



Passport to Peking: A Very British Mission to Mao's China

Patrick Wright

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In 1954, eighteen years before Nixon's momentous visit to China, scores of European delegations set off for Beijing, in response to Prime Minister Chou En-Lai's invitation to "come and see" the New China and to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Communist victory. In this delightfully eclectic book--part comedy, part travelogue, and part cultural history--Patrick Wright tells the story of the remarkable Britons who made this journey, including former Prime Minister Clement Attlee; dapper and self-important philosopher A. J. Ayer; the brilliant young artist-reporter Paul Hogarth; poet and novelist Rex Warner (a former Marxist who had just married a Rothschild); and the infuriatingly self-obsessed Stanley Spencer, who emerges as the unlikely hero of the story. Using a host of previously unpublished letters and diaries, Wright captures the impressions--both mistaken and genuinely insightful--of the delegates as they wandered behind the bamboo curtain. Full of comic detail, this book is also a study of China as it has loomed in the British mind: as both the primitive orient of early western philosophy and the alluring site of revolutionary transformation.

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