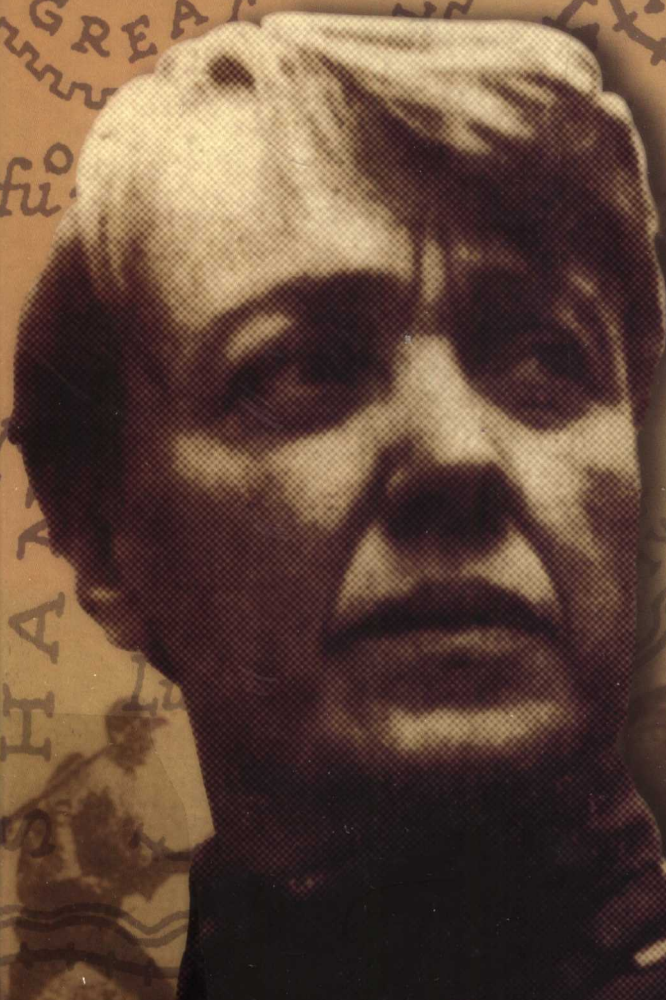


# CHINA FIGHTS BACK



**Agnes Smedley**

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING



# CHINA FIGHTS BACK

*An American Woman  
with the Eighth Route Army*

by

AGNES SMEDLEY

*Author of Chinese Destinies, etc*

With a Map by  
J. F. HORRABIN

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## PREFACE

*Huang Hua*

**I**t 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*

# INTRODUCTION

*by Anna Louise Strong*

THE WAR OF the Chinese people against the Japanese invaders is the fight of one-fifth of the human race for national independence—for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is also a war in which hungry, half-armed Chinese farmers hold the front lines of mankind's forward progress, for you and for me, against an imperialism which threatens Asia, America, the peace of the world.

The Chinese Eighth Route Army, with which Agnes Smedley travelled, is important in this war not alone because it is the reorganized Red Army led by Communists, though that fact shows the new unity of China, bringing under one banner armies that have fought each other for the past ten years. It is important because it brings to China's war of resistance certain methods which are being increasingly adopted by the rest of the Chinese armies—and the Chinese Government—in order to win success. Close co-operation with the Chinese rural population, quick response to their needs and an effective technique for arousing and organizing them against the invader are the chief guarantee of China's ultimate victory against the superior armaments of Japan. More than that, they are the guarantee that after the long war is over, the Chinese people will have won not only independence from foreign invaders but also internal democracy—

the right of the people to rule in their own land.

It is an unbelievably complex struggle. Here is a vast peasant people, the most populous, industrious and patiently enduring of all the peoples of the earth. For generations it has fought with nature at the very frontiers of existence. Creeping deserts of Asia, ravaging floods of gigantic rivers, doomed year by year millions to death by famine, a doom inescapable as long as the primitive tools and the ancient social system survive. Ignorance, superstition and the vastness of a roadless land enslaved them. Landlords, tax-grafters and a host of corrupt bureaucrats and aloof intellectuals ground the toiling folk further into the dust.

The impact of the industrial West broke for a century on this ancient people, bringing new problems, new forms of exploitation, new desires. Foreign imperialisms corrupted native officialdom still further with bribes and armed pressures. Against them successive waves for national independence and internal social change swept the country, penetrating ever deeper into the consciousness of the people, from the Taiping rebellion down to the present day. The Empire fell in 1911, releasing the aspirations of millions of patriotic intellectuals, but adding banditry and civil strife to the peoples' burdens. The patriotic movement of all classes under the joint leadership of the Kuomintang and the Communist parties swept rapidly across China in 1927, creating new hopes and a new government, but these hopes were betrayed during ten years of dissension and civil wars, in which the Chinese bourgeoisie, led by Shanghai bankers, sought to dominate the country, while organizations of workers and farmers were suppressed.

Taking advantage of the internal strife of China, Japanese imperialism attacked the country, seizing Manchuria in 1931, penetrating Jehol and Chahar in the years that followed, holding the Chinese Government in Nanking passive by a combination of bribes and threats. Then Japan entered China proper, seizing Peiping, its ancient capital, striking next at Shanghai, the great port of Central China, advancing



inland to take the government city of Nanking. Millions of people fled before their burning, raping, looting—homeless into the interior of China.

It is the greatest catastrophe of human history, unexampled in the destitution of millions. But under the pressure of this invasion the Chinese people began to awake, to unite, to become a nation. Chiang Kai-shek had already to some extent strengthened the country with roads and railroads; these began even more rapidly to increase. One of the greatest problems was the horde of badly disciplined and even corrupt provincial armies, only one step removed from the bandit gangs which lived by loot. The Central Government had created some twenty-five divisions of relatively effective national troops, but even these were pitifully equipped in comparison with the modern armament of the Japanese. Some of the provincial leaders also had excellent armies—most famous of these being the troops of the Kwangsi generals, responsible for the spectacular victories in Shantung in April 1938. The Chinese common soldiers were heroic in hand-to-hand combat; whole battalions of them died in Shanghai without quitting their posts. But more than the dying of heroes was needed; for a soldier's job is not to die but to win.

A chief factor in promoting the unity of China in this crisis was the attitude of the Communist Party and its Red Army against whom the Nanking Government had carried on civil war for ten years. In 1931 when the Japanese invaded Manchuria, they were the first to call for the cessation of civil strife. Regarding the Japanese invader as the chief enemy of all future progress of the Chinese common people, and the chief threat to their cause on both a national and world-wide scale, they finally agreed, in the interests of anti-Japanese unity, to sacrifice certain policies in the districts they controlled. They also placed their Red Army at the government's disposal; it was reorganized as the Eighth Route Army and sent into Northern Shansi for mobile warfare on the flank and in the rear of the enemy lines.

The Eighth Route Army brings to the battles of China a technique learned at heavy cost through ten years of civil war. They are the world's most experienced guerilla fighters; they have learned how to offset superior armaments by surprise attacks based on close co-operation with the surrounding rural population. Because they themselves were close to the needs of the common people, they were able to arouse and organize those people, giving them hope, desire to resist and a technique in fighting for their homes. This was the chief thing needed by China to win the war.

Agnes Smedley's book is important because it shows the Eighth Route Army in the detailed problems of its first combats in North Shansi, combats which led to new hope in China and to new tactics on all the Chinese fronts. We see the unbelievable poverty and ignorance of the Chinese peasants, and their fear of the warlord armies they have always known. We see the badly organized provincial troops retreating; even this is an advance over the past of China, for they no longer join the victor as they did in civil wars. We see the men of the Eighth Route Army, daring, determined, yet in many ways naive and ignorant like the peasants from whom they sprang. They are overwhelmed by the first sight of a locomotive, they are shocked by their first American movies, and they burn tens of thousands of Japanese yen, not understanding that it might be money. But they know one thing: how to unite the people against the Japanese invader. We see them organize; and their organization is hindered by peasant fears, by jealousies of provincial bureaucrats, by confused allies who use their name while disarming other government armies. We see, in short, all the chaos that was rural China; yet out of it all, success arises through the Eighth Route Army's infinite patience with the common people, loyal devotion to their interests, and ultimate reliance on the honesty of great masses of common folk defending their own homes.

It is a great story. Agnes Smedley brings to its telling a devotion to the common people of China which has continued for many years.

An American writer who all her life has given unstinted energy to championing the rights of oppressed races, she laboured many years for the cause of Hindu Nationalists, and then in 1929 went to China as correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, in the pre-Hitler days when this was one of the famous liberal papers of Europe. From the beginning, however, she gave more time to unpaid work for the oppressed classes of China than she gave to her paid job.

Working with Madame Sun Yat-sen for civil liberties in China, for the rights of workers, of farmers, of Communists, she became for many years almost the one foreigner in Shanghai to whose doors came the inside tales of the Chinese Soviet Districts. Thus she wrote *Chinese Destinies* and *China's Red Army Marches*, which were translated into many foreign languages, as almost the only foreign accounts of the Chinese Communists in those years. They were stories brought to her stealthily, often by night, by people on whose head a price was placed. Her own life was frequently in danger; her very closeness to the Chinese Red Armies prevented her for many years from visiting them, since she was constantly watched.

When at last the chance came to enter the Chinese Soviet Districts, she left everything behind and went, not knowing whether she would be able to return. The war between Japan and China found her there, and at heavy physical cost she decided to accompany the Red Army, reorganized as the Eighth Route Army, to the front. The diary and letters from which the present book is compiled were written hastily on marches at the front, enduring hunger and cold, and with an injured spine. Always, however, she works for the Army to the detriment of her books. When I saw her last in Hankow, in February 1938, she could not do the dozens of articles demanded of her, for her days and nights went to raising funds for medical supplies and warm clothes for peasant volunteers of the North.

Events in China move fast and limit all books. The acid test of war has been removing from the scene the old provincial armies of the

warlord type so bitterly portrayed in this book. Reorganization of all the Chinese armies has been rapidly proceeding, and the methods and technique of the Eighth Route Army are no longer their property alone. Organization of the peasants proceeds on all battlefronts, with the able assistance of Chou En-lai, representative of the Eighth Route Army in Hankow and since February assistant chief of “mass mobilization” for the Military Council of all China. The mobile warfare, so ably developed by the Eighth Route Army, has been combined with excellent positional warfare, which is not so completely outdated as the author implies. The joint product, known as “elastic warfare,” uses mobile attacks to demoralize the enemy’s communications and large-scale attacks to finish him off. How fast this process has advanced is seen already in North China—in fact, on all the Chinese battlefronts.

## FOREWORD

*(From a letter written by Agnes Smedley)*

I'LL KEEP SENDING you my articles. But I want you, when you read them, to realize that I am faced with great problems in my writing. My back is still so badly injured that I work in perpetual pain. And we never remain in one place more than two days at a time. We are always on the march. So I am always walking or in the saddle, and at the end of the day I must start work. Often I must work all night long if we remain but one day, or one night, in that place. I can do no polishing at all. I am so weary and often in such pain that I cannot retype and at times cannot even correct. So please correct my English and have my dispatches retyped. Cut out the repetitions and edit where necessary. Sell them wherever possible and use a part of the proceeds to pay for the typing. If I ever get well, and if we are ever long enough in one place, I can do my own editing.

We are moving through a region where not even ordinary rough paper can be bought. There are no nails, no oil or fat, no salt, no fuel for fire. I shall be writing in the dead of winter without a blaze to warm me. And (need I tell you?) without sufficient food. Our food even now in the autumn is rice, or millet, as a base, with one vegetable. To-day it was turnips, and yesterday it was turnips. Sometimes we have no vegetables at all. There are big armies here and there will be

little even of the essentials. Sugar is simply unheard of.

You there can never conceive of the difficulties under which our army and other Chinese armies operate. The Japanese have trucks, aeroplanes and other efficient means of transport. We have donkeys, horses, a few mules, and men. Almost all of our army walks. No motorized units here!

I have one horse and one mule to carry the possessions of my party. Besides myself there are two newspapermen and three guards. We must carry many of our own things. Henceforth I shall carry not only my attache case and my films from my saddle, but I shall have my typewriter strapped to my back. If my horse or mule should die, I am lost. I have less than one hundred Chinese dollars with me, which I borrowed from a friend, but almost all of it I use to buy corn for my horse and mule each day. Twice a week my party tries to buy a chicken to enrich our diet. My companions have not a cent of money. I am the richest person in the army, with money I have borrowed. And this money I must use to feed my two precious animals, so they can carry our baggage, typewriting paper, films, typewriter ribbons. I have one uniform and one winter coat and set of winter underwear. I have two pairs of shoes. The others in my party have only the shoes on their feet and they are wearing out. I don't know where we can get new shoes for them. Most of our army have no stockings at all.

I am not complaining when I write all this. These are the happiest, most purposeful days of my life. I prefer one bowl of rice a day and this life to all that "civilization" has to offer me. I prefer to work and ride with an injured back that would take six months to heal even if I should stay in bed. All this I prefer. I fear only that my injury will affect my work, has done so already. So I beg of you to help me by editing my manuscript—yet do not make it "literary."

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# I

## FROM YENAN TO SIAN

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*Yenan, Shensi*

*August 19, 1937*

**B**Y THE TIME this reaches you, I will be with the Eighth Route Army (formerly the Chinese Red Army)

which is fighting the Japanese invaders on the north-western front. For months to come a main front of battle will be in this section, in Suiyüan and Chahar Provinces, for it is here that the Japanese have planned to drive a long wedge, a *cordon sanitaire*, between China and Soviet Russia. They have already captured most of Chahar Province bordering Jehol and have been driving deeper into Suiyüan Province. They are using their own troops, a few mercenary "Manchukuo" troops, but chiefly Mongol and Chinese bandits of the North and North-west.

Before this reaches you, you will know that the new and powerful Japanese drive along the railway running from Peiping to Kalgan and Kweihwa has met a serious setback. At Nankow Pass on the Great Wall the Japanese have just lost five thousand dead and wounded. The victory was reported at a great mass meeting here in Yen-an. All important events are reported at such meetings. When Tientsin and Peiping were surrendered there was a big meeting to hear about these defeats. There are daily "extras" in Yen-an, and men from the People's University here can always be seen with home-made maps of China, sitting together with groups of peasants, talking,



explaining. Most peasants up here did not know where Peiping, Tientsin or Shanghai were, or who the Japanese are. They are being educated since the Eighth Route Army has established its base in this vast area in the Northwest.

Every night crowds of men and women jam into the radio station here, listening in silence to news from Nanking, Shanghai and other places. There is no shouting or wild enthusiasm at reports of victory. Instead there is a careful, steady, ceaseless listening, and thorough discussion afterwards.

When the Japanese struck at Lukouchiao, near Peiping, a few weeks ago, a mass meeting was held here and Mao Tsetung,\* the chief speaker, called upon everyone to prepare to go to the front. We prepared and waited for the order to march. So many wanted to go that there were many refused. Someone must remain in the rear, where there is also work to do. Communists and Kuomintang members, students of all kinds from the university, men of all beliefs and views—they are going to the front and will be found in some department of the anti-Japanese Army. Here the national front is a firm reality.

I am going with them, as a correspondent. But I will go on a stretcher, for my spine has been injured. Six weeks ago my horse fell and rolled over on me. We hope that my spine will heal on the way, but until it does I will report the war from my stretcher. Here we have no X-rays, no diathermic apparatus, to examine or cure such injuries. On our march we hope to find such a place. I cannot get well here because we do not even have the means of making plaster casts. So I go with the army on a stretcher. This is a people's war of liberation and even the weakest can do some work, strike some blow, somewhere, some time.

How will we fight in Suiyüan and Chahar? For an answer, consult the interview with Mao Tse-tung, chairman of the anti-Japanese military council here. He gave two interviews on this problem, one to Mr. Edgar Snow,

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\* General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, most widely known Communist in China.