

Women in Leadership Highlights November 18, 2011



The Rockefellers in China – and an Update on China/U.S. Relations with Mary Brown Bullock, Ph.D., Distinguished Visiting Professor of China Studies, Emory University

As both a historian and an American who grew up in Asia, Dr. Mary Brown Bullock shared her fascinating perspective on relations between the United States and China. Coming from both personal experience and her academic research, she provided a historical narrative to help the audience understand the future of the relationship between the two world powers.

Dr. Bullock began the discussion with highlights from her dissertation, which is really where her China research began, in which she talks about her first trip to China in 1974. She was there to visit Peking University Medical College, which had been closed during the Cultural Revolution. Since that time, she has returned to China every year, with the exception of the two years when her children were born. Over the years, she watched Peking come alive. It went from bicycles to traffic jams and traditional shops to modern 5th Avenue-type shops. The area she visits is today anchored by a Grand Hyatt Hotel, surrounded by Prada, Kentucky Fried Chicken, NBA Posters, and other signs of Western society's influence.

Dr. Bullock also described witnessing the rebirth of China's intellectual society that had been squelched during the Cultural Revolution. In fact, while she was President of Agnes Scott College, she continued to travel to China as often as she could in order to interview and understand what happened to physicians there over a century, particularly those affiliated with an American institution. One fact she shared was that 5-10% of the Peking Union Medical College graduates committed suicide prior to 1950 (presumably due to how they were treated during the Cultural Revolution).

Her second book released in 2011 is titled *The Oil Prince's Legacy: Rockefeller Philanthropy in China* (can be ordered at discount from: www.sup.org. [Stanford press] discount code: "LEGACY11"). As part of her research, she was able to access several Rockefeller diaries along with family letters from five generations. She also interviewed current family members.

As Dr. Bullock explained, when the Rockefellers first started focusing on philanthropy in China, it was at a time when the U.S. had strong exclusionary policies against China. However, the Rockefellers wanted Chinese scientists to be part of the world's intellectual community. John D. Rockefeller Jr. and his wife went to China in 1921 - creating front page news. Their trip was an epic journey that is a keystone memory for the family, even now. The couple were heavily influenced by their experiences in China, to the point that Buddhism and a more open view of religion became a part of their lives. The Rockefellers went on to fund the Rockefeller Foundation at Peking Union Medical College, which became the cradle of modern medicine in China.

“Although the Rockefellers no longer focus their philanthropic efforts in China,” said Dr. Bullock, “we are in a new age of Chinese-American relations. China is now putting its own money into medical institutions. The Chinese call John D. Rockefeller “the Oil Prince” and there is a renewed interest in his work and its intersection between philanthropy and economic success.

Question and Answer:

1. *What was the impact of exile on the intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution?*

“In remarkable ways, the intellectuals who were exiled during that time do not seem bitter. There is a sense of career opportunity lost, but they were forced to practice in tiny villages, which many feel was a valuable experience for learning about the true needs of China.”

2. *What are the current issues facing China?*

“China has not yet become innovators, but I believe they will.” She believes their socialist system stunts innovation. China also has horrendous environmental conditions, to the point that an environmental catastrophe is very possible. The government is well aware of that, though, and now putting money into green industry.

She further explained that there is no inherent reason why China and the U.S. should be enemies. The big issue will be whether we can sort out our roles in the Pacific. As announced last month, the U.S. is placing troops in Australia now, which the Chinese see as a direct threat. They feel that we are trying to thwart their rise and that we’re encircling them.

3. *How and why did you become interested in China?*

Her father was born in China and she lived mainly in Asia until she came to Agnes Scott in Atlanta to attend college. Her parents and grandparents were missionaries in Korea. In fact, her family just went to Shanghai to replicate a lot of her grandfathers’ first trip to China, to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of that trip. As missionaries, they were seen as “hometown heroes.”

4. *Has there been a rise of women in leadership in China?*

Women are stronger in the medical and business worlds than in politics. Their greater freedom was inspired in part by missionaries in the early 1900s, but it was also influenced by the communists. The communists expected women to do anything men could do. One side effect of rolling back socialist China has been that childcare has been taken away, which has led to some women exiting the work force. Women are also

becoming commodities. In some cases, they are required to be of a certain height and weight to get jobs.

There is some notion of feminism, though. Hilary Clinton went there a few years ago, which was a turning point for the women's movement in China. It led to the first domestic abuse hotline being established and a very popular documentary looking into abuse. There are also well-established women's studies programs and laws to protect women migrant workers from being economically exploited. There is a lot of work going on to educate women on their rights. For example, Nike has provided some very good programs for women in China.

5. *Do you have any advice for women doing business in China?*

- a. They want to know marital status and if you have a family very quickly. It gives you value there if you do, so make it known quickly.
- b. Modesty in clothing is very important.
- c. Be faithful to your own interest. The Chinese respect when people have confidence in their own goals as a company.
- d. When the Chinese say, "we're studying this," it means NO.

6. *Do you have any thoughts on experimental medicine in China?*

It is becoming a site for medical tourism because it is much cheaper. However, there is no FDA there to provide the kind of oversight that we have here. In general, she would not recommend going to China for medical treatment.

Interestingly, though, traditional medicine and modern medicine are both still used in China. Modern Chinese doctors really integrate the two, still practicing traditional Chinese medicine along with modern.

7. *What has been the impact of the one child policy?*

It started in the late 1970s (after Mao who did not believe in restricting populations). It was pretty evenly applied at first in the 1980s, with many forced abortions. Now, many are self-selecting abortions due to sonograms, though.

It has led to generations who will have no siblings, no aunts and uncles, leaving the one child as the only caretakers for aging parents, which is a lot of pressure. Women are also becoming very selective (i.e., "picky") in marriage choices.