

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

ROBERT W. BARNETT

Interviewed by: Willis Armstrong
Initial interview date: March 2, 1990
Copyright 1998 ADST

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background pages	
Born in China	
University of North Carolina	
Rhodes Scholar	1934-1937
<i>Economic Shanghai</i>	
China economic policy, Peking	1949-1951
Senator Joe McCarthy Institute for Pacific Relations	
The Netherlands pages	1956-1959
Economic counselor	
Harvard	1959-1960
Quemoy Crisis	
Brussels, Belgium	1961
Under Secretary's Office	1961-1962
Foreign economic advisory staff	
George Ball	
Population matters	
China policy	
Far Eastern Bureau	1962-1970
Indonesian debts	
Guam doctrine	
Asia Society	1970-1980
Rockefeller's Williamsburg meeting on China	
Resident associate with Carnegie Endowment	
Author	
Tiananmen Square	1989

President Bush's handling of situation
China succession problem
Peoples Liberation Army
Human rights in China

Eastern European developments

1990-1991

INTERVIEW

Q: This morning I am interviewing Robert W. Barnett who had a great deal of experience in the State Department and the Foreign Service, mostly in connection with Far Eastern affairs. He has a China background and I will ask him to outline his early years and his jobs he held in the State Department, the Foreign Service and elsewhere which relate to our international posture in the Far East, now called East Asia.

BARNETT: Bill, I can't foretell how interesting this is going to be but I will stick to it - the way I spent my life. I will try to be brief. I entered the Foreign Service without having planned for that to be my career. I had fought the war with General Chennault in China and had briefed him every morning and put out his daily, weekly and monthly reports on the operations of the Flying Tigers - 14th Air Force. When the war ended the State Department was in need of people who had some background in Asia and some experience in dealing with economic problems. So the State Department, on the recommendation of Edwin Martin, a mutual friend of ours, persuaded the Pentagon to release me.

Q: You were still in uniform?

BARNETT: Yes, a major in the US Army Air Force. The Pentagon was somewhat reluctant to do this, but finally did agree to my transfer, and in uniform I began working for the State Department on problems related to the occupation of Japan.

I had intended to be a foreign correspondent when the war was over. I knew Henry Luce very well and had my eye on Fortune magazine. That is what I wanted to do with my life. But I was persuaded that it was important for me to work on occupation problems facing the Supreme Commander in Japan and in particular facing the State Department and the White House in keeping faith with our wartime allies concerned in the strategy for Japan's occupation.

So I entered the State Department having in mind that it would be quite a short assignment and that if it were longer I would want to shift over to work on China rather than Japan because all of my academic experience had revolved around China.

Q: Where had you done your university work?

BARNETT: I went to the Shanghai American School, and then to the University of North Carolina where I received the B.A. and then the M.A., with my thesis on the modernization of China, comparing it to the U.K. experience with the Industrial Revolution. I got a Rhodes scholarship and went on to England and first did the degree in politics, philosophy and economics. I stayed on and did a B. Litt., with my thesis being on British foreign policy in connection with the Russo-Japanese war.

Q: That was before the war?

BARNETT: I was at Oxford from 1934 to 1937 where I felt very remiss in not having mastered the Chinese language. So, after Oxford I went to Yale for two years, doing my doctoral work there in the Chinese language. Briefly I aspired to be a China scholar, but it did not work out that way. I went from Yale to New York as a fellow of the Institute of Pacific Relations. While there the Rockefeller Foundation agreed to send me out to China to write a book on Shanghai. It was called *Economic Shanghai: Hostage to Politics*, and came out in 1941. Well, that was what I was doing when Pearl Harbor occurred and I entered and completed my tour with the Air Force.

Then, after the war, from 1945 to 1949, I worked on Japan: actually I was the US member of the Far Eastern Commission's Committees on Economics and Reparations Questions. I left that job in 1949 to become the officer in charge of China economic policy until '51.

Q: That's when I first knew you, because I was doing strategic controls on trade with communist countries and we talked about ChinCom and things like that.

BARNETT: I loved that China job and was told that I was being slated to take over the whole China Office when Senator Joe McCarthy discovered that someone working on China in the State Department had been on the staff of the Institute for Pacific Relations. And he had been convinced that this organization was a hotbed of Soviet espionage. So it was that which caused him to proclaim that I should be "interesting" to a lot of people.

Q: Your audience expanded immediately.

BARNETT: I was really almost stopped cold! Without any interest in or record of radical activities--in fact, having worked for Chennault and for Wedemeyer--you would have thought that they would have thought that maybe I was not a very promising spy. But that was not the state of mind at the time and I was subpoenaed to appear in Executive Session before the McCarran committee which was having open hearings on Owen Lattimore at the time. I was, following Lattimore, to be the next witness. I was particularly worth attention simply because I had been with the Institute--no doubt about that--and I was working on China in the State Department--no doubt about that. In the atmosphere of the McCarthy excitement and turmoil that made me a promising target. My hearing in Executive Session took about five hours. To me it felt like something out of Arthur Koestler or Dostoevsky. But I survived it. I was never charged with anything by

the committee or by the State Department. However, for public relations reasons, the Department thought it was a hell of a good idea to get me out of the Far Eastern bureau and working on something else. They made me a "prominent" officer in EUR. Actually, I didn't do anything much. But I did have a lovely paneled office. I was the senior Economic Advisor for the Office of Western European Affairs. I had not had any academic experience in this, but just then the assignment did not demand much for me to do.

And then I made one of my big life-time discoveries: it is very rewarding to do tough jobs that nobody else wants to do, especially if it is hard and amorphous and does not belong to the tradition of the job; career-minded officers just would not want to touch it. Such a job in EUR, at the time, was the examination of the economic submissions made annually to the NATO. Well, I found them absolutely fascinating.

Q: This was '51 on?

BARNETT: That was the beginning of my interest in European organizations, and before long I found myself in charge of the EUR office for European economic organizations. I worked with very able people like Ed Martin and Larry Vass, Ben Moore, Miriam Camp, Ruth Phillips, Jules Katz, Louis Boochever.

Q: It was a great group of people.

BARNETT: Several of them were my bosses. Some of them were on my staff--because of my so-called seniority. Time after time there were jobs that nobody wanted to do. I thought they had to be done and were worth getting into. Moving on from the State Department's EUR, I was transferred to become the economic counselor in Holland under the truly professional Freeman Mathews where I got deeply into the beginning of negotiations on EURATOM and the Common Market and considered implications of their coexistence with the "OECD". While I was in Holland Bob Bowie, who had become acquainted with me when he headed Dulles' Policy Planning Staff, recruited me for his new Center of International Affairs at Harvard. He and Kissinger were running it at that time. So I came back from a wonderful time--those four years at the Hague--to reenter academia.

At Harvard, I did not want to write about the Common Market although I had been just then very involved. I was intrigued by a foreign aid concept I invented that would solve "all the problems of the universe". My friend Tinbergen, the great Dutch economist, had concluded that in all societies, regardless of their stage of economic development, twenty-five percent of their GNP was invested in transportation, broadly defined.

Q: It is not an unreasonable conjecture.

BARNETT: He persuaded me that this was so. And, it was an exciting concept, I believed, that for all societies at all times, twenty-five percent of their wealth went into

producing mobility. In a very poor country the coolie was "transportation!" For us, aircraft and runways. So I began, at Harvard, saying I was going to spend my year there setting forth the proposition that all foreign aid programs from now on in should be devoted to subsidy of transportation in developing countries. If you did that you would have an employment-technology-improving dynamic at home, and, in the administration of "aid" you would not get involved with the nitty gritty of interfering with other countries' politics. You would just make continuing, vital contributions to twenty-five percent of their capital requirements.

Q: Making sure their trains ran on time.

BARNETT: Or, helping to get trains, at all!

So, that lasted about three weeks. I am still fascinated by the idea but I did not work on. Instead, I worked on the Quemoy Crisis and the nuclear confrontation it produced between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Q: What year was this?

BARNETT: I was at Harvard during 1959-60. The 1958 crisis had just finished a year and a half before. I decided to abide by several self-disciplines. First I would not make use of anything classified. I would work entirely from newspapers, magazines, the FBIS [Foreign Broadcast Information Service] and all that. So, I wrote "Quemoy: The Use and Consequence of Nuclear Deterrence." Thus, I introduced myself to the vocabulary of superpower nuclear competition and it was then that I acquired some credentials for thinking, today, that the SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] was a hideously deceptive, destructive and wasteful misuse of US resources which could have no useful bearing on our security prospects for the future.

After writing "Quemoy" I went back to Europe and became the counselor in Brussels at our mission to the European Communities, responsible for the Common Market.

Q: Who was our ambassador at that point?

BARNETT: Walton Butterworth.

Q: Had you known him in China days?

BARNETT: When I was the economic officer for China in FE he was the Assistant Secretary. The Brussels assignment lasted for about a year and a half when Bob Schaetzel came to Brussels to tell me that George Ball wanted someone to be his man to look out for world population problems: somebody who did not know too much about it; not a demographer; but somebody who had had some experience in maneuvering within the bureaucracy. I did not see that I had spectacular credentials for this job. But, again, it was something that no one else much wanted to do.

Eisenhower had just finished saying that "population" was a word that no one in the government should utter because it was a private matter, and political dynamite! Talk about it and you would lose the Catholic vote overnight. By 1961 we had a Roman Catholic president with a lot of Roman Catholics on his staff. George Ball thought that population was a big problem, which would not go away.

Q: What year was this?

BARNETT: 1961. So I came back and was given the title of deputy director of the foreign economic advisory staff for the Under Secretary of State. We were only three "advisers." I don't know why we were given fancy titles.

Q: George wanted his own show.

BARNETT: Maybe that was it.

Q: I know George very well. I worked for George too.

BARNETT: He is very exciting. Anyway, for almost two years I had the task of making the word "population" an acceptable part of the vocabulary of the Federal Government. I was told when I got there, "You can talk all you want, travel all over the world, find out what other people are doing, but for God's sake don't put a single thing in writing". That advice was my guidance. [laughter]

Q: That's not a normal State Department instruction.

BARNETT: I suspected that it was absolutely the most misguided advice anybody could have been given. Nothing ever happens without its being put in writing first. This was something I wanted to do myself. I wanted to arrange to make myself responsible for drafting the Department's policy form letters, responding to all the mail referring to contraception, abortion, family planning, over-population, UN activities in the population field.

Q: Family planning in the AID program?

BARNETT: Yes. There was a huge inflow of mail and nobody wanted to answer it. I said, "That's not acceptable, you've got to answer them. I will write a form letter that will be signed by some appropriate officer." I did not sign them; somebody else in Congressional Relations or elsewhere signed them. I drafted a letter stating that we had no policy regarding population problems but we were strongly in favor of knowledge about the problem. It requires a lot of research and it is inherently, like the weather, a problem that belonged to our environment that really required the attention of all countries. And therefore we appreciated the letter writer's interest.

With this as a start I cleared with the White House subsequent letters that gradually got improved in light of specific questions raised by the incoming mail. Before we knew it we approved everything the United Nations was doing; we approved everything the foundations were doing, the Population Reference Bureau, the John D. Rockefeller Population Council, etc. We were writing official letters approving what they "privately" were doing. We just ducked the issue of whether we had to agree one way or the other about issues like contraception or abortion.

Q: You could call peoples' attention to what other people were doing?

BARNETT: That is right. Then we started dealing with some really significant issues like contraception. We had in writing our commitment to choice. That was the big thing.

Q: From whom did you get the commitment in writing?

BARNETT: From the White House.

Q: Was that under Kennedy?

BARNETT: Yes, I had discovered quite early that Kennedy had a good record in Congress on family planning. In 1962 Averell Harriman asked if I would leave Ball's staff and become his deputy in the Far Eastern Bureau. The shift from "Far Eastern" to "East Asia and Pacific" nomenclature took place under Harriman. He was a very inspiring leader of the bureau. I noted only one shortcoming and I am a little hesitant to advertise it because his strengths were otherwise so great. When he had his conversation with the president before coming aboard as Dean Rusk's man for the Far East the president made it clear to him, "You can do anything as radical as you want, but lay off China." Why? It seems that when Kennedy saw Eisenhower just before he was leaving the White House, Eisenhower told Kennedy that he could be critical or supportive or enthusiastic. He could have any opinion he wanted to have about Eisenhower's presidency, but once he became the president he would need all the help he could get. "I want to give you that help, all the help that you need to be a great president but I want to tell you one thing: If you start fooling around with the China policy of John Foster Dulles I am going to come out with both fists swinging". This is such an incredible story that I am not sure why it has not been told over and over again. But it is a true story.

Q: It is a fascinating story. I had never heard that before.

BARNETT: You know, Kennedy debated Nixon during the campaign and one of the things he wanted to debate was Quemoy. He condemned the Eisenhower-Dulles team for their brinkmanship in the Quemoy crisis: he thought it was crazy. I was very pleased that before that debate he had read my Harvard study of the Quemoy crisis, and had agreed with my views on brinkmanship. Anyway, Eisenhower, Nixon and Dulles didn't agree with me and didn't agree with Jack Kennedy. Maybe Eisenhower's advice to Kennedy before he took office had really a lot to do with the Rusk and Harriman refusal to really

consider what I regarded as perfectly practical policy options with respect to China during the period of 1960 to 1972.

During my period of being deputy assistant secretary for East Asia many tried to give me credit for the ineffectual and really misguided attempts to claim progress in unwinding China policy. I did not do much except declare that I thought our China policy was a poor policy. Bill Bundy and Roger Hilsman, knowing what my views about China policy were, seemed to believe that talking about changing it was changing it.

Q: They assumed that because you were there, you were doing that?

BARNETT: Although I disapproved personally of isolation of China for year after year after year, regardless of what was happening anywhere else, I had nothing to do personally with Roger Hilsman's speech when he went out San Francisco and talked about an opening door when saying such a thing had no operative meaning..

Q: When did he take over from Harriman?

BARNETT: Harriman was assistant secretary from 1961 to 1964 and then he became deputy Under Secretary. Hilsman came aboard and left about a year later.

Q: Hilsman, after he left, came to Columbia. I knew him in Columbia as I went there in 1967, and he had been there about a year.

BARNETT: Anyway, early on in my tour I did not focus on the China problem as much as people thought I did. But I was very upset by the commitment and the progress of the Vietnam War. I was a problem for both Hilsman and Bill Bundy and I talked a lot to the Secretary, Dean Rusk, about this. I won't go into all that because that could be the only subject of another whole conversation. But the result of not being a "good team man" on Vietnam was that Bill Bundy turned over to me a whole platter of things that he had no time for, and, incidentally were projects, I thought far more interesting. I coordinated all the joint economic cabinet meetings between Japan and the United States. And this gave me a "bureaucratic" relationship with the whole city on Japan matters--with people whose attention span in focusing on the Japan problem was weak. I made them focus on Japan.

It also turned out that there wasn't anybody around who was really qualified to handle the economic consequences of the 1965 explosion in Indonesia resulting in the massacre of communists, the shelving of Sukarno, and the creation of a multi-national aid strategy for the bankrupt Indonesian economy. Indonesia was bankrupt before the coup.

Q: You were in the Far Eastern Bureau from 1962 to 1970. How did things work out, in view of your alienation from the basic line of policy on Vietnam?

BARNETT: On Indonesia we worked out a strategy that many people believed should become a model multinational foreign aid structure. One of the things I want to revert to

is that I think it is very exciting to work on jobs that no one else wants to do--jobs that no one knows how to handle properly. For one thing, to try takes you out of the firing line of people who are competitive and who think they can do it better. They have done it before and therefore can look down on any successor. If you are doing something that has not been done at all before, you are exploring ranges of choice after a while which are five or six times broader and deeper than others are aware of. You become kind of an authority on the "nature" of the problem, and when you have done that, you can have more confidence in what is likely to be the best solution.

In the case of Indonesia, I had never worked on a problem like this before. I soon discovered that it is not possible, under the law of many countries, to extend money to countries which are in default of their debt. Legally such countries cannot be granted aid.

Q: That is, they are legally in default, not just behind on their payments.

BARNETT: Therefore, the first two or three years of our work on Indonesia were devoted almost entirely merely to rescheduling, not settling, the debt. And a very interesting thing emerged; the creditors were quite willing to enter into debt rescheduling understandings, in order to be legally capable to extend Indonesia aid for broad strategic reasons, but without much real confidence.

Q: They would never see their money again.

BARNETT: ...that the rescheduling made any sense in terms of the probable capacity of the Indonesians to perform. The Indonesians did not like that; they felt that it was dishonest to enter into rescheduling that seemed to be suggesting they had capabilities that they had not had, nor were likely to have, in any foreseeable future. Such dialogue between creditors and Indonesians helped all concerned to grapple with "reality." It was not a "theoretical" problem.

Q: It was real, it was right on their desk.

BARNETT: In looking to a future in which there could be an acceptable basis for ongoing foreign economic assistance to Indonesia, the creditors asked for an outside opinion for what might be seen as an acceptable and realistic basis for disposing eventually of this overhang of Indonesian debt. We brought in Dr. Hermann Abs, governor of the Deutsche Bank, who had done the job for Germany. He and I then worked for two years and did come up with a very good agenda.

Q: It must have been a very stimulating experience. He is a very bright man.

BARNETT: He is a wonderful man. Our collaboration yielded a lot of things that surprised everyone. For instance, one of his recommendations was that the Indonesians should be forgiven the payment of interest. They would accept the obligation to pay off the principal, but for a specified grace period of time--thirty years--they would be

forgiven obligation to pay interest on it. Well, you know what over time happens to the value of the initial amount...!!

Q: Given the rate of inflation. What about the Indonesian debt to the Russians? Wasn't that a major factor?

BARNETT: That was another thing. Central bankers throughout all of Western Europe, North America and the US are really obsessed with precedent. So there had to be something absolutely unique to justify doing something that could arguably not set a precedent. In our case the debt of the Indonesians to the USSR was larger than Indonesia's aggregate debt to all of the Western powers. Under any rational calculation of the economic requirements of Indonesia's future, some kind of a debt settlement was imperative. If the Western creditors took an impoverishing settlement, under presumption of MFN treatment, treatment of the Russians would be worse. This was in the background. Also it provided the theory of sui generis.

Q: Did you have any contact with the Russians?

BARNETT: We invited the Russians to all of our meetings.

Q: Did they come?

BARNETT: No. That was a very interesting period. Gene Rostow and I handled our part of the negotiations with the Indonesians for the last couple of years before it was wrapped up. He was the Under Secretary [for Political Affairs]. He and I went and visited the Russian embassy here and also in Paris and told them about all what we were doing, when and where.

I believe that the solutions that arise from very prolonged analysis of the nature of a "hopeless" problem offer the best prospect for acquiescence in a durable result.

Q: They ought to have you working on Easter Europe at this time. I just read the World Bank study on Poland which was just published in January. It is a fascinating work. It is the Caesar's Gallic Wars sort of thing; everything has to be done by Caesar right now. You have to have stability on your currency, you have to have credibility for your currency, you have to cut out your subsidies and an endless number of things. I am sure that the way the Indonesians were working in those days you had the same thing.

BARNETT: One other thing I want to mention. I take some credit for a few really strategic decisions. Who should direct administration of the aid program? The World Bank? I opposed that because I said that the World Bank, in our strategy, should be regarded as a donor--but also should be regarded as reinforcement of the parts of the Indonesian government receiving the aid. So, throughout the period from 1965 to 1971 the World Bank and the IMF were always sitting side by side on the Indonesian

delegation. The Bank was a technical arm of the Indonesian side in presenting their case and monitoring within the Indonesian trading world their actual performance.

Q: That is a very good solution to the problem. Who did chair your committee?

BARNETT: The Dutch. They understood the subject.

Q: There is an empathy between the Dutch and the Indonesians. The Indonesians who have been properly trained by the Dutch are just as Dutch, stubborn as hell.

BARNETT: I know. That was a very rewarding and wonderful experience.

Q: That was '65 to '70?

BARNETT: Actually that started before. I went out there with Rutherford Poats who was AID and with an IMF representative--his name was Savkar--and somebody from the Bank to talk about an AID program for the Indonesians under Sukarno. However, Sukarno destroyed any possibility of our working with him when he burned down the British embassy and commenced "confrontation."

Q: That took care of that.

You left State in 1970 you have any particular policy reasons for leaving the Department or was it purely a personal matter of leaving at your own convenience?

BARNETT: It was on policy grounds? No. I was tempted to say I had one, but that would not be true. Nixon and Kissinger's attack into Cambodia was enough in my opinion to impeach them. I was really outraged by this exercise in presidential discretion in the Vietnam context. Actually, however, as a result of my work on Indonesia the desk, the Indonesians, A.I.D., and the World Bank all thought that I should be the ambassador in Jakarta following after Marshall Green. And Marshall Green thought I should be too.

Q: He came back to be Assistant Secretary under Nixon.

BARNETT: He came back through Paris. He was involved in shaping the whole strategy on Vietnamization.

Q: Then he became Assistant Secretary replacing Bill Bundy.

BARNETT: I had not been seeking to be Marshall's successor. I already occupied the job I really most wanted. I was in charge of the economic side of things for all of "EA and P."

Q: As an ambassador you have to do a lot of things nobody else is going to do.

BARNETT: I loved my job at State, I really loved it. I had become sufficiently involved in Indonesia to have been flattered by the suggestion that I go.

Q: It is a stimulating job and a fascinating country.

BARNETT: I didn't get it. I did not try to get it. I was not disappointed. I guess I was a little disconcerted that everybody else thought I should get it. The truth may be that I did not get it because Marshall felt he had slight experience on the economic side. As assistant secretary he needed to have somebody he absolutely trusted to help him for two or three years.

Q: He had no economic background.

BARNETT: Hardly any. Marshall is my best friend in the Service and I was delighted to help him. So I stayed on with him when he came on in 1969. He and I did the work in the State Department for the Nixon trip that produced the Guam doctrine.

Q: When was the Guam doctrine? This was Mr. Nixon on the policy of semi-detachment.

BARNETT: 1969. At the time of the landing on the moon. So Marshall and I, in addition, really did a lot under the early Nixon administration to unwind the China trade controls and to prepare the president for a psychological and strategic breakthrough in our China relations. We traveled with him on the tour to Guam, Manila, Djakarta and Thailand and then Romania.

I don't regret those wonderful two years of working as Marshall's deputy.

Q: He is a stimulating and interesting man and I have a great deal of respect and admiration for him. I was associated very briefly with him for I was assistant secretary and attended a chiefs of mission meeting in Hong Kong in 1972. I thought he handled everything well and had a great deal of esteem for him. Your own departure was on personal grounds?

BARNETT: When I did not get Indonesia, Marshall and Alex Johnson--so they said-- offered me Singapore. I said no. They said, "Why don't you take the Asian Development Bank?" I think they were trying to dig up something to make me feel good.

Just at that time John D. Rockefeller said he wanted me to open up an office for the Asia Society in Washington. I asked him what he wanted the office to do? So we began talking and to make a long story short I got him to agree that we should have a program in town for people who know Asia, or who should know Asia, who would become an audience that any Asian coming to Washington would drool to meet. I had contacts and I knew I could do what he wanted, and he said he knew I could do it. So, I did it. The key to my

decision was to have no fund-raising responsibilities and no crippling responsibility to merely look out for the entertainment of "members."

Q: That took most of the monkey off your back.

BARNETT: It was very creative time. With my State contacts, to start with, I discovered that there was a lot of intelligence and experience out there in Congress, at the Pentagon, among members of the press, and other places. In the State Department you tend to be quite adversarial with the press and also the Congress. You have to be cautious not to mess things up. If suddenly you are not bothered by that restraint and you get to know these guys, talking in terms of the real merits of the problems out there--this is a wonderful city to be in.

Q: This is a remarkable city and that is why a lot of us don't leave.

BARNETT: It so happened that my first year at the Asia Society was the year that China first opened up. To celebrate that event, Rockefeller held a meeting at Williamsburg for the countries in Asia who were going to be really bewildered by this total change of direction and attitude by the United States in relationship toward China. It was called "Rockefeller's "Williamsburg Meeting," and I was the guy who staged it. It turned out to be an extraordinary session. We had representatives from about twelve countries there; all the obvious ones, Australia, Canada, etc. George Ball was there, and Bill Roth; we had a strong American delegation. But after showing ceremonial respect for the agenda's intention to examine in depth, historically, psychologically, the "China factor"--now that it was open--the rest of the two and a half day conference shifted attention to Japan. Japan was seen to be the dynamo of East Asia. The Vietnam war was still going on and now that China was opening up, the Japanese economy was going through the ceiling in its exploitation of the dollar earnings from the war. All these things about Japan became so much more rewarding to talk about in this company that when we wrote up the conference, the references to China seemed prosaic.

Q: The opening up to China in effect took China off the agenda of conversations about Asia. If we hadn't opened up to China and you had had such a meeting you would have spent all your time talking about "why didn't you change your policy about China?" Did you have any connection with the Kissinger mission to China?

BARNETT: No, none at all.

Q: That was in '71?

BARNETT: Yes, in July. Even Marshall Green did not know about it.

Q: Kissinger went to Russia several times and Jake Beam, our ambassador there, was never informed.

BARNETT: Let me go on about this for just a minute. This was a spectacular meeting, especially from the standpoint of the Japanese, because Japan deflected the spotlight from China. To have that happen was both flattering and also troubling. It was important from their standpoint because they felt Japan was taken seriously, with great candor. So they insisted on another meeting, and Rockefeller had only wanted to have the one. He said that "you think about it and if you believe there should be another I will help to co-convene it, but I will not convene it by myself, I will co-convene it with Saburo Okita, the Japanese. And Sudjatmoko, who had just left the Indonesian Embassy in Washington. Well, I became their executive officer, agenda writer and note taker and rapporteur for eleven so-called "Williamsburg" meetings. The first was at Williamsburg, the second at Jakarta, the third was at Hakone in Japan, the fourth was at Hong Kong. After Hong Kong came Vancouver and then Penang, and Canberra. After Australia came the Philippines and after the Philippines came a tenth anniversary meeting at Williamsburg. An eleventh--and my last--was held in Singapore.

Q: How were these meeting financed? By Mr. Rockefeller?

BARNETT: No, Mr. Rockefeller never contributed a penny and nobody was paid to go. We did have some very generous donors. Okita got Nippon Steel, Sony and several others. Phillips Talbot got contributions from several U. S. corporations. We established at the very beginning--with Japan and Indonesia as early precedents--that participants at a "Williamsburg" meeting would be the guests of the host country. Hosts raised the funds to cover costs of accommodations, secretarial staff, entertainment, travel from airport to site and so forth.

Q: Your overhead costs in between were not all that much. And everybody paid his own way to the meeting. That was very well done.

BARNETT: It so happened that the surplus from the donations was enough to pay for most of the Washington Center's year-long activities. So without any effort to raise a penny for the Washington Center, the Williamsburg meetings paid for the role it began to play in Washington.

Q: That had not been anticipated when you started.

BARNETT: Totally unanticipated.

Q: How long were you with the Asia Society?

BARNETT: For eleven years, 1970 to 1980. The last two years I was concurrently a Resident Associate with the Carnegie Endowment. I wrote two books while at Carnegie.

Q: What were your books?

BARNETT: The first was published by the Joint Economic Committee of the Congress. It was a symposium called Pacific Region Interdependencies. My friend and collaborator there was Richard Kaufman. I had never believed in the goal of creating a Pacific Community, despite Okita's support of it. The region was doing well enough without "structuring," without a constitution, without facing questions of "belonging" or "not belonging." No membership questions have arisen in the loose Pacific community which exists today and from which the whole region benefits.

"Tiananmen Square" and Chinese Government's suppression of June 1989 demonstrations would have been a disaster for the whole Pacific community if there had been a "structured" community. Tiananmen was easier to absorb without too many institutions. Even so, look at the United Nations' World Bank's vulnerability! The World Bank did not terminate its lending to China but was pressed by Washington to do so.

My other book was called Beyond War in which I analyzed the Japanese concept of comprehensive national security. It is still used by the faculty at Japan's Defense Academy, and its biggest sale here has been at the Pentagon. It is still on the reading list of eight or ten American universities.

While at Carnegie I also made a start on a third book that is coming out two weeks from now [March 1990]: it is called Wandering Knights: China Legacies, Lived and Recalled.

Q: You were, I believe, born in China. What is the book about?

BARNETT: My brother, Doak Barnett, has written many books on China and he was one of the people who read the book in manuscript. But he had to say, "I couldn't tell you what it is about. What do you say?" That question was hard for me to answer, but I can say this - I would not have written the book if I had not been interested all my life in what caused people to wonder what makes the Chinese "Chinese." Wherever they have gone, for millennia, they preserve this "Chineseness." And this book grapples with why that is so. I do it by telling the story of a recently deceased Chinese classical historian. His name is Sun Yutang, who by the time he was 16 had memorized the Confucian classics. His maternal grandfather was the tutor of the Ching dynasty emperor Kuang Hsu. At Sun Yutang's home in Tientsin a tutor was chosen by this maternal grandfather to bring Young Sun up in the Chinese classical literary tradition. Sun's mother died suddenly and Sun's father went bankrupt, so at age 16 this kid began working his way through China's most "modern" educational institutions tutoring faculties in the ancient classics. Having finished at Tsing Hua University he turned down all types of invitations for scholarships to resume his study of the classics, first as a college instructor in Tientsin, and then as the darling of Japanese sinologues in Tokyo.

Q: What were his dates?

BARNETT: Exactly mine. He was born in 1911 and graduated from Tsing Hua in 1933. I was going to make it our joint book but he died in 1985. So this book is my account of his

life, particularly his education, high spots from his enormous body of scholarly writings--it was an enormous corpus--including contributions to works like the Cambridge history of China.

Q: Could you comment on the Tiananmen Square business on the basis of your own experience with China?

BARNETT: I approve of the way that Bush, Scowcroft and Eagleburger handled it. I am dismayed by the fact that both the House and Senate of Congress have failed to show any sympathy whatever for any of the basic, long-term questions Bush had to think through and deal with. Those questions, those problems were inherently and inescapable agonizing. I found what happened during the period of April to July 1989 one of the most exciting and painful times that I have ever observed and tried to understand. I watched with great interest and great care what happened in China from the death of Mao in September 1976. It was Deng Xiaoping who after the death of Mao, helped to bring to justice Mao's Gang of Four which had presided over the devastating destruction of Chinese brains, capital and access to the "outside world." It was their "Cultural Revolution."

Deng stopped that, but not in a wild rush. From '76 until nearly the end of '78, he was clearing the ground for the beginning of the social, economic and intellectual transformation of China from '79 to '89 which was an absolutely unprecedented achievement in social engineering in all history. One billion one hundred million people found their welfare doubled in a decade. Deng's strategy permitted market orientation, the rewarding of individual competition in the rural sector. The population of China is eighty-five percent in the rural sector. That transformation increased its productivity by exciting the greed and imagination and enterprise of the farmer. What came from doing this was education, television, radio, windmill power generating capabilities, etc... It happened all over China. My brother Doak made a trip all over China in 1988-89, comparing it with places he had visited and written about in 1949! He was a reliable judge of the changes!

When I think of Tiananmen I think of the Deng who had the courage to get rid of the Gang of Four; to let forty thousand students come to this country, to let anyone who wanted to go to China to study to do so, and to have done it with the advice of very many brainy people in China and abroad. He was, of course, running a monstrous risk: runaway, malignant inflation being set in motion by the daring of his Machiavellian designs. And "inflation" by June 1989 almost brought him down. In '88 CIA reports on inflation were very scary. World Bank reports echoed what the Chinese were beginning to say in their own literature. So during '88 to '89 there was a kind of retooling of think-tanks and bureaucracy as to how can we get under control runaway inflation with all the concurrent concomitants of corruption and breakdown of morality? When bloodshed at Tiananmen happened I thought it was a terrible accident: it was not necessary for it to happen.

Q: It was my impression that better management could have taken care of it.

BARNETT: I had believed that the succession problem was virtually solved. Zhao Ziyang, the chairman of the party and previously the prime minister was on the side of the reformers and had the background and the muscle to run the country--or so I thought. The students overdid condemnation of Deng and Deng considered Zhao soft. So Deng, architect of China's triumphs, saw China going down the drain unless an iron hand was applied. The price of malignant inflation known to Germans, Italians and Chiang Kai-shek in losing the civil war caused Deng to panic. The only thing that Deng was sure about was that to exercise some sort of power was vital to bring inflation and the irresponsibility of the kids under control! His tool was the PLA!

By the way, I know Deng loved those kids. They were his creatures. He did not kill them because he hated them--he loved them. He had given them their chance.

Q: You think it was the PLA that was responsible?

BARNETT: No. We know the PLA did not like the shooting, they did not want to do it. The problem was "that the world saw the PLA on television.

Q: I got that impression too.

BARNETT: Deng had to go a long way from Peking before he could find any units that could be trusted to obey Deng's harsh orders!

Q: I don't know of any army in the world that likes to shoot its own people. They are part of the people and consider themselves so. The Russian army considers itself part of the people.

BARNETT: I was at a meeting with (Congressman Stephen] Solarz last week and admitted that anybody who looked at television had to have great sympathy with his desire to be on the side of the angels. However, I felt that he was doing more harm than good because he put the whole moral justification for his outrage at the Chinese on the basis of China's violation of "human rights." I told him that "human rights," in our sense, has never belonged in the vocabulary of the Chinese.

Q: It is a different culture entirely.

BARNETT: The words did not even exist in the morality saturated Chinese language. "Human rights" was brought to China by Chinese students studying in Japan just before World War I. The Japanese had borrowed the words from European languages. "Mandate of heaven" is a concept very familiar to all Chinese, but it never included respect for "rights" of abused citizens. "Moral" legitimacy always revolved around another kind of judgement - the betrayal of responsibility by the ruler, failure to serve the welfare of the people, etc.

Q: That is well-said. I think that is a very good summation - I trust you have this in your book?

BARNETT: Not, as such, but as a matter of fact I do deal with the problem.

Q: This is very enlightening. We are frequently amateurs in understanding other cultures and we do not educate ourselves well enough. Human rights has a hard ride in Russia too, which has been my area of interest. The Russians are enough Westernized so they can understand the concept, but they are not used to it. They are more used to what is the mission of our ancient state, the Rus, and what we think is right. Being big countries, both China and Russia are a bit careless about individuals. This should have been taken by people here as a glitch; somebody slipped back because the students were too intemperate and they got a too intemperate reaction. I agree with you on the need to maintain contact. I think it is unfortunate that there was a secret mission [the Scowcroft-Eagleburger one] and then it was made unsecret. A lie does not pay off. This was a terrible mistake.

You have had a fascinating range of subjects to be interested in, going backwards from Tiananmen Square, the Asia Society, years of watching and feeling a part of China. You had a lot of experience with the Japanese and a lot of experience in Europe as well as an excursion into Indonesian economics and into nuclear questions. How do you feel about Eastern Europe at this point?

BARNETT: I have wondered what I really do think about Eastern Europe. The one thing that I don't wonder about is that I think it is marvelous that there has been an end to an automatic assumption that there will be a Russian military presence there, and acceptance of the sanctity of the ideologies of Marx and Stalin. I cannot view that as being anything but a wonderfully apocalyptic event in human history.

Q: Do you think it will be appreciated in the United States as to how apocalyptic event it is?

BARNETT: I do. I have some other thoughts too. One is that it is almost an unbearable shame that we have squandered our resources on a meaningless competition for nuclear superiority at high cost in money, brains, imagination and motives to a point where we do not have anything commensurate with the requirements of this opportunity to change the globe.

Q: Some people would argue the other side to that, that it would not have happened if we had not had the defense build up and the Star Wars effort - whatever that was. This has put a lot of money into defense think tanks.

BARNETT: I call that squandering.

Q: Well, people were going through a lot of this experimental science work anyway. The thing that some people would argue, that the Russians changed when they heard about Star Wars, because they knew they did not have the technical and intellectual resources and monetary resources. They did not know what it was, but they were afraid they might know what it was. I think that that, combined with the fact you had an intelligent guy like Gorbachev, who knew the country was in trouble; those factors all combined to make him switch. That is the point from which the East Europeans decided they would not be shot either in the front or the back by the Red Army and once they decided that and that they would not be shot by their own army, then you got this marvelous explosion. You never know what is a critical factor in history. You can argue that the critical point at Waterloo was the arrival of Blucher's calvary; it turned the tide. The other fascinating thing is that the Soviet system has had so few real roots, because it is based on an intellectually specious doctrine that had become a religion--it has no base. Besides it does not work, people have no bread on the table. A combination of all this has been apocalyptic. The poor Russians do not know what to do now.

End of interview