

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

RUTH KURZBAUER

Interviewed by: Dr. Chen Xiaohong
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INTERVIEW

KURZBAUER: I am Ruth Kurzbauer here at the University of Utah in the International Business program and I am also a former Foreign Service Officer, a USIA Officer. I served from 1979 to 1991 and then resigned in order to join a non-transportable spouse who is a professor here at the University. I am honored to participate in the ADS (Association for Diplomatic Studies) Oral History Program and I am particularly delighted to have as my dialogue participant Dr. Chen Xiaohong here at the Ph.D. program at the University of Utah in diplomatic history, and formerly of the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, China. So Dr. Chen and I share many moments together in our life experiences, particularly in the People's Republic of China, and I am looking forward to reminiscing about my truly wonderful and challenging life in the Foreign Service.

Q: When were you in China?

KURZBAUER: I first came in August 1984 to work at the US embassy as the assistant press officer. That is a USIA function, as you know, under the larger embassy mission. And I have to tell you that prior to that time I served in Yugoslavia, my first post, first as a JOT and then as what they call the ACAO, assistant cultural affairs officer. My own background had somewhat prepared me for a European assignment. I had studied European art and literature and come from a European born mother and father. I was a music major at university, stressing European classical music. So I wasn't necessarily Eurocentric, but I was comfortable in a European setting, and ended up being very comfortable in Yugoslavia, and we can talk about that later.

But I have to confess that I knew almost nothing about China. I will tell you what I knew before my training, and I will talk about that too. I was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio and we have a wonderful museum there, which is famous for its Oriental art collection. So as a young girl or student I used to wander through and just looked the way you look at great art and paintings anywhere. Then, when I was an undergraduate at Yale University, I worked as the secretary to two very famous American scholars of China, but that was a chance assignment. I worked for Arthur Wright, who is the great scholar of classical and ancient Chinese history, and an expert on the Sui dynasty. Then I worked for Jonathan Spence, the famous scholar of modern China who was Arthur Wright's student. Then the academic dynasty passed to Spence when Arthur Wright unfortunately died.

So I had some exposure to China by typing papers and doing library index research and meeting the Ph.D. students in the Chinese History program. But that was the extent of my professional exposure. The rest I knew about China was what anybody who is interested in the world around them learns from reading newspaper headlines and occasional books and stories. But I had no other preparation than that.

Q: I understand that you speak Chinese to an extent and the Chinese you speak from my point of view is very fluent and very understandable. How did you acquire that?

KURZBAUER: This is thanks to the Foreign Service Institute, which is the training school for American diplomats. I got my assignment through the bidding process that goes on in the Foreign Service. My first choices after Yugoslavia were either in the Balkans, Eastern Europe or somewhere around the Mediterranean, which at that time was my area of interest. But I had put Beijing down somewhere at the bottom of the list because I thought it would be exotic and we were required to distribute our bids among posts that are considered to be hardship posts. So I had to put one hardship post down and at that point Beijing was a greater hardship designated post. I am not sure that it is today--it probably shouldn't be because of the comfort and diversity of life now possible there. But in those days, 1982-83, China was not the China of today.

So I put Beijing down, and lo and behold I got a cable back saying this is going to be your next assignment. Then USIA officers and State officers, but I think USIA officer even more so, despite junior or middle rank, and I was not a high ranking officer, were allotted a full course in Mandarin Chinese through the Foreign Service Institute. It consisted of one year in Washington, language training and area studies, and almost a year at the extension school in Taipei, Taiwan. So in 1983, I spent about ten months in Washington going to language class every day, four or five hours a day. Also attending the East Asia lecture series given by academics from the Washington area and elsewhere at the Department of State once a week. And then, following that and passing the exam for that year, I was sent with my colleagues to Taiwan for follow up training.

As you know, in the Foreign Service not everyone gets full course language training. It depends on your home agency, on the function you will be doing. For example, the assumption is that as a press officer, a public affairs officer, the network of persons that you will encounter and will have to reach is somewhat broader in number than those working in the administrative function. Your mandate is to go out and make contacts and discuss and learn, etc. with a broad sector of local society, so that the ability to communicate in a foreign language is perceived as being an absolute requirement. So, even though I was of a more junior rank, as a USIA officer, because of our agency's policy, I usually received full language training. I am not sure I can speak for State, but I think junior officers in consular work, although the encounter with the local population is intense and daily, is not necessarily always given a full course, so I was lucky that USIA's policy supported the full course. By the time I got to the People's Republic I had more than a year and a half of Chinese language study.

Q: And I guess that was very helpful.

KURZBAUER: It worked well. I had gone through the Foreign Service Institute once before and that was before my tour to the former Yugoslavia. It pains me to say "the former Yugoslavia," but we are speaking now in 1993. Anyway that was my very first tour of duty, my junior officer tour and following on in Belgrade with cultural officer duties. I was given eleven months of Serb.-Croatian at the same Institute. Then I and two other colleagues, both from the State Department, were sent out on kind of an experimental language intensification program to live on the land, as it were, with

Yugoslav families for three months. We were the first ever selected, I believe, and I am not sure if the program ever continued. After our formal training in Washington, FSI picked three of us to go out and find a Yugoslav family and just live with them and interact for several weeks in the hope that that would intensify our language use before we actually got into the embassy and began our diplomatic work.

Q: You didn't do that in Taiwan, did you?

KURZBAUER: No, not in Taiwan.

Q: How did you get your training in Taiwan?

KURZBAUER: There is the AIT, American Institute in Taiwan, a language school extension, if you will, of the Foreign Service Institute. It is a formal school attached to the diplomatic training process. It used to be in T' aichung and then moved to Taipei.

Q: So you were again going to classes over there further learning the language.

KURZBAUER: Right. Of course, the purpose of sending us abroad was the hope that after 6 hours at language school every working day and lots of homework, that living in Taipei we would get out and do things in the community and use Chinese in the process. And I think to a certain degree that happened. We were a group of between 20 and 40 students from various US government departments doing the advanced Chinese program. We developed strong group rapport and friendships, so we had a nucleus of friends and used to do a lot of things together in Taipei city. But we also took off on our own.

For example, I was trained as a musician before I went into my adult work, so I hung out with the Taiwanese classical musicians. I went to art galleries and met artistic types. In many cases the common language was Chinese, although the younger Taiwanese speak English very well, so it was sometimes a hard pull to speak in my limited Chinese and not have my Taiwanese friends break out into perfect English. But it worked. You just lived a normal life. I had no car there so I took buses. My living quarters were up in the suburb of Taipei, which is up on a hill above the city, so in order to get down into Taipei City I had to take local buses and find my way around. It worked very well.

Q: There is always a prejudice in society against women when we talk about a certain kind of work. I think at your time when you made your decision to get into diplomatic service, was that a challenge, or how did you make your decision that you were going to get into the Foreign Service?

KURZBAUER: Well, it is interesting, because I have to confess that for me the decision was on one hand, I think, deep, but in a way unconscious and on the other hand serendipitous. I have always been interested in international things. Most everything I did as a student or as a person on my own had some international link. I was playing

European music when I was a student, or assisting foreign students in adjusting to university life. I was just always interested in the world in a broad dilettantish way.

Q: Did you have family that impacted you that way?

KURZBAUER: Yes. My parents were born in Vienna and escaped after the Nazis occupied Austria. A year later through a series of miracles and stories they got to America. They came from the "Mittel Europa" culture, the culture of the Austro-Hungarian Empire...literature, art and music, etc. But they also had a curiosity about the world. And they taught me a strong respect for people regardless of what function a person might hold or what status in society, or where they came from. I think that was genuinely built into the way they looked at the world. I never had a car when I was a teenager, we didn't have color television then, I think they expressed more the intellectual and cultural side of life. But we had trips in the car and traveled across the United States a lot.

I went to England on a local Cleveland Rotary music scholarship when I was sixteen. Maybe that was where it accelerated because I landed at the airport and had the address of a music students' resident hall, which was a commercial venture, not attached to a university. I had already organized the possibility of studying music with a famous piano pedagogue, but who was also not attached to a school. I was introduced to her by an American professor who said, "I recommend that you go and study for a semester, if you can find the funds, with this famous European piano instructor." So that was arranged. But when I got off the plane I had the address of a boarding house and the address of my teacher, whom I was to meet a week later, and that was it. I had never been out of the United States before. Of course I was in an English speaking country, but nothing else was set up. Yet, it worked. I had such a marvelous experience. I ended up in a boarding house living with international music students from everywhere in the world. A lot from Commonwealth countries. So for the first time I met South African blacks, Malaysian Chinese, etc. I think that experience was probably the first conscious beginning of my general interest.

But going back quickly to the Foreign Service, I was working at Yale University as an administrator in the History Department after I went to school there and was thinking, "Well, what can I do interesting in the world?" Someone mentioned the Foreign Service exam and I thought it sounded good to me and took it. But it wasn't a really deeply thought out process that led to my decision to apply to the diplomatic service. It was: "Well, I have always been interested in the world, and here is somebody telling me about all you have to do is register and take a Saturday morning and try an exam. You pass, maybe not, but you don't put your life on hold and radically alter your plans in order to prepare for the exam or in order to take the first steps." I think that is one of the nice things about our diplomatic service, the entry process is very egalitarian I feel because it is based on an exam that is offered broadly throughout the country and abroad to Americans who might be living overseas. It reminds me of the SAT and the GRE exams that you might encounter. So, if you have a broad-based interest in a lot of things you have a good chance of at least passing the written exam. At the same time you don't have to take nine months of a special course in order to prepare. It is something you do parallel

to the main course of your life, which I think makes it accessible to a broader range of people.

Q: From what you have said, I have the feeling that you had been by that point a very compatible person who was willing to meet challenges. Did you think of yourself as a woman at that point?

KURZBAUER: No, to be honest I didn't. And that may be...I don't know if that is a failing or a lack in my own...how would I put this...sense of society and history, if you will. Maybe because in my own personal experience...I went first to a music conservatory in Baltimore, Maryland for my college training and there it was how much did you practice and how good a musician were you. As students there was no particular feeling of male students having a priority, that this is a classically male field. Then, when I went to Yale University, I was in the first class of undergraduate women that was admitted when Yale opened their undergraduate doors to women. Up until that time the graduate school was open to women but not the undergraduate school. So in a sense we were a pioneering class, but I felt it was a very collegial camaraderie environment. I didn't feel any particular bias, either more special or less special.

Q: So you just felt like you were a person who could meet any kind of challenge.

KURZBAUER: I think in a way I probably didn't realize how great the challenges were. And also because I sort of did it, you know, it was my Saturday morning attempts, rather than I have worked seven years to be a lawyer and now comes the bar exam and I stand or fall on this, my career is on the line. I really didn't know what to expect, to be honest.

Q: That's great, I think you just got into the right thing.

KURZBAUER: It was luck.

Q: Since I come from China I am most interested in your years in China. After your training in Taiwan, you got an assignment to work in Beijing.

KURZBAUER: Right. The assignment predated the training.

Q: You knew the assignment and took the training in order to fulfill the assignment.

KURZBAUER: Exactly. And it was training not in the PRC but training outside the PRC. Most of the diplomats being trained in that group were destined for Mainland assignments at that point, although others were going to Hong Kong and Taiwan. The thinking was, and I think it was true for all three agencies that feed into the Foreign Service, by and large that if you have training in a language you do some of your tours of duty in one region of the world and other assignments would be in another region entirely, unlike foreign services of some other countries where they have deep specialists. I remember the former Soviet Union diplomatic service. I met quite a number of USSR

diplomats when I was in Yugoslavia and they were actually area specialists. They were in a way like you, Ph.D. level or intensely trained geographical specialists and they would stay much of their diplomatic career in the area of their geographic specialty. Many of us in the U.S. service are more general and taken from here and put there and taken from there and put here. But the chances of going back to an area, especially like the Chinese speaking area, once you have received hard language training, are high. In fact many of my colleagues have gone from Beijing to posts outside China and then back to another China post or related post. So there is some long term continuity.

Q: Yes, because when one acquires the language ability, it is easier to use that person in a way.

KURZBAUER: But I, myself, had never been to Mainland China and as I mentioned before and except for the training that I received at the Foreign Service Institute I had no academic or professional background in China.

Q: Yes, so my next question is besides the language you learned about the history and culture of China...

KURZBAUER: Yes, we had an area studies series that Dr. Howard Spendelow from Georgetown University was the coordinator of, a professional US academic Chinese specialist. These were weekly lectures, two or three hours a week on various aspects of Asian history, economics, politics and then more intensely focused on China during the second half. So it was almost like a graduate survey course. The participants were diplomats, including high ranking ones and junior officers and other agency personnel, but it was basically a survey. I learned a great deal, but it wasn't an intensive Ph.D. seminar with specialists all together investigating deeply a certain topic; it was to give a broad background introduction to the area.

Q: What you learned from the training program in that regard did you find out that was exactly what China was when you arrived?

KURZBAUER: I will tell you about stepping into China, I remember this vividly. One of the things I remember vividly is reading...you have to realize at that time, we were in training in 1982-83...I left Yugoslavia in August of 1982 and then went into the first half of the language program in Washington, 1982-83, and then the second half in 1983 in Taiwan. I imagine you were in China at that time, but looking back relations had barely been established and barely at a cordial level. There was not much interaction, travel, movement back and forth. You can't compare it to the situation today at all. There were very few general books on contemporary China that had any roots in contemporary reality. There were views of China by experts who had been outside the country for many years, but there were very few people who had actually been there. Some Canadian specialists, some folks from countries who had had longer diplomatic relations with the PRC than we had, but not very much. Nothing to equal the wealth of articles and periodicals and books and popular magazines that you have today, even articles in the general press. So one

book that had just come out was Fox Butterfield's book on China, which I think is called, "Alive In The Bitter Sea."

Q: That was very controversial in China.

KURZBAUER: I will be interested to hear your reactions to it because I read it knowing only general things about China. I read Fox Butterfield's book about his own experiences as a journalist in early reformist China, if you will. I am sure that he wrote them exactly as he experienced China. Some of the incidents that have to do with surveillance and caution and the difficulty of interaction between foreigners and the Chinese I am sure happened. But the image from that...if he published it in 1982 then the material was gathered in 1980-81...I think back to China 1981 just in a very anecdotal and not very deep image, but in China then the Beijing Hotel was the landmark and the most comfortable and most luxurious hotel in Beijing and that is where foreigners would hang out when, you know, you needed to kind of group together and get a perspective on your new experiences in China. And it was from what I read, and from what I remember even going to the Beijing Hotel, it was very Chinese in many ways.

Now, today, you go back and there is some symbolic contrast here; think of the China World, the Sheraton, the Jonglun, which is no longer even a major hotel. One luxury hotel after the other! Obviously that is not all of China and not a symbol of a nation, but it is a symbol of changes, evolution and prosperity of society. In my time, in luxury hotels Chinese nationals could not easily enter unless they were accompanied by a foreigner or had an official reason to be there.

Q: We had to show our ID.

KURZBAUER: Now that has disappeared. If you have the bucks you go! That was not Fox Butterfield's China. I think he had a great affection for the Chinese, but his time was both challenging, exciting and stressful, which I think is probably a very realistic way of describing experiences in China as it was unfolding from cultural revolution to the period we are in now. So my image of China from his book and others was darker. I had just read about the cultural revolution and the great dislocations and the terrible traumas. You look back twenty years before then, the Great Leap Forward, and then you look back again to war-time to Japanese invasion and then you look back again beyond that and there is civil war. So the imagery to me was one of turmoil and darkness. If somebody asked me how I imagined China, I would have said regimented, everybody in lock-step, everybody wearing the same clothes, everybody reading the same book--or turmoil or anarchy! These two kinds of extremes.

I know that is an emotional image, not a scholarly or professional image, but that was my view. So at first when I was assigned to Beijing, I didn't know what to expect and I didn't think it was going to be an easy assignment. I thought it would be isolated, difficult materially, but more importantly emotionally isolated. There would be foreigners, officials, China and a kind of gap in between, only bridged occasionally by formal

interactions. So my view, I think, was cautious, nervous and uncertain. It was very interesting, when I got there...again this was maybe an extreme, but for me it sort of sums up how unexpected things really turned out for me, at least personally. I got to the Beijing airport in August 1984, got off the plane and the embassy always sends an officer or staff member already residing in the country to meet the new arrival regardless of the rank or function the new arrival holds. I think it is an important custom. Well, there waiting for me was a member of our USIA section and the embassy driver. We got through customs without a problem, through the diplomatic entrance. I tried out my Chinese for the first time in the PRC when I said, "Hello" to the custom official who was looking at my passport. I got in the car and the first thing I noticed, and that was when my imagine began to turn a little bit...in Fox Butterfield's book he talks a little bit about how the trees had been cut down in Beijing under Mao because of the anti-sparrow and anti-pest campaigns. But as you know along the road from the airport into town, which takes about 40 minutes, are willow trees and it was all green. I found that interesting.

Okay, then we get to the Jianguo Hotel, as you know, which was at that time the only international joint venture hotel. I had expected, gee, I knew I was going to be living in a hotel because there was not enough space in the diplomatic compound. Relations were expanding and the embassy was growing and, as you know, diplomatic personnel in Beijing lived in Chinese built diplomatic compounds either in Jianguomenwai or Sanlitun, so you have nations' diplomatic corps plus most of the journalists living there. It is kind of a canton system, sort of like keep the barbarians all together! Anyway there was not enough space because relations were improving and officers and staff were being added, more programs and interaction. So many of us newcomers, especially those of us who were single, were housed in hotels for a couple of months. So I was housed in this new joint venture hotel, the Jianguo, which was my beloved home for eight months.

Another image of China that started to turn my mind even more was as we pulled up to the Jianguo, there outside were staff members, probably from the hotel, getting on bicycles and bicycling off home. But there inside, as I walked in, was this beautiful Chinese musician in the lobby of the hotel in a white satin gown! I will never forget that. My image of China was Fox Butterfield, Mao revolutionary oppression, regulation wear of green, green, green, blue, blue, blue, everybody in high necked tunics. But I walked into the hotel and there is this beautiful young musician wearing this silk gown with sequins, sitting at a grand piano playing Brahms. And I thought, "Well, this is not quite the way I imagined it." Again I realize this was not all of China, but it was a small piece of another part of China.

Q: At least you are in China.

KURZBAUER: I think then this was "foreigner's China," if you will, but it has expanded now. Just a few weeks ago I got a New Year's card from the Shenyang Conservatory of Music, which is the major Chinese music academy of Northeast China--Manchuria. We had many cordial and successful cultural exchange type programs between our U.S. Consulate in Manchuria--my section--and the Shenyang Conservatory. On the New Year's

card I just got from the Conservatory director is a picture of the brand new Shenyang concert hall. As you know, Shenyang is not the culture capital of China, but the people have invested in a cultural center which is aimed at presenting classical, Western and well as other kinds of music, and it has become a popular place to be! You wouldn't have seen that in 1976 or imagined that the mayor of Shenyang would be opening the Shenyang Conservatory of Music's new concert hall with a Beethoven symphony. It would have been unthinkable under Mao.

Q: That is what we say is the opening up of China.

KURZBAUER: Or that "Farewell My Concubine" is a best selling film in the United States. These interactions are growing and the world is being enriched. I think I was there at a wonderful time because 1984-85, as you know, was a time of expanding relations. New excitement.

Q: Right.

KURZBAUER: So the Jianguo and Great Wall were the two major international business type hotels in Beijing in 1984. The USIA section and the embassy rented the ball room and had an election party where beamed in by satellite were the election returns from the US. And for the first time since 1949 we were able to invite whole classes from China's number-one university, Beijing University, political science classes and international studies classes of Chinese students who came with their instructors to an American embassy function at the time of election. This was new. It had not been possible before. So there was a lot of excitement in these kinds of first encounters. So I came at a very auspicious time.

Of course there were restrictions and there were difficulties and there also was the "spiritual pollution" campaign. Relations would go up and down. But the overall contact possibilities were expanding at that point. So it was really exciting for me to be there then.

Q: Yes, I think you were actually in that country at the right time if you wanted to see the development of relations between two countries. China and the United States had had a relationship before, but there was a long time cut off, and it was really picking up speed at the time you were there.

KURZBAUER: One of the interesting things for me was to meet some of the older Chinese academics, some in government institutions, probably some in your own institution, who had gotten their early training at US universities before the Second World War and then had either been caught up in the war in China or here in the United States and had not been able to get back to China during the Japanese occupation, and then came back to China in the late forties to help build the new China. Of those I met there was a great deal of joy in the ability to be able to communicate again with Americans scholars or bridge the gap that had existed for the last 40-50 years. So someone who had spent his

or her youth training in Oberlin College or Harvard and then had gone through all the series of events in China that we know about and had been cut off from broader world ties, now able to reach back out...it was a very moving thing. People like me, American officials, not because of our own personal worth, but because of the function that we held and what we represented, were recipients of that joy. And there was a special emotional quality to some of the encounters and some of the programming that we were able to initiate or promote or extend. Because of that it was like friends finding each other after a long, long separation.

Now, obviously that group of Chinese scholars had not known me, but I represented, or my colleagues represented, that other world for which they had affection also. It was a very moving thing.

Q: Yes, and moving also not only because they were separated from a country where they spent their youth, but also because of the time period they had just gone through. Remember, if they had training or education in the United States, most of them suffered one way or another during the Great Leap Forward or the cultural revolution, which lasted more than ten years.

KURZBAUER: Some would tell me their experiences and some would gloss over them by saying "that that was then and now I am still alive and am here." But you are absolutely right.

Q: So in a lot of ways, their joy reflected not only their personal feelings, but really on behalf of the whole country. The country was changing from an entirely isolated radical phase into a phase which was hopeful at least.

KURZBAUER: Towards great normalcy and stability. It is interesting because if I compare interactions in China to interactions in another Communist country...actually I served all my tours in countries that were Communist politically. People used to tease me that Personnel must have thought I was a Communist because every assignment I got had something to do with Communism.

But in Yugoslavia it is interesting, the personal interactions...of course, as you know, Yugoslavian Communism had a different face.

Q: Tito Communism.

KURZBAUER: Although there was certainly surveillance of certain personnel, no question about it, we couldn't feel it but it was understood. We just couldn't run around and not be observed by some aspect of security or some aspect of the Party. But there was no overt restraint in personal relationships in Yugoslavia then. So, for example, I sang in a Yugoslav choir. I had Yugoslav friends as I have friends here in Salt Lake City, perhaps more! I went to their homes; I went to their weddings; stayed up all night and drank tea and brandy in the kind of Latin Quarter, the Bohemia cabaret district of Belgrade called

Skadarlija. In those days (unfortunately I am sure there have been massive change after all that has happened there now), but it was a kind of live and let live city with a lot of drinking and sitting around with friends in cafes. Kind of an old style European cafe life in a way. A lot of hanging out and window-shopping and socializing. Group social activities were very strong in those days. And there was no constraint for me as an American official to do all that with Yugoslav friends.

Now in China in 1984-86 it was still different. No matter the curiosity, the interest, and in fact, indeed in many cases, the friendship and the affection, I think that our Chinese official colleagues and unofficial friends, let's say students or musicians, had to be cautious and were. So going to someone's home was extremely rare. At the end of my tour of duty, I was invited to private homes, but then I was "safe" because I was leaving.

Q: When was this?

KURZBAUER: I left in August 1986.

I went to the homes of several mid-ranking government cadres, but...part of it may be that people live in small quarters and it is very hard to invite somebody to such cramped spaces. I think there was a perception that we can't invite a Westerner who comes from a pretty luxurious style of life into our one-room apartments! Maybe there is some "saving face" involved. But I think there was also political caution. That you know probably better than I. Certain interactions were authorized by a work unit because they were professionally necessary. But in this new period when the rules were changing within Chinese society, but were not clear, people most often, I think, needed to be cautious so that they wouldn't over-step some kind of unwritten rule that they might not know about! Are my perceptions accurate?

Q: Exactly. Especially when you are talking about a certain section of people. I am afraid that even if they wanted personally to invite you or felt there was no constraint on them in terms of inviting an American friend, they still have to tell their boss or authority that that is what they were going to do and is that all right. Sometimes they will get an easy okay, sometimes they would say that it has to be reported somewhere and will get an okay afterwards.

KURZBAUER: I think it affected some of our Chinese colleagues in terms of professional programs, they had to receive professional approval in order to participate in the various USIA programs. Now when I was in Shenyang, five years later...of course you know that Liaoning is a pretty conservative province, it is a military district headquarters, etc....I found a great deal of possibility in official programs that we did which were somewhat new or fairly new. We were able to expand in a number of cultural and educational and press exchange areas which surprised me. A lot of it, I think, was due to our staff. I would like to say a word about them if I can. And there were, I think, real professional and personal likings which developed. Not only with me but with my consulate colleagues as well. But still that caution prevailed. When I left I had a whole slew of invitations. Not only banquets from institutions and work units which are par for

the course, but from individuals with whom I had worked and who then told me that they sort of needed to wait until I left in order to go that extra step. If they had been too friendly on a personal level with me or American colleagues during the course of our stay, it would have been a little too much, maybe too risky. They were welcome to participate in official doings, but not to extend that too much into a more personal interaction.

For example, a professor at a university. We had a number of programs for professors of English or American literature which we had established in the consulate. We invited both American teachers of English who lived in China at the time and Chinese professors of English and American literature from various universities in Northeast China. And we had a number attend our regular monthly "Literary Salon" that I and my staff established. But those same professors who were able to come to the consulate for those events, which was quite unusual actually, would not feel comfortable enough to say, "Well, come over to my apartment on campus."

Now in 1994 I understand that as far as the American business and academic communities it is pretty much an open door. Whether or not there is still caution towards an American official, it probably exists among some, but if you are a non-official foreigner there is very little that you can't do and very few places you can't go in China.

Q: Talking about the fact that you were in Shenyang and there at that period of time which was six months after Tiananmen Square...

KURZBAUER: Actually it was almost nine to ten months after Tiananmen. I arrived at a time when our political relations were still not all that cordial.

Q: So as a representative of the United States government, did you feel anything that had something to do with the Tiananmen Square incident?

KURZBAUER: Well, that is an interesting question because as an officer in the public affairs, public diplomacy section of an embassy, namely the USIS mission...we have a twofold mission: one is to present the vast spectrum of American society, culture, politics, intellectual life, etc. to the foreign public, whichever country that may be, and two, to help bridge the knowledge gap between our own American public and a foreign culture and society. That is the overall mandate. We do it through a variety of programmatic means. One way might be assisting a school like the University of Utah that wants to expand an academic program with China, in making contacts with local Chinese universities that might be appropriate partners. Others are formal programs which are mandated by Congress like the supervision of the Fulbright Scholar Exchange program or the international visitor program that brings leading younger professionals from a foreign country to the United States for a month to meet American counterparts in the hope that they will establish an ongoing intellectual and professional dialogue. This has nothing to do with the government, but we are the facilitators of that introduction.

Other things are social science and cultural and educational types of programs that basically bring both sides, protagonists and professionals, together. The media function, of course, is presenting the American foreign policy point of view, distributing material on issues that might be difficult between the US and China, for example, trade imbalance, MFN. Part of my job was to talk to the local journalists and people who could spread information in the Northeast about why does America have this particular position, what are the trade issues, and explain to government officials of those provinces and also to media people, our positions and viewpoints, etc. So, a variety of activities and tasks.

But the bottom line is presenting America. Now presenting America, obviously, was not the most popular thing to do from the point of view of an official Chinese government ministry at that particular time.

Q: That is exactly so. Your feeling about what the government was supposed to do....

KURZBAUER: Of course we also had an understanding that we were supposed to go out there...that all diplomats are learners as well as doers. We are there to learn and understand as best as we can in a limited way. What is the thinking in that local society? What are the problems and goals? What are the issues from the point of view of that country, its population, its society? So it is a two way mission.

Q: So you have to feedback to the government so that they would make appropriate...

KURZBAUER: Yes, diplomats in many ways send reports back to Washington that are then reviewed by the policy makers and hopefully are factored into the next policy stage. So we promote and listen. But the promotion function, you are right, how do you do it when officially your host country is not all that encouraging of your method and mission? And I think what happened in my section was that I was lucky because I dealt in some aspects with less controversial issues. I had in some ways in some programs "goodies" to hand out. Some of the things we were interested in doing dovetailed with China's own stated political goals of education development... development in science, development in economics, development in industry...so that as a representative of the cultural and educational side of the USG, I think that some of our programs or contacts were encouraging of Chinese development and that made it a little bit easier to get in the door.

For example, the Northeast universities want to train more of their faculty in English. So I think they were more likely to respond to the kind of programming that we were able to initiate and to continue, both what we designed on the spot in our consulate and what we got from Washington and then presented, because it agreed with Chinese orientation and development.

But, not all. Sometimes there was the problem of how do you work it. A lot of times you had to go through the "back door" and then through the front door. Every provincial government, as you know, has a "waiban," a foreign affairs office that is suppose to facilitate and assist foreign activity in that area, but also keep an eye on it and make sure

that what is being done is not contrary to the perceived interests of China or the provincial government. I believe that most of the cultural and educational and scientific and media institutions in Northeast China with whom our consulate had either existing relationships or expanded relationships had to report to their provincial government or at least their institutional foreign affairs office the contacts they might have with us, or the plans that they might have to do some program with the American consulate.

So I decided with the help of my staff, who were fantastic..as you know the American embassy and consulates are directed by the American officer and American professional staffs that come through the American diplomatic service, but the work really rests on the foundation of local national employees. This is the case in all of the countries in which we have diplomatic missions, not just China. You will have, for example, cultural advisors, economic advisors, media assistants who are nationals of the host country, as well as the janitors, the drivers and administrative staff. So really you have a small layer of American diplomatic personnel supervising and working with a larger group of host country nationals. There have been arguments and I have read in our newspapers and in Congress about the wisdom of that. Shouldn't a diplomatic mission be run by Americans?. Isn't that safer, more secure? It keeps our policies done and executed by Americans. Frankly I think it would be impossible to do the most effective work without the assistance and cooperation of Foreign Service Nationals. They provide a window of understanding into the culture and even are vital in pragmatic things. In some countries you just can't go to the counter and buy a train ticket, you need to know how to maneuver and where to go to get the most efficient service and whom to butter up! No American flying in for two years is going to know that.

In the case of China, I think the foreign national employees were in a difficult position, but they gave outstanding service to the development of bilateral relations and I will tell you why if I can be frank. They were assigned to the American consulates and embassy by the Chinese government's Diplomatic Service Bureau. In France, for example, if the US embassy needs a cultural advisor or an education assistant, you advertise in the French newspaper and look at the resumes. It is just like you would hire in the U.S. If your desiderata is somebody with a PhD in American Studies who has worked in academic exchange programs, then you look at the resumes that come in and hire, just as you would if you were running an American business or big US institution.

Q: Without any institutional censorship.

KURZBAUER: Exactly. But in China the government selects people to fill the function on a two, three, four, five year contract as necessary, not only in our diplomatic mission, but all foreign missions that rely on foreign nationals. Now, for example, the Soviet mission did not hire any Chinese local staff. They were staffed completely by Soviet employees from drivers all the way up to the senior adviser. But most western missions have a mixed diplomatic supervision and local staff, which I think all in all works quite well.

So the staff we received was staff from the Chinese government. Now, obviously at a time of political tension or political disagreement or differences, foreign national employees are caught between two masters. On the one hand the job is to help bridge the gap and help. If I the officer am doing a program to promote American music or to promote understanding in new developments in American environmental science, my staff member is trying to get an audience or get the appropriate format or create the right atmosphere to promote these ideas and this information. At the same time there is probably a certain amount of pressure on that person from his other supervisor, meaning the Chinese Diplomatic Service Bureau, not to go too far to push a positive American program. I'm speculating, obviously none of my Chinese staff sat down and told me that, but I think it is pretty obvious.

Q: I think we are talking about the right period of time, because if we both think about the primary reason for the Tiananmen Square incident from the point of view of the Beijing government, the explanation or interpretation was the students had had too much Western ideas or had too much Western influence and that is why they were demanding democracy and brought the country into chaos in 1989. So there was some kind of a measure after that to try to reduce it. From your point of view the program is to promote understanding, from the Chinese point of view it is to expand contact.

KURZBAUER: So it is a difficult task for the American officer, but I think even more of a difficult task for the Chinese employee of an American or other foreign mission who has to really look at two missions, one is the mission of his own political society and the other is the mission of the foreign consulate which, to simplify greatly, is to expand contact and understanding.

Maybe because I had exceptional people on my staff, or they were genuinely dedicated to...I think they genuinely believed that China and America are two great countries and there is a lot that can be shared. That may have inspired some of their really outstanding efforts.

Q: So you didn't personally encounter any difficulties?

KURZBAUER: Oh, there were difficulties but my staff always advised me how to get around them.

Q: So you were able to get around them.

KURZBAUER: But had I not had the staff...that is probably my point and I want to emphasize the value of the Foreign Service National to diplomatic work. At least the diplomatic work we do in many countries. Because without these employees I could be the same person with the same mission with the same diplomatic training from Washington and with the same intermediate Chinese language fluency, but I would not have known whom to go to for "permission," or to invite so-and-so because that will help promote the program among the provincial government officials, etc. So it was a very

extensive personal network that the staff was able to advise me on. And in China, as you know, that helps to get things done. Now, maybe it would make no difference if I was in New Zealand. If my staff member says to me...let's say I want to do work with the New Zealand Institute of Animal Technology (I am making that up). So as a diplomatic representative I have my staff call up the director of the university or the vice president for external relations and say, "We have this really interesting program between American animal technologists and we have some scholarships or we have some dialogue possible, would you like to look into cooperation or would you like to be introduced," I don't think there would be any... For them it would be a matter of do they have the interest in the topic, the time or resource to invest in it, is it productive for them intellectually. But in China at the time it was more than is it productive intellectually. Is it political correct, is it useful in local terms, is it politically suspect? There were many, many other levels. Many people in the Northeast had not had extensive contact with the outside world, unlike institutions in Beijing or institutions in Shanghai or institutions in Canton, the great centers. Northeast China, except for Russia and Japan, was not the center of great external relations with the rest of the world. Manchuria was off there, cold and remote. There were many institutions who had little or no external contacts, not only with Americans but with other countries. And we were just beginning to build. So there was caution, hesitation and uncertainty: was it okay to proceed this way, was it useful. The advice that I got from the staff on personal connections, who is important, what key institutions might be interested and which might not be, what did it mean if somebody said, "no." Were they offended or were they just politically unable to respond? Or did I just phrase my program in a way that was incomprehensible? What were all the meanings and results of actions. That was invaluable.

Q: The staff you are talking about is the Chinese?

KURZBAUER: That's right. My cultural assistant, my press assistant, my administrative secretary, they were all involved as a team in our programs and I think without them those programs would not have been done.

Q: I have another question. As a representative of the United States government and as a diplomatic official who is supposed to carry out the American policy of that period towards that country and in this case the PRC, in both period when you were in Beijing and in Shenyang, did you personally experience any kind of conflict? In order to implement your official policy this is what you need to do, but in reality you really found that is not a very smart idea to do it in China.

KURZBAUER: That is a third element that I did not experience personally, but that is an experience in the Foreign Service, and that is what happens if the individual officer fundamentally disagrees with his own country's policy on a particular issue, and I am thinking about having recently read about the resignation of a couple of our Yugoslav policy officers who resigned on principle because they disagreed with current American position in Yugoslavia. And, of course, having served there I have an emotional attachment to the issues and very much respect the decisions of the four promising young

men, who made their own decision to leave government service (even though it is a wonderful career and maybe a unique career), because they could not agree with their own government's policies. That may be rare, but that is a third element. At the time I was in US government service I was not faced with a moral conflict between what I personally believed and what the policy was of my government towards a particular situation in the country I was serving in. So I was spared that.

Your question also points to a pragmatic issue of here's your mission but can you really do it. I have to say again I was pretty fortunate: in Shenyang I think given the overall political differences at the time between China and the US, the programmatic expectation was that not much would be able to be accomplished in that period. So I was not burdened with over expectation on the part of superiors or our program people back in Washington. In fact, it was the reverse.

But, from what I have seen in my service experience, there is a fair amount of latitude given to individual officers in the execution of their duties. I found that especially in a small post like Shenyang...we had five Americans and everybody else was family or Chinese nationals. And in the compound next door to us were five Japanese diplomats. So it is a very entrepreneurial and very collegial setting. Now in a large embassy obviously the division of labor is much stricter and the hierarchy may be a little more severe. We in Shenyang were almost like a new joint venture; we were out there at a frontier post! We were given a lot of latitude. And that is helpful, because if you can do something constructive you are one step ahead.

Q: And also I think it has something to do with the United States government's understanding of the post-Tiananmen Square situation in China so they were not expecting the embassy people to do a lot.

KURZBAUER: I understand the people in Beijing, especially after Tiananmen happened had a very difficult time starting the more programmatic aspects of our work up again. I came after Tiananmen and it may be that it was harder to operate in the capital than out in the provinces.

Q: Especially the Tiananmen incident had a strong effect on Beijing and even in Shanghai you felt the difference.

KURZBAUER: I was Branch Public Affairs Officer in Shenyang, so head of section. That sounds very grandiose, but I was the only American USIA officer in my section. So I was head of myself and my Chinese staff. I reported to the Public Affairs Officer who was the Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs in Beijing. He was the senior USIA officer for all of us stationed in China and there were quite a few of us since every consulate had USIA officers. I also reported to the Consul General of my own consulate in Shenyang, who was kind of a mini ambassador of that. Over all was the ambassador who was the supervisor of the entire U.S. diplomatic mission in China, regardless of the agency you

represented. Then you also had your own agency bosses back in Washington. It sounds like a lot of reporting and hierarchy, but there was also a considerable amount of latitude.

I think I found that, interestingly enough, as I went further north, the looser things were politically. Heilongjiang province, at the time, I found probably the easiest in terms of initiating some new contact with some new program activity. Jiein, as it is geographically, was kind of in the middle, and of course we were based in Liaoning. I think the provincial government's foreign affairs office looked more closely at us there than they would obviously when we went off to Heilongjiang. But even in Liaoning, with the right relationships, in programs that were not perceived to be too threatening to China, there was a lot that was possible to initiate. But I noticed going up to Heilongjiang, which is the Russian/Chinese border, that there was a kind of frontier independence. As you know a hundred years ago it was the frontier. There was gold mining, there were wild native tribes. The railroads helped open up that area just like it did in the West. I think there are a lot of similarities between parts of Manchuria and the American West. Underpopulated until recently, depending on mining extraction, fur industry, developed by outside powers...in the States it was easterners coming west and developing western mining industries, etc. and in Manchuria it was Russians and Japanese coming in. But there is a frontier mentality there of "we are our own bosses." I found of all the provincial interactions that the Heilongjiangers were kind of like the American Westerners here in the U.S. Southwest. Beijing was important, but it was far away somewhere else and the Heilongjiangers didn't have to look over their shoulder for every permission. Whereas the Shenyang authorities were much more cautious and not terribly open, very careful, very considering of every proposal and taking a long time to coming around to certain decisions. Of course the provincial government of Heilongjiang had to do the same thing but I think they were more ready to say, "Our goal is making Heilongjiang a wealthy province and if that means bringing in American business, fine; if that means sending our folks to America for training and bringing some Americans in, fine; whatever it takes to get us moving, that is what we want."

Q: You know, China is a large country and we have a saying that is carried down from centuries ago which says...The sky is high and far away and the king is remote from me...and means that I can do whatever I want. That in a way explains the rapid development in Canton, Guangzhou. I have heard Cantonese people say that if we want to do something we still do it whether it is after the Tiananmen incident or before that. See, it did not have such an impact on them as it did especially on the intellectuals in Beijing or on the general public of Beijing. So I think being stationed in Shenyang would make a difference then if you had been stationed in Beijing.

KURZBAUER: Oh, I am sure. If you draw a spectrum and talk about north China, and this is really speculation on my part, really not deep knowledge, you would have Beijing on one end of the spectrum and Harbin or Heilongjiang on the other. Liaoning, Shenyang would be closer in terms of caution and political supervision to Beijing. One incident, for example, was that the president of the major university in Liaoning, who was apparently a well known reformist economist...again this is a secondhand story I heard in China...kept

his students out of trouble during Tiananmen Square, but he didn't prevent them from going off, down to Beijing if that is what they chose to do. He is still president, he maintained his presidency, but he was kind of under wraps for foreigners. It took a year for him to be able to attend a US consulate function after Tiananmen. Whereas, his staff like the vice president and department heads, could under certain circumstances and did participate and respond to our invitations to various academic and professional programming. But although the president was invited each time (he normally would be the one to receive the new Consul General and section chief, like me). was kind of under wraps for foreigners. I remember the first time he was "out" was in the spring of 1991. That was when he felt able to accept an invitation from the consulate to attend a consulate function. So that was 1989-91, two years during which he had to maintain a cautious position.

Now, others did not. Usually the economic officials had the most latitude.

Q: Because he was president of the university and we understand the Tiananmen incident had most to do with universities, and if he was in that capacity, whatever position he took would have a great impact on him afterwards for a while. It was good to hear that finally he did appear.

KURZBAUER: He appeared at a dinner that we hosted for the visit of the head of USIA's East Asia Bureau. But there are many interesting vignettes.

Q: One last question. In China we use the term "peaceful evolution," that is the strategy of the United States.

KURZBAUER: Well, that is what Chinese political commentators say is the strategy of the United States.

Q: That was the official Chinese line and they said to watch out for the "peaceful occupation"...

KURZBAUER: In a sense it implies that our real hidden agenda is intellectual occupation by peaceful means.

Q: Right, or intellectual invasion of China. Now, as a USIS official, as you were laying out the objectives and everything, that if something of that kind is behind all those, then you are the one who is doing something which would contribute to that so-called strategy of the United States diplomacy in China. Now what I am trying to get from you is, how would you interpret the so-called "peaceful evolution" as a strategy in China?

KURZBAUER: Are you using the term, "peaceful evolution" in the way that the Chinese political commentators would use it?

Q: Yes, I am using it within quotations. I am saying you worked for that section and generally you worked as a diplomatic official...

KURZBAUER: Is somebody going to be thinking that my real purpose is undermining the Chinese present system by the introduction of or the exposure to a variety of American alternatives.

Q: How could you persuade Chinese officials in Beijing that that is not what you are doing?

KURZBAUER: This reminds me of a question when I was in Beijing in 1984-86 as assistant press officer and I was asked to give a series of talks about American culture and policy to the New China News Agency's English language group of journalists. It was among the early times that foreign diplomats were allowed to go to Xinhua headquarters. Probably now it happens all the time, but this was in 1985. I had a fabulous time. These were young journalists being trained under the Thompson Foundation program. The British press magnate, Lord Thompson, had given money to Xinhua to develop professional journalism standards and training. So this was a special group of Xinhua journalists who were English speaking and would be working in foreign posts. You know how it is in China, audience people did not easily ask questions openly. A lecturer finished lecturing and that's that. (I know in Europe in the old days my father told me he never would ask questions in a German-Austrian high school or college.) The professor lectured and the students took notes, you didn't raise your hand and challenge, etc. So I think part of that in China comes from another sort of academic tradition and part of it is also social and political caution. So I went to lecture and didn't expect really very many questions. Instead, I got a whole wealth of questions. One of the young journalists said, "Well, isn't it true that all diplomats are spies?"!! So, they asked me about being a spy, so I had to answer them, but no one ever asked me about "peace evolution" so I never had to answer it. But it was obviously in the back of the minds of the people who were looking at the programs we were doing.

My answer would be that I am a representative of my country and my culture. This is how my country and culture operate. We have had successes, we have had failures. We have challenges, we have many problems that we have not overcome and we are struggling with. And we have had things that we think work. I am here to present the reality as best as any one small program can or any one section can of the vast diversity that is the United States. Openness is a hallmark, so we are open or try to be. Disagreement and critique is part of our cultural way so we have to be this way. The adjustment in a China-aimed program has to be in approach, but the fundamental values cannot be adjusted or otherwise we betray who we are. At the same time we are here to look at China as best as we can and understand it from a Chinese perspective. I am not here to tell you what to do. I may believe that a certain way of doing something is the best, but I am not presumptuous enough to tell you that you must do it that way. I can only present that aspect to you and have you see if this is appropriate. There are some areas where there are obvious benefits of working together in a collegial way. There are

environmental problems, narcotic transfer problems, AIDs problems, medical problems that both of our countries face. We can bring together our best experts and our best methods to solve these problems. And I think one can agree that there obviously are political and social differences because you have 5,000 years of history and we have 200 plus. China is not really an ethnocentric state, but I think in many ways you can say there still is a dominant Han culture and at the same time a lot of diversity within that Han culture. But if you want to over simplify, there is a core that over thousands of years Han Chinese have seen themselves as related and united at least culturally if not politically or geographically. We are very different. Our whole history is serendipitous, diverse, and so naturally that history affects our values. So I am here to be as best as I can be an honest representative of what I perceive or what our programs help us to try to perceive about who we are. I am here also to honestly listen to you and all of what you are. We have to be honest representatives of who we are. And that is how I would answer it.

If I am an American diplomat serving in Jordan where there is a constitutional monarchy, I would be lying and betraying who I am and what I represent to say to you to make you feel comfortable that monarchy is obviously the best political system. Maybe it is appropriate for Jordan. But this is not what I represent, I am presenting you with the alternatives that the American experience has generated. No political official in China has ever asked me that directly. I mean, they asked me the spy question and that was a journalist. I remember that answer because I was so shocked for a moment I didn't know what to say. Obviously I don't know much about spying but from what I read the purpose is basically to gather information. I would say, "Well, you know an embassy gathers information. How do we gather information? We gather it by talking to you. We gather it by reading your newspapers. We gather it by reading your literature. And your diplomats and your journalists are doing the same thing in the United States. Now is that bad? I don't think it is bad because if we don't read your literature and your newspapers our perceptions of you are stereotypical, just as mine were of China...everybody running around China dressed in green and blue. Even as an educated woman and as an American official, before I went to China I knew I had a stereotype, but it was there unconsciously inside of me. 'China is grim, the Chinese are regimented, the Chinese don't think for themselves.' All kinds of things. If I hadn't been to China, if I hadn't seen, if I hadn't gathered information that stereotype would prevail. So I think the information aspect comes through reading, talking, programs and interactions and I think it is very important for both countries." And that is the answer I would give.

Q: That is wonderful. I purposely asked this question in order to provide some material for a future researcher because I think there ought to be somebody who gets into that to do research to explain what "peaceful evolution" is in terms of relations between countries, what ought to be and why this is perceived as "peaceful evolution." I mean, I just felt like it needs to be answered because it is very one sided and the Chinese government says it and tells people that way what do you mean by that..

KURZBAUER: That's interesting too because I think there is a perception among...I am not really a deep expert in broad policy formulation, as an officer I have been much more

the implementer than the policy designer. That is both my background and functional assignments and probably what I do better. I think I am probably a better facilitator than I would be a staffer at the National Security Council creating the right policy we hope for the right moment. But still the general thinking is, I would think, that obviously relationships with nations, states or countries, that have similar perceptions and values are easier. Obviously we relate to Great Britain in an easy way although we have our differences and problems as well. We have them with France, as you just saw in the GATT negotiations and agricultural subsidies. Every nation is going to look out for its own self-interest, and that is the way it should be, even if they are closely related by history or political system. But overall the relationships tend to be easier with those whose systems are similar. So there is a presumption that in the best of all possible worlds, most nation's political and social systems will be organized somewhat akin to ours. But you know, the US society is changing and evolving. Our social criteria change. Our social problems are changing. Our issues are changing. So no society is ever in this ideal state. And there is no such thing as the ideal republic or the ideal democracy. We kind of strive towards it but it is going to take a different form. Even the British democracy's working out of social practice or political relationships are not like ours entirely. I think there are some basic assumptions that are similar and we might want to consider as universal. But the working out of those universals and those values differs even among politically akin nations. And in the end, I am sure scholars are going to say, it will have to be China that decides somehow for itself, and it is a very difficult process. America has been evolving for 200 years. We were not born as we are now.

Q: Personally as a student of diplomacy and diplomatic relations, my deep belief is that we ought to do everything as a person to promote understanding between and among countries. The more we understand each other the less we will fight against each other.

KURZBAUER: I would want to believe that also. Some people say that it is like personal relations, if you know too much about somebody, you wind up hating them. But I am still an optimistic and have that same personal belief as you do.

Q: I think it is based on the recent history. If you look at the kind of things that the United States foreign policy was based on or the Chinese foreign policy, or the Soviet foreign policy, was based on during the Cold War years. Now in retrospect we have a great number of books that we can read which tell us that there were a lot of misconceptions, especially between China and the United States. There were literally no contacts at all and so each of them were trying to understand the other by their own bias or prejudice and that created a lot of problems. So from the recent history I feel that the more we understand each other...

KURZBAUER: I am taking a course over in the political science department now in administrative theory. We have been assigned to read a book called "Group Think," which you may have heard of. It is by a social psychiatrist at Yale. He analyzes foreign policy decision making in certain key episodes. One of them was the decision to cross the 38th parallel during the Korean War. He goes into the long discussion bringing in the

historical and diplomatic and scholarly literature on U.S. misperceptions not only of the Chinese resolve, but of China itself. We did not see China as a proud new revolutionary state with its own perception of its own self-interests. It sounds like from just reading secondary sources in this "Group Think" book that our policy makers saw China through a very stereotypical lens and that was as a tool of the Soviet Union. That is just a small anecdotal example, but it points right to your point.

Q: And to add to it quickly, what happened in Vietnam. It turned out that the perception was that Vietnam was operated from Beijing and Moscow, but we now know it is not all that true.

KURZBAUER: All you Commies are the same!

Q: That's right and that is how the United States jumped right into it. That is the period that I concentrate on in my studies and that is how I come to this sort of conclusion that the more we understand the less we will fight against each other. I think to promote understanding between countries is everybody's task.

KURZBAUER: You know it is strange because you look at that and you see how our two nations have had a history of close alliance, the World War II history, and positive mutual perceptions. And then a great divide of mutual hostility and mutual misperceptions and so forth. But we can approach that and can find congruence at least on many levels.

And then there is Yugoslavia and I am still trying to figure it out, even having worked and lived there for two years and probably having gotten more deeply into ordinary society than I did in China, to be honest. Trying to understand how people who are fighting each other stem from the same nation, if you will, the Slavic nation. They speak basically the same languages: Croatian and Serbian linguistic differences are minute. It is analogous to British and American English. The people are Slavic by original ancestry but history for a variety of reasons has divided them into the Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and Muslim segments. Empires from the outside came in and changed histories. People found themselves on different sides of imperial lines, the Ottoman and Austrian. It is like saying the Shandong and the Hebei people who both stem, at least according to legend, from the Great Yellow Emperor, are now fighting each other to the death. And yet not only are the Slavs originally from the same stock way back, they have had the experience of living, working and intermarrying with each other in many cases for at least the last fifty years. And yet that nationhood was not able to sustain itself.

So you have the optimist and pessimist. On one hand you have two nations like the US and China who are so diverse and have both a bitter and a sweet history, who are somehow making more and more approaches towards each other. And you have peoples who are interrelated but are separating. I will leave it to the historians and the academics to answer that questions. But we belong on the hopeful side, I guess.

Q: Let's hope so.

KURZBAUER: Thank you very much for your time.

Q: Thank you, I enjoyed it. I have known you a lot but we have never had such a concentrated conversation.

KURZBAUER: Maybe we can talk more at another time professionally or personally. I read about the Oral History Project in the Foreign Service Journal and wrote a letter to the gentleman in charge of it and they explained about the volunteer project and hopefully I will be able to do some. You might be interested or willing, if you have time to come with me when I interview Ambassador Huntsman who was in Singapore.

Q: That should be interesting.

KURZBAUER: It should be interesting because as you know he has a very strong affiliation, interest and knowledge of China, both as a public servant and a major business figure. And he speaks Mandarin and some Cantonese.

Q: I would love to if the schedule fits.

KURZBAUER: It will be some time this winter. Anyway, this experience helps me to reflect back because now I am not in it. While you are doing it you don't have much time for reflection. Sometimes, late night, you get together with your Foreign Service colleagues and friends at the embassy or after a cocktail party or in somebody's apartment and you start talking, but most of the day is involved in the day to day, what's the policy, what's the immediate crisis, what's the program, and you don't have time to sit back and reflect. It is really nice for me to have someone who understands the process and the country and it helped me focus back on these reflections.

Q: And I certainly have my own tendencies, I was asking questions mostly about China. But I am glad you brought in your Yugoslavian experience in several places, which hopefully will make this recording useful to someone who is interested in Yugoslavia.

KURZBAUER: Well there were similarities and differences. In fact China and Yugoslavia have very positive relations at the time when I was there. even though the way they unfolded under the communist-socialist system was quite different.

Q: After China split from the Soviet Union and India in the early sixties, they too got....

KURZBAUER: Well, it was a natural because Yugoslavia was a maverick state. What I found so interesting...when I was assigned to Yugoslavia I didn't know much about it but thanks to Foreign Service training I at least got an introduction... what I didn't realize was that when Yugoslavia left the Cominform, it was not because there had been a policy or sovereignty reason to separate, but because Stalin threw them out. Tito, at that time, was a devoted Stalinist communist and he organized Yugoslavia after the war on democratic

centralist lines with everything coming from the top. Yugoslavia ended up through the decades as a federated system. But it was not initially because policy makers in Yugoslavia thought this through, it was because Stalin perceived Tito to be a threat, he was too independent, too nationalistic, even though Tito perceived himself as a loyal communist. So all of a sudden Yugoslavia was left hanging. It was like your father throws you out of the house and what do you do now? So they had to reinvent themselves in some other way, to define themselves in such a way so they could say that they were the true communists and it was Stalin and his system that were the aberrations.

China too had its thorny relationship, so I think it was a natural alliance. Two countries that in one way or another had been threatened by the Soviet Union. There were a lot of Chinese students and diplomats in Belgrade when I was there. That was, I guess, my first introduction to official China, the meeting of these Chinese students and diplomats at various functions.

End of interview