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# *Rebels and Bureaucrats*

*China's December 9ers*

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# *Rebels and Bureaucrats*

STUDIES OF THE EAST ASIAN INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

### *The East Asian Institute of Columbia University*

The East Asian Institute of Columbia University was established in 1949 to prepare graduate students for careers dealing with East Asia and to aid research and publication on East Asia during the modern period. The faculty of the Institute are grateful to the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation for their financial assistance.

The Studies of the East Asian Institute were inaugurated in 1962 to bring to a wider public the results of significant new research on modern and contemporary East Asia.

*To Mary, Sue, Nym*

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Mrs. Snow, better known to her friends as "Peg" and to the reading public by her pen name, Nym Wales, merits a special note of thanks. Without her accounts as a foundation and backdrop, our description of the student movement would have been pale indeed. While in China, she and her former husband, the late Edgar Snow, exemplified the best of the participant-observer tradition of journalism. Subsequently, by publishing her China notes instead of leaving them to gather dust, she performed a great service to a later generation struggling to know secondhand the China that she learned about firsthand and understood so well. Helen Foster Snow has never received the recognition she has long deserved, and so it gives us special pleasure to dedicate this book to her.



# Abbreviations

## Text

ACFDY	All-China Federation of Democratic Youth
ACFLAC	All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
CSMAC	Central-South Military and Administrative Committee
CYL	Communist Youth League
GAC	Government Administration Council
KMT	Kuomintang
NCPG	North China People's Government
NDYL	New Democratic Youth League
NLVC	National Liberation Vanguard of China
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PSNSU	Peiping Student National Salvation Union
PRC	People's Republic of China
U.N.	United Nations
WFDY	World Federation of Democratic Youth

## Notes

CKJML	Kuo Hua-lun, chief ed., <i>Chung-kung jen-ming lu</i> [Chinese Communist personalities] Taipei: n.p., 1967.
CNCH	<i>Ch'ing-nien ch'ien-hsien</i> [Front line of youth]. Hankow.
CWR	<i>China Weekly Review</i> . Shanghai.

# ABBREVIATIONS

- IECHIL* Li Ch'ang and others, "I-erh chiu" hui-i lu.  
See Bibliographic Note.
- IECYT* Jen-min ch'u-pan she, ed., *I-erh chiu yun-tung*. See Bibliographic Note.
- NCSM* Nym Wales [Helen F. Snow], *Notes on the Chinese Student Movement, 1935-36*. See Bibliographic Note.
- PTCK* *Pei-ta chou-k'an* [Peita weekly]. Peiping.
- RON* Chiang Nan-hsiang and others, *The Roar of a Nation*. See Bibliographic Note.
- SCMM* *Selections from China Mainland Magazines*
- SECCNCNTK* Yen-ching ta-hsueh hsueh-sheng tzu-chih hui, ed., *Shih-erh chiu chou-nien chi-nien t'e-k'an* [December 9th first anniversary memorial issue]. Peiping: n.p., 1936.
- SECTK* *Shih-erh chiu t'e-k'an* [December 9th special]. Peiping.
- SNIC* John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China, 1927-1937*. See Bibliographic Note.
- SNL* Min-hsien-tui [National Liberation Vanguard of China], ed., *San-nien-lai ti min-hsien* [Three years of the Vanguard]. n.p., October 1938.
- URI* Union Research Institute
- WMTTW* Chung-hua min-tsu chieh-fang hsien-feng tui tsung-tui-pu [NLVC headquarters], *Wo-men ti tui-wu* [Our corps]. n.p., March 15, 1937.
- YTCK* *Yen-ta chou-k'an* [Yenching weekly]. Peiping.

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## *Introduction*

On December 9, 1935, some two thousand college and high school students demonstrated in Peiping's streets and outside the city wall. This event, still little known in the West, has been dubbed epoch-making by Mao Tse-tung; indeed it was. For Chinese youths, it marked the end of nearly four years of silence. Intimidated by government suppression, patriotic young people had swallowed their anger while Japan's military adventurers moved inexorably from recently conquered Manchuria toward the heartland of North China. Finally pent-up fury no longer could be contained. The December 9th outburst was followed on December 16 by a second demonstration, four times as large. News of the Peiping uprising electrified students, intellectuals, professionals, and even factory workers in cities throughout China. These patriotic forces coalesced in a National Salvation movement powerful enough to halt Chiang Kai-shek's appeasement of Japanese aggression and to transform his anti-Communist extermination campaign into a united front against the aggressor.

December 9 was no less epochal for the students themselves. Having discarded passivity for a posture of defiant *engagement*, many of them moved steadily leftward. Less than two months

after December 9, the radical student leadership was absorbed into the National Liberation Vanguards of China (NLVC), which was to become an adjunct of the Communist Youth League (CYL). The following summer a few December 9 veterans embarked on the long dangerous journey to the Communist base in the barren reaches of Northwest China. In the summer of 1937, when Japanese troops occupied Peiping, this trickle of youthful pilgrims became a flood. The December 9ers had cast their lot with the forces of Mao Tse-tung.

Three decades later, seventeen years after Mao's seizure of power, another crisis was about to find resolution in a more famous movement, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Once again a deceptive calm preceded the storm. On December 9, 1965, ten thousand well-behaved youths filed into Peking's Great Hall of the People to dutifully commemorate a historic event. Conspicuous among them were the greying heads of a dozen middle-aged bureaucrats whose historic deeds were being extolled. Thirty years before, as university and high school students, they had braved freezing winds and club-swinging police to storm the citadels of the old order. Now, in their late forties and early fifties, they were at the threshold of power. The Mao Tse-tung generation was aging and soon would pass from the scene; the mantle of national leadership would quite possibly fall upon their shoulders. Yet, within months this promising group of loyal functionaries would be attacked by teen-age revolutionists including, no doubt, many of those who had filled the Great Hall to applaud their exploits. Their authority was to be challenged by young rebels just as they had once challenged that of their elders. Accused of opposing Mao, they would be forced from office by militant Red Guards. By late 1966, all but a handful would have disappeared from the public stage.

The saga of this "December 9th generation"—the young intelligentsia drawn into the Communist camp during the anti-Japanese crusade of 1935–37—poses a series of important questions for historians and social scientists. Chinese student



movements invite comparative study. A dominant motif, the age-old theme of young Hotspurs versus cautious elders, frequently recurs in the clash of student nationalists and practitioners of appeasement: "The president, who has taken a stern stand against student demonstrations in recent weeks, was asked to send his army to the borders to fight the Israelis rather than to beat up students in Beirut."<sup>1</sup> The president is Suleiman Franjeh, the students Lebanese, the year 1973, but with the change of only a few nouns it could be Chiang Kai-shek versus the December 9ers in 1935.

Unfortunately, comparative study is in its infancy despite intense interest in student movements during recent years. Student movements have attracted attention because of their importance, their dramatic appeal, and their intimate relationship to a panoply of other issues. Scholars have sought to understand the sources of these phenomena, the composition of student movements, and their impact upon the contemporary political and social order. However, many have interpreted these outbursts as destructive forces—intrusions in the normal pattern of academic life and disruptions of the established political system. For example, Louis S. Feuer has observed that student movements can undermine academic freedom and liberal institutions.

Less studied have been the positive and constructive functions of these movements. In stable democracies, young people often enter political life through student branches of established political parties. In colonial and semicolonial societies, however, students are introduced into the adult political world through participation in revolutionary movements. In the recent history of Burma, Indonesia, Cuba, China, and other countries, national leaders received their political baptism in student politics. Men like Castro, Sukarno, and Mao first became aware of their political talents and experimented with techniques they would later use to mobilize millions of their fellow citizens.

<sup>1</sup>*The Washington Post*, April 13, 1973.