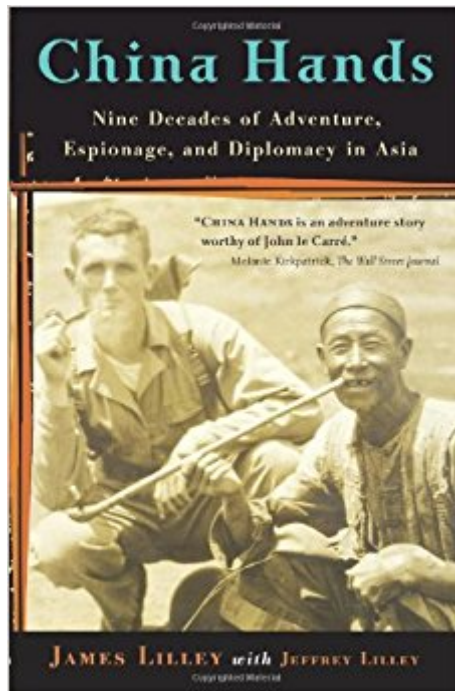


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China Hands: Nine Decades Of Adventure, Espionage, And Diplomacy In Asia



Synopsis

James Lilley's life and family have been entwined with China's fate since his father moved to the country to work for Standard Oil in 1916. Lilley spent much of his childhood in China and after a Yale professor took him aside and suggested a career in intelligence, it became clear that he would spend his adult life returning to China again and again. Lilley served for twenty-five years in the CIA in Laos, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Taiwan before moving to the State Department in the early 1980s to begin a distinguished career as the U.S.'s top-ranking diplomat in Taiwan, ambassador to South Korea, and finally, ambassador to China. From helping Laotian insurgent forces assist the American efforts in Vietnam to his posting in Beijing during the Tiananmen Square crackdown, he was in a remarkable number of crucial places during challenging times as he spent his life tending to America's interests in Asia. In *China Hands*, he includes three generations of stories from an American family in the Far East, all of them absorbing, some of them exciting, and one, the loss of Lilley's much loved and admired brother, Frank, unremittingly tragic. *China Hands* is a fascinating memoir of America in Asia, Asia itself, and one especially capable American's personal history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The first thing to make clear is that this is, first of all, an autobiography. While it provides an interesting insight into the life of a CIA agent who later became a diplomat, it does not provide a comprehensive historical account of the political events mentioned in the book. So, historians may feel that this book is incomplete but may still find this book interesting as it inevitably presents a

different perspective from other books. James Lilley was born and raised in China while his father, who worked for an American oil company, was assigned to its China office, so he had an interest in China from childhood. Throughout the book, it is clear that James belongs to a close-knit family. It is possible that you may find too many early chapters devoted to his childhood and the eventual suicide of one of his brothers. You can, of course, skip these chapters but they help to set the context for James' career. His career took him to a number of Asian countries, originally as a CIA agent but later as a diplomat. He was USA representative to Taiwan in the early eighties, USA Ambassador to Korea in the mid-eighties and USA Ambassador to China during the late eighties. His account of the troubles in Tiananmen Square is therefore particularly interesting, as is his perspective on relations between China, America and Taiwan - a very complex issue. In his earlier career with the CIA, James explains the difficulty of working there during the fifties and sixties, when China was all but closed to the outside world. He also acknowledges the importance of Richard Nixon in breaking the ice between America and China, though he correctly points out that deteriorating Chinese relations with the Soviet Union made Nixon's task easier than it would otherwise have been.

James Lilley's memoir of his lengthy service, first in the CIA then later in the Dept. of State, is an interesting story of one of America's little known but highly influential players whose knowledge and insights of China proved invaluable after the reopening of China following the Nixon trip to China in 1972. Lilley, born in Tsingtao [Qingdao] China to a well-to-do family whose father worked for Standard Oil, returned to the States in 1940, went to Exeter preparatory school, entered military service in 1945, followed by college at Yale. Prior to graduation he was recruited by the CIA--there was a Yale-CIA connection at that time that sent many Yale and other Ivy School graduates to work for the Agency. Because of Lilley's background, he entered the clandestine directorate of the CIA and served in several Southeast Asian countries under diplomatic cover as a case officer and later as deputy chief of mission. An intensive Chinese language training course in Yale in the late 1950s honed his linguistic capabilities so that he was a logical choice to be the declared CIA person in the newly opened Liaison Office in Beijing in 1973, where he remained until "outed" by a newspaper column, leaving in 1975. Prior to departure George H.W. Bush was named head of the Liaison Office and during this time of overlap, Lilley was Bush's tutor on China during lengthy bike rides in the then quiet city--mostly bike traffic--of Beijing. When Bush was named CIA director in 1976, he brought Lilley into the overt side of CIA as the National Intelligence Officer for East Asia, dealing mostly with China.

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