The education of Edward Friedman reveals the story of a post-World War Two Jewish boy who was greatly influenced by the issues of social justice, revolution, and the nationalistic or dogmatic barriers national leaders and intellectuals had erected against open and eclectic discourse. His early enemies were the benighted, if not the idiotic, views of American leadership toward the rest of the world. What Richard Hofstadter contributed to the idea of the anti-intellectual attitudes of domestic life in America, Ed applied to the same ignorant attitudes of our international leadership.

Ed grew up in an Italian and Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn. His father worked in the garment industry and had left school after the third grade. His early education was animated by the household political conversation, which reflected the socialist and progressive ideas emanating from the recent-immigrant milieu in Brooklyn’s working class communities. Friedman spent many long afternoons in the Brooklyn Public Library, working his way through the journals, especially moved by the liberal Catholic publication, *Social Justice*.

Ed entered Brandeis College on a science scholarship with the intent of developing a career in medical research. He was diverted to political science because of Professor Leonard Levy’s course on civil liberties. Levy, a student of Henry Steele Commager, Jr. was one of the great constitutional historians in America. For him, history was a “blood sport.” Ed may have modeled himself on Levy’s fierce some defense of his
views. Professor Richard Smith of Rice University referred to Ed as “one of the most aggressively critical and combative people I know.” For Ed, like for Levy, research was not just an issue of documentation, but of how to argue for the formation of a better society, and how to expose the errors of the past. Ed’s remarkable command of European history, which he used for comparative purposes with China, was fueled through his encounters with Professors Herbert Marcuse, Lawrence Fuchs, and John Roche. But most significant for his future philosophy of politics was the course on European utopianism and its dangers by Frank Manuel. Ed’s moral philosophy mirrors Professor Manuel’s own legacy of questioning ideological utopias and the crippling effect of hierarchies and authoritarian charisma.

In 1959, Ed entered Harvard’s MA program in East Asian Studies. Professor John King Fairbank addressed the 13 entering students. Ed remembers “He warned us that studying China was dangerous. He advised us to withdraw from the study of China and, instead, cross the bridge over the Charles River and enroll in the School of Business.”

The “danger” in the field was that the scholars of China were “scarred by the political witch-hunt known as McCarthyism. . . . The profession’s first journal, *Far Eastern Quarterly*, was shut down by political pressure. The new organization, the Association for Asian Studies, defensively declared that it would be totally non-political. In the 1960’s, Ed recalls, “Paranoid politics endangered a fearless quest for truth.” The result was an academic bloodbath that resulted in the victimization of many scholars and students who refused to bow or follow the leadership of political conformity. These ostracized, banished, and blacklisted scholars and young professors were denied
foundation grants, were denied tenure, and were denied employment and publication. Rather than heading out to the School of Business, Ed decided that the profession of Asian studies, and the scholarship on Asia should be organized to fight back against the consequences of McCarthyism and other oppressive influences in the body politick.

At Harvard, Ed’s key advisor was Barrington Moore, who along with the Latvian born Judith Skhlar, and the first woman tenured in Harvard’s government department, “shaped his commitment to a progressive liberal orientation.” Ed launched into a career of studying the social theories of revolution and comparing them with the authoritarian realities of coercive leadership.

Ed’s experience in the political science department buffered him from the history lessons in Fairbank’s classes. He did not even think about struggling with ideas of culturalism, or the essence of Chinese civilization. Ed did not dwell on the issue of tradition vs. modernization; or the contrast between Chinese and Western civilization. In fact he never had a class with Fairbank. If he had such an experience, it might have detained him briefly from his European centered methodologies regarding revolution, rationality, and social change.

In the mid 60s, Ed was one of the first students of Chinese language in Taiwan. He had an isolated and unique experience. He lived and studied for some time in central Taiwan, not in the northern capital in Taipei. He became thoroughly knowledgeable about all aspects of the society. He had a curiosity that astounded his visitors who dropped in on him tour their tours of the Island from beyond Taipei.

He still had baggage from the iconoclastic and anti-capitalist student experiences in America. While a college student, he took part in the Student League for Industrial
Democracy, which “led to his attendance at the second meeting of Students for a Democratic Society.” The later development of extremism caused Ed to break ties with the group. But “He characterized his orientation at that time as a progressive liberal with strong civil liberties and human rights commitment, beliefs which have remained his lodestar.” Yet, he still had a few quirks of paranoid radicalism. For instance, he kept his bananas in the refrigerator. His reason was that the American importers of bananas to America told shoppers to not put the bananas in the refrigerator. That was, according to Ed, because they wanted the food to spoil quickly so the customer would buy more.

It was in Taiwan in 1966 that Ed joined the nascent group that would soon form the nucleus of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars. About 20 graduate students and professors met to write a letter to the Association for Asian Studies. Their immediate purpose was to ask the Association to expand its topics, and to allow for political discussion. The energy for this request derived from a political analysis of the Vietnam War. This war was imperialistic and counter-revolutionary. America was wrong to be in Vietnam. Furthermore, it was wrong for the Association for Asian Studies to oppose discussing the war, and limiting topics of discussion from criticism of American policy, and from contemporary political and international issues. Finally, Ed and others criticized American leadership for ignoring the voices of Asian students, workers, intellectuals, and reformers. Later, he with other CCAS members criticized the profession for its discrimination of Asian scholars who often did not get tenure and could not find adequate employment and appropriate status.

The formal organization of the CCAS occurred at the AAS Convention in Philadelphia in 1968.
Ed described the membership as a mixture of individuals with different, sometimes competing, and mixed points of view:

“CCAS” he said, “had three groups—Vietnam oriented, China oriented, all other places in Asia oriented. People could also be divided by their origin of commitment of church and peace people, critics of U.S. foreign policy, those rooted in Marxism, those coming out of the New Left concerns. The country orientation and the root of commitment overlapped and divided people in many and overlapped ways.”

Ed obviously overlapped several groups. He was China oriented, a critic of U.S. foreign policy, and a person with New Left concerns.

Ed’s energies concentrated on exposing American political leadership in China as irrational and exploitative. The major cause of these policies was to support America’s empire—both domestically and internationally. And Ed’s attack was that America opposed revolutionary forces in Asia. And the profession opposed scholars who were critical of America’s policies.

By 1969, Ed Friedman and Mark Selden edited the first major criticism of America’s presence in Asia. Entitled: America’s Asia: Dissenting Essays on Asian-American Relations,” the book offered a stunning challenge for the understanding of America’s policies in Asia. “In the era of America’s Asia, until we know America, we cannot understand Asia, and until fundamental changes are forthcoming in American policy, only Asian revolutions can make Asian autonomy and independent development.”

justify their views about China by psychoanalyzing their culture in a way, which denigrates the Chinese and makes them look foolish. He concludes his essay with the warning: “Americans may ascribe to the psyche of the Chinese leaders an irrationality which is actually and institutionally American.”

Ed’s methodology did mislead him at some times. He predicted that the Chinese would never agree to form a diplomatic pact with Nixon. He argued that Chinese foreign policy was better for Asian economic development and independence than American policy. And he seemed to join with the European analysts of the time that China could bring up into several regions. What is unique about Ed’s professional life is that he did not become angry at himself or at China for misleading him. Unlike other China scholars, he did not become bitter, he did not become a Panda hugger, and he did not drop out of the field.

But, what does this tell us about Ed and the CCAS?

The CCAS gave the opportunity to graduate students and faculty to participate in the creation of a new, vigorous, and challenging reform of both American foreign policy, and the profession of Asian studies. The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars gradually developed from a polemical and angry critique to a first rate academic journal that combined activism with research. For young scholars such as Ed, the CCAS gave them a platform and a community to express their idealism, to engage in national debates, and to take part in political activism.

Ed played an active role in the editorial board—encouraging writers, criticizing essays, and maintaining relationships with a broad range of scholars from throughout
America and abroad. CCAS was a springboard out of the narrow confines of the academic, and the profession of Asian studies.

Many of the members and sympathizers of the CCAS did not survive the battle with the profession. They were blacklisted, their writings were not published, and they could not get a college job. Some found academic positions abroad, others changed their profession, and some committed themselves to alternative life styles. Even Ed was advised to change his views if he wanted tenure.

Ed was one of the first CCASers to obtain a college position. In 1967, he joined the political science department at the University of Wisconsin. He did not become an active committee chair or administrative leader. He was a scholar who often felt alone in his department and in mid-America.

However, Ed was a major figure of compassion, knowledge, and wisdom. There are many accounts of his kindness and friendliness. John Bachman recounted how he went to Ed’s home for advice on his Masters thesis. Ed, we are often told, was always ready to listen and talk. For us, Ed was always a guest who brought the warmth of friendship and the delight of story telling and intellectual discovery.

I want to end with a story that I believe captures Ed’s view of the world and his approach to his search for meaning and understanding. Ed has said that the art he likes most is Claude Monet’s Impressionism and J.M.W.Turner’s shimmering color. Both artist’s have elevated the transient effects of light—even painting a single subject from a different point of view, a different perspective of color. Looking at the details closely, one cannot understand the meaning. Yet without them there is no content to be observed. One has to slowly walk back to obtain a visual sensation of the scenery and the actions.
The control of the material viewed is in the eyes of the viewer and not the subject itself. To understand China, or America, one has to pay attention to the detail but then step back to bring it into focus and give it meaning in terms of the lessons for making a better quality of life and understanding of the meaning of history.

Ed’s education gave him the skills and experiences to raise his academic interests in activist conclusions of what should be done to promote the common good and the general welfare of individuals and society. That is what I like about him and why I am happy to relate and relive parts of his life.