

**Tribute to Roderick MacFarquhar**  
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Rod MacFarquhar was an extraordinary professor, politician and person. For over thirty years Rod was a mainstay of contemporary China studies at Harvard. His colleagues – particularly those who knew him best, in the Fairbank Center and the Government Department – have for him the utmost admiration and affection.

Rod was in many ways the exemplary colleague who managed to faithfully attend nearly every seminar and every faculty meeting, no matter how trivial or tedious the topic. How could he endure this punishing regimen? In part, I suspect, because of his uncanny ability to close his eyes, maybe even catch a refreshing bit of sleep, almost as soon as the proceedings were called to order. Yet somehow, as if on cue, Rod always knew just when to open his eyes and ask the smartest question or offer the most appropriate, and often most amusing, comment.

Rod had enjoyed an eventful life and career well before he joined the Harvard faculty – having spent his childhood in India and then his early adult years in London as a journalist, television commentator and founding editor of *The China Quarterly* before serving as a Member of Parliament. This depth of experience allowed Rod to approach the Ivory Tower with a certain equanimity that eludes many of us and afforded him penetrating insights into human nature that not only informed his impeccable scholarship, but also made him an unusually perceptive and persuasive colleague.

Twenty-five years ago, it was Rod who convinced me to leave what I had thought was my dream job in the Berkeley Political Science Department. Rod's powers of persuasion turned out to be irresistible.

I had met Rod only briefly on a couple of occasions. But at a conference we both happened to be attending in Stockholm he surprised (and unnerved) me by leaning over at dinner, seemingly out of the blue, to ask if he might come up to my hotel room later that evening for a private chat. Noting my frosty reaction, he hastened to assure me that although the meeting needed to be private it would be professional rather than personal. When he arrived at my room shortly after and explained that his mission was to interest me in a possible position in Chinese politics at Harvard, I told him flatly that while I was flattered by this suggestion, there was no way on earth I could be convinced to give up my Berkeley job. I was from the West Coast and I planned to stay on the West Coast. Moreover, I had taught at Harvard as a visitor shortly before Rod joined the faculty, and had found the Government Department, with the notable exception of Benjamin Schwartz, to be a pretty inhospitable place to which I had no desire to return. He should not, I stressed, waste his breath.

Rod of course was not fazed in the least. He waxed eloquent over the innumerable ways in which the Harvard Government department (and also the Fairbank Center, under his recent direction) had been thoroughly reformed during the years since I'd been there and maintained that I simply must return if only to witness these remarkable improvements. I was intrigued.

Some months later, when I had a formal offer from Harvard, Rod's powers of persuasion – rooted in a keen understanding of human psychology – became more evident. I knew from having read the first two volumes of *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* that an appreciation of individual psychology was a skill that Rod deployed brilliantly in his scholarship, to explain Mao's opaque rationale for launching the Cultural Revolution. What I didn't yet realize was that Rod had an equally astute grasp of his colleagues' and future colleagues' penchants and proclivities, that he also parlayed masterfully to win them over to his designs.

When Rod discovered my love of sailing, for example, he blithely issued invitations to various colleagues' boats. When Rod and I were having lunch in the Harvard Faculty Club one day, he asked why I remained so reluctant to accept the Harvard offer. I sighed and replied that it was that uncomfortable feeling in the pit of my stomach whenever I walked into the Harvard Faculty Club that gave me pause. Rod looked up in some surprise but then, after seeming to take in the dour décor for the *very* first time, cheerfully volunteered to explore whether some of the oil paintings of Harvard luminaries hanging on the walls, all of whom happened to be elderly men, might not be replaced with a few women. Well, I had never encountered such a discerning or charming senior colleague and I finally did decide to make the transcontinental move. I never asked Rod whether it was his doing, but I did notice after I arrived at Harvard that for a time there was a painting of a sprightly ballerina hanging in the place of honor above the mantel in the lobby of the Faculty Club.

Thanks in very large part to Rod's sparkling presence and his supportive mentorship, I found Harvard to be a much friendlier and more collegial place than feared. Rod and I would occasionally disagree about things, but in that case he could always disarm me with his signature retort, "That's where you're wrong, dahlink!"

Still, having come from the West Coast, I did miss it. So some years later, when I was on the verge of deserting Harvard to return to sunny California, Rod again put his psychological skills to work. Knowing that my dog, who had accompanied me on the move from Berkeley, had recently passed on, Rod took up a collection among our Fairbank Center colleagues to purchase me a local puppy in hopes that I would not miss the West Coast so much! I declined this generous offer in favor of adopting a rescue dog, but Rod's gesture moved me and in the end I stayed.

I am certainly not the only colleague toward whom Rod applied his formidable powers of perception and persuasion. As chair of the Government Department, Rod convinced many other initially reluctant colleagues to join us. And wine connoisseur that he was, Rod even upgraded the vintages served at department faculty meetings in a successful bid to improve attendance. Rod had many truly wonderful qualities, but his ability to connect with other people on *their* terms is the one that meant the most to me.

While Rod surely preferred being a politician over a professor, he threw himself into academic life with great enthusiasm and to great effect. He was fiercely loyal to Harvard and he made major contributions to this university, especially to the Fairbank Center and its library and to the Government Department. I miss his wise and constructive counsel, his encyclopedic knowledge,

his wry sense of humor, and -- most important -- his warm and steadfast friendship more than I can possibly express.