerging new balance of power in Europe. I was, however, disturbed by the lack of knowledge in Europe, particularly Germany, regarding East Asia, as well as a somewhat timorous recoiling from learning more about the most dynamic part of the world. Nothing like the Kaiser's *Yellow Peril*, but, it appears, a wish to shield oneself from the harsh reality of powerful competition with Europe, particularly Germany.

The sojourn was also good for my self-discipline. Having spent decades as a foreign correspondent reporting to a head office ten thousand miles away, I initially found even the light obligations of the Kolleg a little onerous. Although I may not have adjusted completely to those demands, I learned again to live with men and women who are, to say the least, my intellectual equals.

Also the insights, the exchanges, the repartee, and the mental strife. In a way, it was like going back to school for one so long untrammelled. But what a school !