SIX AMERICANS IN CHINA

by Rewi Alley

International Culture Publishing Corporation

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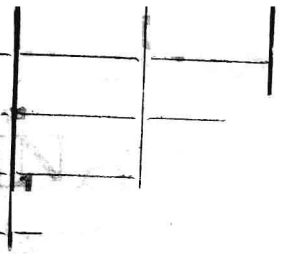

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". . . . . the purpose of this book is to create a better understanding and closer friendship between two of the great nations of the world."

Rewi Alley

(from a letter to Mary Clark Dimond,
Beijing, September 15, 1974)

FOREWORD

It is a happy event that Rewi's book SIX AMERICANS IN CHINA will soon come off the press. I feel highly honored to write the foreword at the request of the author, and would like to take this opportunity to pay my profound respect to these six old friends whose memories the Chinese people hold so dear.

These six Americans, most of whom I know quite well, indeed deserve high literary extolment. Though vastly different in profession and personal experiences, these writer-journalists, armymen or medical doctor shared several points in common: an enduring relationship with and profound friendship for the Chinese people and great dedication to their noble cause.

With deep sympathy for the Chinese people who were suffering from untold misery, humiliation and aggression, the six Americans lent warm support to the Chinese people in their various forms of just struggles against feudalism, imperialism and fascism. Among the six, some went to Yan'an, making in-depth field studies of the liberated areas and other places in China. And their visits resulted in a good number of books and articles telling the truth about our side. Thus, they played an important role in bringing into wide notice the Chinese people's just cause and in

helping the American people and other peoples of the world understand China better. Of those who went to Yan'an one stayed on and has since then been working assiduously together with the Chinese people. There were others who shuttled between the Kuomintang-ruled areas and between China and the United States, trying by every possible means to raise large sums of money for the Industrial Cooperative Movement and for children and hospitals in Yan'an. Still others were remembered for fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Chinese people and performing meritorious service in defeating the forces of fascism.

Through their own experiences in China, they came to develop a sincere love for China and her people. When Agnes Smedley learned of the founding of New China, she was so elated that she lost no time in trying hard to free herself from her troubles in order to come back to China. Though her plan was later frustrated by her critical health condition, she wrote in her will that she wanted her ashes to be buried in China. Anna Louise Strong decided to move to Beijing at the advanced age of 72, and worked tirelessly as a writer until her eternal rest in this country. The ashes of Edgar Snow were buried partly in his homeland, and partly on the serene campus of Beijing University, as he had wished. General Joseph Stilwell expressed his desire to revisit China after the victory of the Chinese people's War of Resistance against Japan. Unfortunately owing to some obstruction, his wish was not fulfilled, and before long he passed away. So it's only fair to say that all of them looked upon China as their second homeland.

The six Americans are not only fine sons and daughters of the great American people, but true friends of the Chinese people who will always remember them. Today, with the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, exchanges between the two peoples have been increasingly expanded. However, it is still necessary to further the mutual understanding and friendship between the two great nations. I believe that the noble sense of justice shared by the six Americans will inspire their countrymen in their hundreds of thousands to show sympathy and love for China and thus enable them to work unswervingly for promoting social progress and safeguarding world peace.

On the title page of this book, Rewi has quoted from his letter to Mary Clark Dimond as follows: ". . . . . The purpose of this book is to create a better understanding and closer friendship between two of the great nations of the world." I sincerely thank him for his efforts made toward this end.

Wang Bingnan
December 4, 1984

PREFACE

Over the past two centuries many Americans have lived in China. There have been those who came "hot-footing" after fortunes, those who worked as missionaries, those who were sent in one official capacity or another, and then those who were just fascinated by seeing so much of the world's humanity living and struggling together, people of one of the greatest and oldest continuous civilizations on earth — and stayed on.

China has given warmth and friendliness to many a lonely spirit as well as the spoils of profit to traders in all manner of things, good and bad. In addition, however, there have been some understanding Americans to whom China's struggle to free herself from an increasingly heavy yoke has been both a challenge and an inspiration, calling on the true old-fashioned American conscience for active participation.

From the ranks of these — and their number is not insignificant — the stories of only six have been selected for this book. Typically "American" people, who loved their own America and who grew to love China too, they came to understand the desperate need for change and were thus convinced of the essential rightness of the struggle to improve the lot of this quarter of mankind. They sought out and acquired a deeper knowledge of the Chinese people who were waging so gigantic a fight, and in so doing, they themselves became part of it. Perhaps they also remembered that their own forebears were once driven to revolution.

In the America of the past, there has been much goodwill for China. When the Chinese people fought for their future in their own way, they succeeded brilliantly. Today

the People's Republic of China rises among the world's nations, and once more friendly American people come to see what has happened here. They learn new things, and an admiration and respect for the growing momentum of a combination of old and new becomes integral to them.

During my fifty-seven years in China, I have witnessed, and still do, how Chinese and American peoples can understand, work happily and profitably together. I have usually found that whenever they treated each other on a completely equal footing, they liked each other. The six Americans to whom this book is dedicated have worked toward similar goals despite their vastly different backgrounds. Now they are part of both Chinese and American history. In the years to come, more and more will be written about them and their kind. For to their fellow-countrymen they have been gallant pioneers in a determined search of the understanding needed to build a better world for future mankind.

I am very grateful to Mary Clark Dimond for her untiring and arduous work on editing this manuscript right until her death. Her husband, Dr. E. Grey Dimond, has kindly sent it back to me for revision before publication.

Rewi Alley
Beijing, April, 1984

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Ma Haide
(George Hatem) the Doctor

It is pleasant to write about Ma Haide, for as I do so his image rises up in front of me, an image that I and a great many others like to see. Ma Haide, an American who became a revolutionary Chinese when faced with the utter chaos of the old society as seen from the Shanghai angle, and who has in the fifty-odd years that have followed kept active in serving the Chinese people. Born in 1910 in Buffalo, New York, he is now quite white-haired though still very active, a source of encouragement and stimulus to all who see him and learn something from him. It is too bad however, that he had neither time nor use for his memoirs, which makes it hard to extract details of his life. One should of course have made notes about him down through the years, but there has never been enough time to get down all that has to be written as part of one's work. There have been, I am grateful to say, a few occasions when we were together and from which scraps of his story could be garnered. These and later impressions, old memories and so forth I have put together in the following pages.

It was the summer of 1953. The place was my tiny cottage on the ancient mound of earth called "Lei Tai" or "Wrestling Platform" by the local people in the county town of Sandan in the area known as the panhandle of west Gansu. It was evening and there was little prospect of visitors casually dropping in, for an unusually heavy summer rain had turned the soft loess topsoil into mud more than ankle deep. The weather, the altitude (we were almost

five thousand feet above sea level) and the proximity of the tall snow-clad Qi Lian Mountains had brought a chill to the night air.

Chen Tianyuan, a local farm lad who looked after our wellbeing, came in with an armful of firewood to make a bit of a blaze in the open fireplace (my only concession to Western architecture in the cottage). Supper over, we pulled up chairs to toast our chilled limbs and talk. "We" were Dr. Ma Haide — George Hatem, as he was known before joining the old Long March Red Army — and myself. We had come up from Beijing together to spend a month in the technical training center where I had been working for the past ten years. George had come out of curiosity and I, perhaps, out of nostalgia for the happy years of learning and struggle spent there.

Usually, we did not talk much of the past. China today, and what was to be done, was always the most absorbing topic. Moreover, George's work with the Ministry of Health was fascinating, and conversation turned to such things as the eradication of major diseases. Lessons of old traditional and new combined methods of health care which closely affected millions of people were our subjects. He had spent the day with young workers in our school hospital, staffed entirely by students who had been trained there, and had been particularly anxious to observe what short-term training had been able to make of them.

On this particular evening, however, although we discussed various types of illness and their remedies and had branched off into related matters, somehow we could not hold our conversation from going back into the past. Perhaps it was because I reminded him of a meeting of early days of our friendship when we had gone to a party in Agnes Smedley's flat in Shanghai and I asked him what he knew about "chrome dermatitis", a disease which affected workers in a chromium-plating industry. He had answered, "Nothing much, but I'm very willing to learn."

I was then working with the factory inspectorate of the Shanghai Municipal Council. In those days, a portion of Shanghai was governed by a council consisting of various nationals, backed by the armed occupation forces of their respective countries. The inspectorate was especially interested in the collection of data which might demonstrate, for the benefit of its critics, the existing industrial hazards in at least one of the more exploited branches of Shanghai industry, so that a few well publicized reforms might be instituted. There was at that time an increasing popular outcry that something be done to eliminate the most obvious and terrible of these hazards. It had thus become possible to do a small study of a special problem and, as a first contribution, have results published.

As a consequence of this conversation, George, who knew more of the subject than he admitted, came quietly to our department one Monday morning and began a round of the factories involved. He spent several months analyzing the particular situation under research, his findings later being published by the Lester Research Institute in Shanghai. The director of the Institute, I remember, put his own name first on the published material. The study was useful in bringing about some elementary reforms and spreading knowledge of this particular abuse. One great result, however, was its influence on the thinking of George himself.

George smiled at the recollection of all this "old stuff", as he called it, out of a past made the more distant by greater, more recent events. However, his quiet kindly face, which showed the wisdom of his years, showed interest too, and so I talked on about the dark workshops in stinking alleyways and of wretched overworked children in chromium-plating works. I recalled the small boys who stood wearily, day and night, over buffing wheels, their pitiful limbs encrusted with the grime of emery powder, sweat and metal dust. They worked over open chromium vats with no exhausts for the poisonous fumes surrounding them. Sores ate into

their flesh, and hands and feet were pitted with "chrome holes" nearly impossible to cure under their horrible working conditions. Children toiled for incredibly long hours in a desperate situation, denied the most elementary rights of humanity. Emaciated little bodies fought for life against great odds to bring swift profit for their masters. Industry after industry multiplied the desperate plight of these young, and also old people, attempting to live on in a national economy that had broken down. For George, all of this was an education in the social system of that day in China.

As I went on, George looked quizzically over the top of a big mug of coffee. He then told me he had pondered deeply over the whole situation, wondering how we might somehow deal more basically with such a set-up in these and other similar factories. He referred back to his own days in Buffalo in the State of New York in the United States where his father, an immigrant from Lebanon, had been a steel worker.

"What sort of life did you have as a kid, George?" I asked him.

"Oh, it wasn't bad. In Buffalo we lived in a neighborhood with a lot of black people, and the black kids and I played together. Our mothers helped each other when there was sickness in the house, always a tough time for the poor. We wrestled and fought as kids do, and got a lot of fun out of it. Then we moved to North Carolina, and it was different. There, for the first time, I saw white kids separated from the colored, and white kids knocking down colored ones as they were coming from school. I lived in the southern United States a long time but never could get used to the way white people pushed black folks around!"

"What made you decide to become a doctor?" I persisted.

"There was an old American doctor who made a deep impression on me when I was a kid in Buffalo. He used to treat our family, and we paid him when we could, which

wasn't very often. Once, all six of us were down with the Spanish flu at a time when there was a big epidemic. The old doctor not only treated us, but kept us supplied with food for several months, until my father was at last well enough to return to work. I thought this doctor was the most wonderful man in the world, and I wanted to be like him. Workers' families are always scared of sickness, for if the breadwinner cannot work the whole family goes hungry. The doctor who could cure and cared for people was really looked up to.'

"It must have been hard for a poor family like yours to pay for your schooling," I suggested.

"It certainly was," George agreed. "And it was because they were so poor that the family was willing to sacrifice so much for their children. They wanted their kids to have a security they had never had, and they thought we could find it in the professions. There was not much incentive to become a steel worker like my father. Apart from the wretched and often dangerous labor, in those days a steel worker on strike might be shot down in cold blood by company police! Poor parents were more than willing to tighten their belts if there could be any chance, any way that one of their boys could be a doctor, lawyer, or accountant."

George received early medical training first in North Carolina in the USA, and then after winning a scholarship he traveled to the American University Hospital in Beirut, (Lebanon). Afterwards, on another scholarship, he completed his medical studies at the University of Geneva in Switzerland. At last his medical apprenticeship was over and he gave thought to the various parts of the world where he could practice. He heard that doctors were much in demand in Shanghai, China, and somewhat disenchanted with the way of life he had thus far encountered he and a few other young doctors put together their slender resources and took a "slow boat to China".

It was not easy for him when he arrived in 1933. He

was unknown, and the mere display of a medical practitioner's sign did not mean that paying patients would automatically come to him and his partners. He knew that he must get to know people, and a natural inclination ultimately led him in spare time to a "leftist" Shanghai bookshop. After frequent conversation with people there, he began to make friends and learn something of the background of events then happening in China, all of which was still strange to him.

In those days the average foreigner in Shanghai knew little and cared less about what went on in the interior of the country. Such people would refer to the birth pangs of the Chinese revolution as the "trouble of 1925", "the Nanking Road trouble" and so on. Every year there was some kind of "trouble". "China is like that!" However, they were smug and sure that nothing could alter life for them, not basically. The Shanghai Club, the Racecourse, the Country Club and the Golf Club were some of the top-ranking "temples" where the international population of Shanghai "who really were anybody" worshipped. These people had no interest in what was happening down the streets and in the alleyways of the great sprawling industrial sections of the city. That was a world absolutely apart from theirs.

Of course, there were some exceptions among the foreigners. George met Hans Shippe, a German and a great book-lover who wrote political articles in English under the pen name of "Asiaticus". The Dutch woman Irene Weytemeyer, who ran the bookshop, was also a student of progress and of things Chinese, so much so that a group of German fascists broke into her shop one night and smashed the place up. The police made no arrests. To one like George, who had a natural awareness and affection for his fellowmen, the tale of crude exploitation written on the faces of the ordinary Chinese people who toiled endlessly was always easy to read. Wherever he went this was around him, inescapable, disturbing, an ever-present urge to action. George, an easy-going,

convivial and average American, began to see clearly the facts. The choice of the path to take in the China of his day had to be made, and he chose as any decent American with his understanding would have done. He took his place by the side of the ordinary man, the Chinese citizen so driven to labor, in as intelligent and active a way as he could. He was never a fanatic, never a starry-eyed idealist. Loving life well and all the good things therein, he kept happy himself and made those around him as happy as possible also. Yet as he read, as he talked with his nearest friends, the way ahead became more and more clear to him.

In Shanghai he had a close inside look at imperial occupation; the spectacle of Battleship Row anchored on the Huangpu opposite the big banks on the Bund, well-fed Western businessmen and their sleek wives dancing in evening clothes at the French Club, and then the starving Chinese rickshaw pullers openly beaten on the streets by the foreign concession police. George spent a few days each week in two of Shanghai's big hospitals, to which poor people came in their thousands every winter, on the verge of death from pneumonia and overwork. He began to understand that illness in China could not be cured only by an increased number of doctors. Too many millions needed help and it appeared possible or more likely necessary that only a fundamental change of their political system could save them, a change that would give all a chance not only for a better livelihood but for the opportunity to help themselves. Each and every citizen needed to possess a self-esteem which in turn would enable them to have the power over their lives that was truly theirs.

Working in the hospital, George met innumerable poverty-stricken, ordinary Chinese workers. He admired the courage with which they endured pain and how they helped one another in the wards. He was warmed by the parents' love for their children and surprised but pleased by the readiness with which he was accepted and trusted as a friend.