

# My First Sixty Years in China



*Sam Ginsbourg*

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## PREFACE

*Huang Hua*

It is a great honor for me to write a preface for the new, PFS (China Society for People's Friendship Studies) 50-book series under the general title of *Light on China*. All these books were written in English by journalistic and other eyewitnesses of the events described. I have read many of them over the seven decades since my student days at Yenching University. With some of the outstanding authors in this series I have ties of personal friendship, mutual regard, and warm memories dating from before the Chinese people's Liberation in 1949.

Looking back and forward, I am convinced that China is pursuing the right course in building a strong and prosperous country in a rapidly changing world with its complex and sometimes volatile developments.

The books in this series cover a span of some 150 years, from the mid 19th to the early 21st century. The numerous events in China, the sufferings and struggles of the Chinese people, their history and culture, and their dreams and aspirations were written by

foreign observers animated by the spirit of friendship, equality and cooperation. Owing to copyright matters and other difficulties, not all eligible books have as yet been included.

The founder of the first Chinese republic, Dr. Sun Yat-sen wrote in his Testament in 1925, “For forty years I have devoted myself to the cause of the people’s revolution with but one end in view: the elevation of China to a position of freedom and equality among the nations. My experiences during those forty years have convinced me that to attain this goal we must bring about an awakening of our own people and ally ourselves in common struggle with those people of the world who regard us as equals.”

Chairman Mao Zedong declared, at the triumphal founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, “The Chinese people have stood up.” Today, having passed its 53rd anniversary, we see the vast forward strides that have been taken, and note that many more remain to be made.

Many foreign observers have traced and reported the real historical movement of modern China, that is: from humiliation — through struggle — to victory. Seeking understanding and friendship with the Chinese people, their insight and perspective were in basic harmony with the real developments in China. But there have been others who viewed China and the Chinese people through glasses tinted by hostile prejudice or ignorance and have invariably made irrelevant observations that could not stand the test of time. This needs to be better understood by young people and students, at home and abroad. The PFS series *Light on China* can help them gain an overview of what went before, is happening now, and will

emerge in the future.

Young students in China can additionally benefit from these works by seeing how foreign journalists and authors use fluent English to record and present historical, philosophical, and socio-political issues and choices in China. For millions of students in China, English has become a compulsory second language. These texts will also have many-sided usefulness in conveying knowledge of our country to other peoples.

Students abroad, on their part, may be helped by the example of warm, direct accounts and impressions of China presented by their elders in the language that most readily reaches them.

Above all, this timely and needed series should help build bridges of friendship and mutual understanding. Good books long out of print will be brought back to strengthen the edifice.

My hearty thanks and congratulations go first to ex-Premier Zhu Rongji, who has been an effective supporter of this new, PFS series. They go to all engaged in this worthy project, the Foreign Languages Press, our China Society for People's Friendship Studies, and others who have given their efforts and cooperation.

Chairman Mao Zedong has written: "So many deeds cry out to be done, and always urgently. The world rolls on, time presses. Ten thousand years are too long. Seize the day, seize the hour."

The hour has come for making these books available to young people in China and abroad whose destiny is to build a better world together. Let this series add a small brick to that structure.

*Beijing, Autumn 2003*





## FOREWORD

This is the story of my life narrated against the background of a half-century of the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people.

I am not a professional writer. I am no more than a man whose life, with its peripeteia and aspirations, has taken him in his sixty-seven years from country to country, from epoch to epoch, from one type of society to another. I am not a close observer, I am but a man who has gone through more than his share of things and remembered many of them.

George Bernard Shaw has said somewhere that "... all autobiographies are lies...." His explanation of this sweeping statement being that "No man is bad enough to tell the truth about his family and his friends and colleagues." I must be bad, because I have done precisely this: told the truth about those around me and about the events in which I have been involved and of which I have been witness. If there are any divergencies from the truth, it has not been for the sake of embellishment, concealment or with any other motive.

In putting my story down, I have been faced with various problems, encountered, I suppose, by every autobiographer: how to organize the material in such a way as to keep roughly to the chronological order without spreading out more than is necessary; how to deal with the relationship between self and background, between artistic presentation and veracity. Perhaps, the greatest difficulty has been, particularly when speaking of my childhood and youth, not to give way to the temptation of putting into the mouth of a youth ideas and impressions which in fact belonged to more mature years.

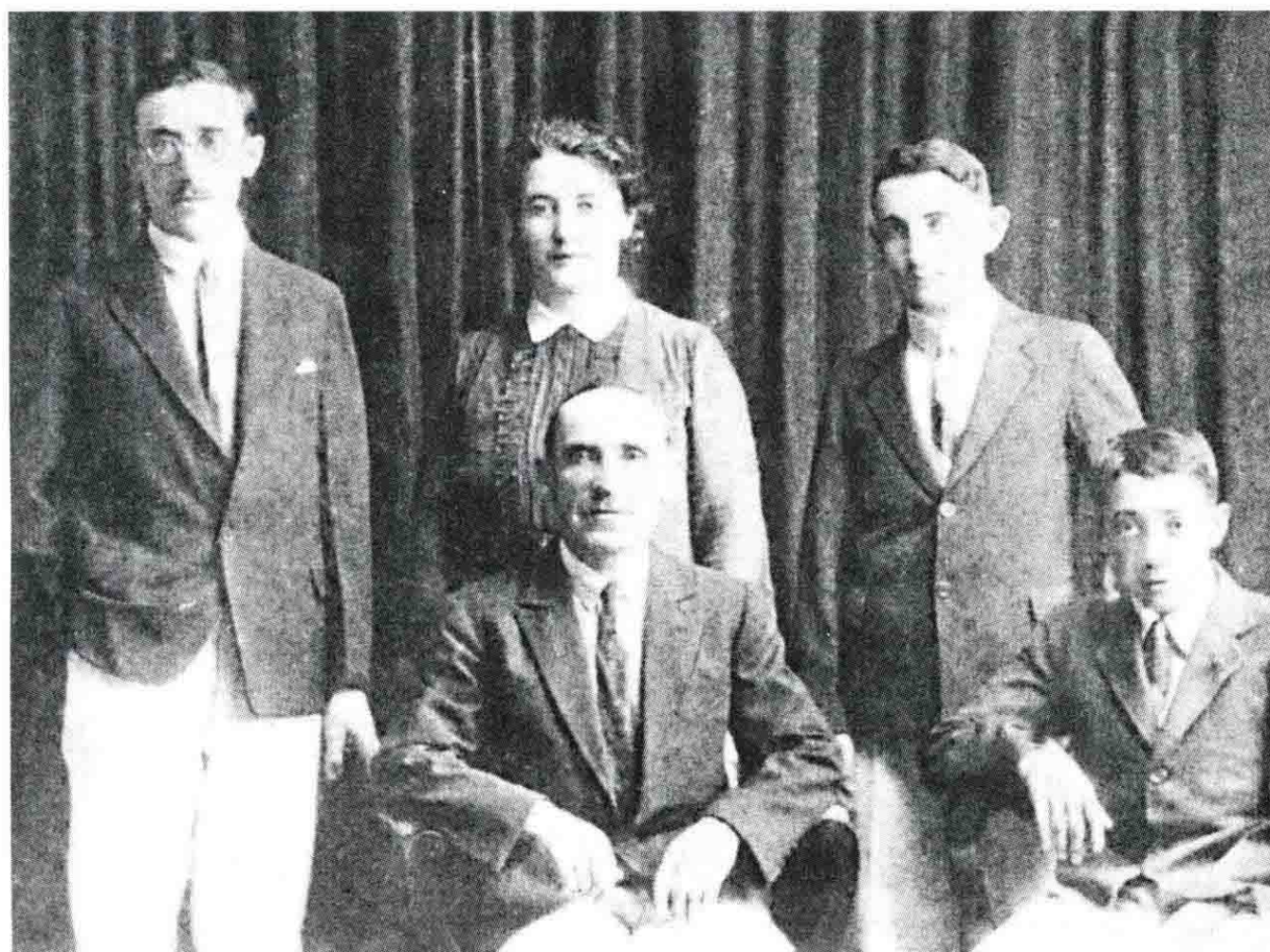
There have been many other difficulties, which I am not sure I have been able to solve very well. But, on the whole, it has been tremendously exciting and gratifying to recollect and write down the events of my life and to evaluate them anew. I am more than thankful for the opportunity to do it. I only hope that my work will not disappoint the publishers and the readers.

I have been asked about the title of my book. Why "first"? Are you thinking of a second sixty years? Well, it has never hurt anyone to have a try.

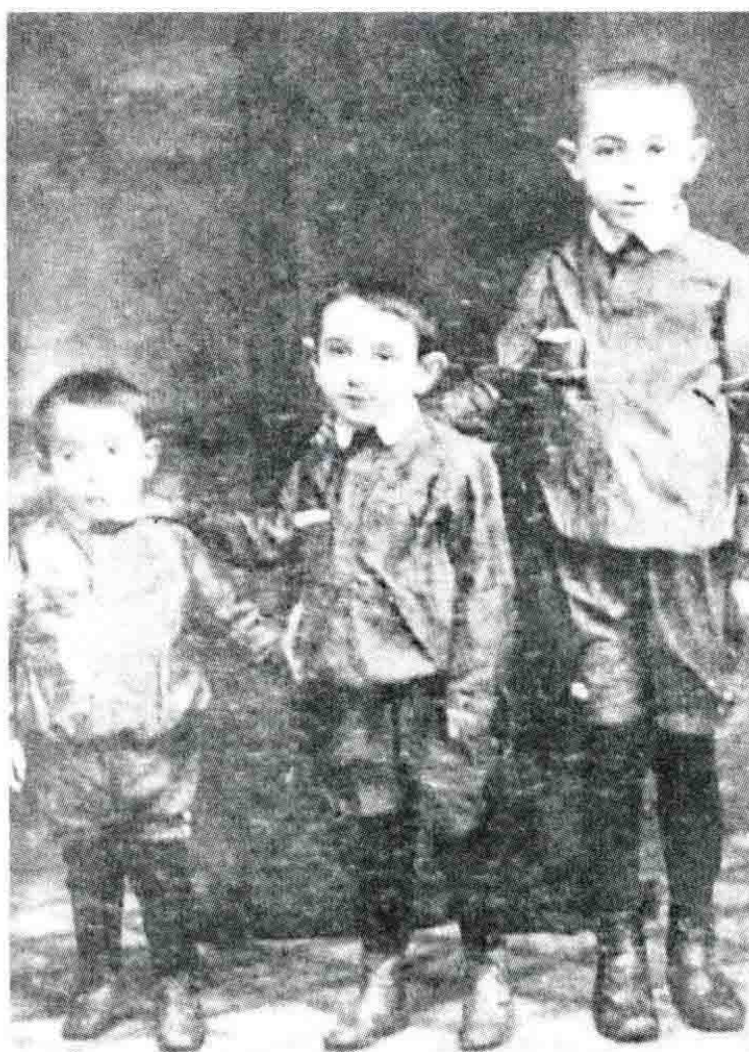
And I do not suppose anyone will have the heart to blame me if I fall somewhat short of the target.

But of one thing I am sure: my China has given me all I possess, and it has a claim on all of me, no matter how long I live, until I draw my last breath.

The Author



The family in Shanghai in the early thirties. Front row, on father's left, is the author in his teens.



The offspring, in Harbin, around 1920. The youngest is the future author.



In Chefoo, in summer 1947, soon after arrival in the Liberated Areas. On the extreme right is the author.

The newlyweds. The unforgettable date is November 20, 1951.





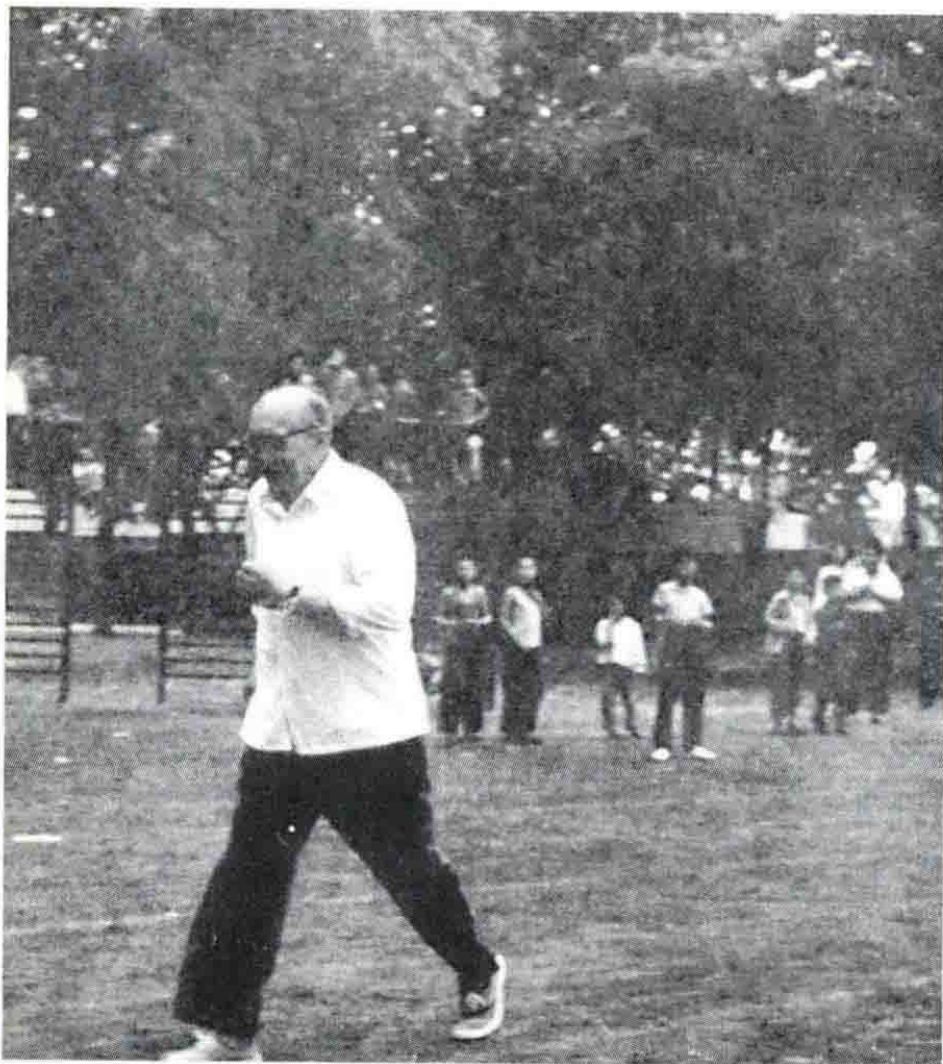
Thirty years later, in Fragrant Hills, Beijing.



Daughters and son, Jinan 1979.  
Front row (from left to right): the  
eldest, the second; back row: the only  
son and the baby of the family.



The happy teacher among his happy students. Jinan, summer 1980.



Beating world records at the university sports meet at the "venerable" age of 59, Qufu, 1973.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ACCURSED JEW!

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#### 1.

I was born in Chita, Siberia. At the age of one I was taken by my parents to Manchuria where I spent my childhood.

My father, a Russian Jew, was born and grew up in a small town in southeastern Byelorussia, in one of the districts where pogroms were the order of the day and where later the German fascists exterminated Jews by the tens of thousands.

I do not think he ever told me much about his childhood and youth, or, if he did, I must have forgotten. I do not know who his parents were. I only know that he began working on his own before he had gained the age of twenty. He traded in lumber. An enterprising young man, he felt his wings clipped by the various restrictions imposed on Jews in European Russia, and 1903 saw him fleeing the ghetto. He managed to reach Chita, Siberia. Here he continued to deal in lumber, here he found and wooed his love, my future mother. Here I was born in September 1914.

In 1908 father left Chita for Manchuria where the completion of the Chinese Eastern Railway in 1904 had given great impetus to trade and industry. Except for one trip to Chita on the eve of the First World War to visit his