

At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on March 3, 2020, the following tribute to the life and service of the late Roderick Lemonde MacFarquhar was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.

RODERICK LEMONDE MACFARQUHAR

BORN: December 2, 1930

DIED: February 10, 2019

Roderick MacFarquhar was the Leroy B. Williams Professor of History and Political Science, *Emeritus*. MacFarquhar taught for three decades at Harvard and was a brilliant scholar of contemporary Chinese political history. His work, exemplified by his magisterial trilogy, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, confronted the most challenging questions of Chinese politics: Why did the all-powerful leader of the Chinese Communist Party mobilize the masses to attack a Communist party that he himself had built over decades of revolutionary struggle and sacrifice? And what would be the lasting impact of Mao Zedong's final revolution on the course of Chinese politics?

MacFarquhar's answers, informed by an encyclopedic examination of the Chinese documentary record and augmented by his keen political intuition, highlight the central role of the leader and his vision. He concluded his trilogy in 1997 with this assessment:

Many revolutionary victors are happy to settle for power and stability. Mao was not. The revolution was dead; long live the revolution! . . . Mao genuinely believed in spiritual rebirth. Uncertain, now, where the revolutionary Grail was to be found, Mao pinned all his hopes on the quest for it. Travelling hopefully would have to replace arriving, the means would become the end, making revolution would *be* the revolution . . . And if all else failed, the revolution was incarnate in its leader and the prime directive was: Long live Chairman Mao!

Twenty years later, while conceding the dynamism of China under Xi Jinping, MacFarquhar stressed the continuing influence of Mao and Maoism, observing that "Xi Jinping has transformed China at an amazing pace. Maoist institutions and values are being restored, though. . . . Mao is the lodestone of the Xi regime, the ultimate legitimation of Xi's policies and personal role. . . . So the Chairman's portrait will continue to hang in Tiananmen, and citizens will continue to be shepherded into his mausoleum. Mao does still matter." Yet MacFarquhar also considered a more optimistic possibility: "People as dynamic as the

Chinese . . . are not going to be ruleable from one center, one party, or one person . . . for very much longer.”

It is a testament to the soundness of his analysis (and the power of his prose) that, while political science had largely abandoned studies of leadership and ideology, MacFarquhar’s approach resonated so positively with scholars as well as with journalists and the reading public in both China and the West. A leading historian in the People’s Republic of China remarked, “In China, the name ‘Roderick MacFarquhar’ [马若德] reverberates like thunder. . . . His rich sources, penetrating insight, and objective narrative opened Chinese people’s eyes to their own history.”

Important and influential as his scholarship was, MacFarquhar was not a typical academic. Having spent his childhood in British India, where his father served as a civil administrator, he was sent to the United Kingdom for secondary and university education. His Oxford degree bestowed a passion for politics rather than academics. Determined to pursue a career as a politician, MacFarquhar’s decision to study China was initially a means to an end. After completing an A.M. in East Asian Studies at Harvard in 1955, he returned to England as a journalist for the *Daily Telegraph* and the BBC, reporting on China. He also served for nearly a decade as founding editor of the *China Quarterly*, which under his direction became the leading international journal on contemporary Chinese society and politics. But he saw journalism primarily as a stepping stone to political office and in 1974, after two unsuccessful attempts, MacFarquhar won election to Parliament with the Labour Party. His five years as a member of Parliament allowed him to promote an array of causes close to his heart, from school access for the disabled and women’s rights to Sino-British foreign relations. Much as he relished serving as an M.P., however, MacFarquhar’s political career ended abruptly in 1979 when Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative Party swept into office. Almost 50 years of age at the time, he was then willing to consider a less capricious occupation. And what could be more secure than a tenured professorship at Harvard?

In 1984, less than four years after receiving a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics for a dissertation based on a volume in his trilogy, MacFarquhar joined the Harvard Government Department as a full professor. While he would surely have preferred to remain a politician had circumstances allowed, he threw himself into his new position with enthusiasm, drawing upon his previous experiences as journalist and politician to make impressive contributions as an academic. For the next three decades, MacFarquhar was an exceptionally engaged and energetic presence at Harvard in the multiple roles of teacher, administrator, and scholar. His legendary courses on the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Uprising enrolled each semester upwards of 500 students, many of whom were inspired to dedicate themselves to the study of China. Lecturing without notes or slides, a skill he had honed on the floor of Parliament, MacFarquhar was a spellbinding speaker whose riveting accounts of political intrigue within the Chinese elite captivated his students. His contributions to Harvard extended well beyond the classroom. He served successive terms as

director of the John K. Fairbank Center for East Asian Research and chair of the Government Department, in both cases leaving these units larger, stronger, and more collegial as a result of his dynamic stewardship. Reviewers hailed the first volume of his trilogy on the Cultural Revolution as “an unrivalled account of high politics in China” and the second as “a model of scholarship.” The third volume, completed at Harvard in 1997, was awarded the Joseph Levenson Prize of the Association for Asian Studies for the best book on twentieth-century China.

Roderick MacFarquhar believed in the transformative power of visionary leadership. This belief animated his shrewd understanding of Chinese politics; more important, it inspired his entire life’s work—as pathbreaking journalist, principled politician, revered teacher, and beloved colleague.

Respectfully submitted,

Alastair Iain Johnston
Susan Pharr
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Elizabeth Perry, Chair