

# The People's War

*J. Epstein*



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# THE PEOPLE'S WAR

by

I. EPSTEIN

*With six full-page woodcuts carved specially*

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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*

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## CHAPTER I

### *This Land is Ours!*

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C HINA'S modern history began when her common people first stood up and said: "This land is ours!"

It has always been a dangerous thing to say.

Back in the eighteen-fifties, after China had suffered her first defeat at the hands of the foreign Powers and had been compelled to cede Hongkong and a number of concessions and to open her coastal ports to foreign trade, the leaders of the great Taiping peasant rebellion had said it to the Manchu imperial Government. Ten years of war and twenty million lives were the forfeit, yet the Mandarins kept the land. Only the aid of foreign guns and foreign volunteers, like Franco's, enabled them to do it.\*

In 1900, the "Boxers" said it, after China had lost, in quick succession, Annam and Tonking to the French, Formosa and Korea to Japan, Tsingtao to the Germans, Port Arthur to the Czar, and Weihaiwei to Great Britain. The "Boxers" were misled, betrayed, and destroyed. The Chinese people are still paying for the perfidy and cowardice of their rulers at that time.

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\* The imperial army was re-armed and re-organized under the direction of General "Chinese" Gordon, who was later to perish at Khartoum. Another prominent "volunteer" of the period was Frederick Townsend Ward, an American.

Western and Japanese trained intellectuals said it throughout the next ten years. They fought and suffered and agitated; they lost their newspapers, their homes, and their heads. There had been revolutions in Russia and Turkey. In China, the party which was later to be called the Kuomintang was formed. In 1911, with the aid of other groups, it overthrew the Manchu dynasty and laid the groundwork for a new stage in Chinese history. (The last emperor and ministers of the dynasty now grace the puppet Court of "Manchukuo".)

The rebellious South-west said it when a traitor President of the Republic signed, in 1915, the *Twenty-one Demands* designed to give Japan virtual overlordship in China. Within a year the President, Yuan Shih-kai, had tried to make himself Emperor, had seen the death-blow given to his hopes, and had died.

1919. For the first time, the students shouted it in the streets. The Treaty of Versailles, fruit of idealism and guardian of self-determination, had turned over to Japan the province of Shantung, previously filched from China by the Germans. A Japanese-bought government acquiesced. (Several members of this Government are now "Ministers" in Japan's puppet show at Peiping.)

Students fell under police bullets in the streets of Peking and were buried in the earth which they had refused to see signed away without their consent. There had been revolutions in Russia, Germany, Austria, and Hungary. In China, industry had developed rapidly during the War, and with it a labour movement. The Chinese Communist Party was founded in 1920.

In literature, young writers revolted against the barren classicism of the past and put down in writing for the first time the everyday speech of the people. With a few thousand characters, anyone could now read. Without being laughed at as a boor ignorant of classical forms, he could write — as he spoke. Anyone could understand a book or newspaper read aloud.

The Washington Conference and the Nine-Power Pact forced Japan to disgorge part of the concessions which she had extorted from China while the Western Powers were fighting each other in Europe. Meanwhile, in North

China, rival militarists battled to decide whether Japan or Great Britain would have first call on the country's resources. The Kuomintang and the Communist Party, both of which had said for the Chinese people, "This land is ours!", were illegal in the territories of these war-lords. (Now Chang Tso-lin, the Japanese-backed war-lord, is dead, killed by his patrons when he waxed too independent. The other, Wu Pei-fu, sits amidst wine-bottles and books of poetry in Peiping, deciding whether or not to head a puppet State for the Japanese.)

The Kuomintang entrenched itself at Canton in the South. The Kuomintang was aggressively nationalist. A party of industrialists and intellectuals, its aims were to break the stranglehold of foreign-dictated tariffs which was crippling Chinese industry, to destroy the feudal landholding system which paralysed modern industrial growth, and to unite the country by driving out the Northern militarists — defenders of feudalism and tools of foreign intrigue.

The immediate aims of the Communists, a workers' and peasants' party, were the same. Like the Kuomintang, they were interested in breaking the hold of the foreign Powers on the country; interested in the development of industry and a stronger working class; interested in the destruction of feudalism and feudal militarism throughout the land.

The Kuomintang led the rising urban middle class. The Communist Party, although organized only a few years before, had demonstrated its ability to lead and to organize the workers in the cities and the peasants in the villages. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, father of the national-revolutionary movement in China, realized that only by the joint action of these classes and of the two parties could the aims of both be attained. In 1923, an alliance between them was concluded. Together they crushed a revolt in Canton which was headed by a feudal Kwangtung militarist and the compradore of the British Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, which backed the rebels as a bulwark against "Communism". (To-day, the militarist, Chen Chiung-ming, is dead — but his followers fought in the invasion of South China as Japanese hirelings. The compradore, Chan Lim-pak, was Japan's first choice for puppet mayor

of conquered Canton.)\*

The Southern alliance went for support to the people:

"This land is ours," said the students, and although British rifles shot them down in Shanghai and Canton, a nation-wide movement continued to say it.

"This land is ours," said the workers, and in a general strike they paralyzed Hongkong and tied up British trade in China's ports.

"This land is ours," said the peasants as they smashed the power of the landlord and usurer in their villages and, gun on shoulder, marched in the revolutionary army against the strongholds of the Northern militarists. The rotten structure of feudal China tottered as they advanced.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen died in the spring of 1925.

Two years after his death the alliance between the parties, between all groups thwarted by the backward state in which China was being kept, broke down. The Kuomintang exchanged the support of the workers and peasants for a bloc with the landlords and compradores. No longer could the common man say that the land was his — for the land was in pawn. The Communists perished under the knives of executioners or retired to mountain fastnesses, where they continued to organize the disinherited.

Then followed ten of the saddest years in China's history. Because the great drive of the Southern armies ended not in the dethronement of feudalism but in a compromise with it, new civil wars between generals were fought. Because the common man continued to rebel, countless armies were thrown against the strongholds of the Communists, whose very existence was regarded as the inspiration for his rebellion.

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\* The first great action of the Chinese working class against the pressure of reactionary feudalism and foreign imperialism, the general strike of 20,000 workers of the Peking-Hankow railway in February 1923, was led by the young Communist Party. The strikers demanded only the right to organize unions. For this, 200 of them, and also a progressive lawyer who had volunteered to defend them in court, were brutally massacred by the police of British-backed Wu Pei-fu, who suppressed the strike. 1923 also saw the organization of the first Peasant Unions in the vicinity of Canton.

From the point of view of the Japanese, the situation was perfect — and they took advantage of it. It was easy for them, in 1931, to wrest Manchuria from a China which had just emerged from a great civil war and was now beginning a new campaign against the Red Republic in Kiangsi — a China estranged, for internal political reasons, from the only other country bordering on Manchuria — the Soviet Union.

From the beginning, the people of Manchuria refused to accept slavery. Although the main armies had withdrawn, tens of thousands of soldiers, hundreds of thousands of armed peasants and workers, and a number of generals continued to resist the conquerors. While in China south of the Great Wall the generals still fought the people, in Manchuria all who opposed the invader were united. The names of the Manchurian militarists who joined the Japanese have vanished in a haze of obloquy. The generals who resisted became national heroes — known throughout the world. Who has forgotten the elusive Ma Chan-shan, his stand on the Nonni River, and the chase he led the Japanese through the Manchurian forests?

No troops moved into Manchuria from the South. The Nanking Government placed its hopes in the League of Nations, of which both China and Japan were members. The League produced only moral lectures.

The Manchurian volunteers fought on alone.

In 1932, Japan struck at Shanghai. Who has forgotten the exploits of the heroic Nineteenth Route Army which held them there for two months?

During the fighting, the Chinese Soviets in Kiangsi published an offer to join forces with any military unit marching against the Japanese.

A Sino-Japanese truce was signed in Shanghai. The Government, confident that the Japanese would now be satisfied with Manchuria, turned to its old pursuit of "internal pacification." New definitions of "treason" were invented. To say that it was possible to fight the Japanese before the suppression of the Communists was treason. To agitate for the return of Manchuria — treason. To collect money for the volunteers — treason.

The anti-Japanese heroes of the Nineteenth Route Army, withdrawn from Shanghai, were sent to Fukien to fight the Red Army. They fought for

a year. Then they rebelled and formed a new government. The revolt did not gather strength and collapsed after Nanking's planes had bombed Foochow. The planes had been bought by popular subscription — for use against Japan.

The Japanese encroached further upon North China. The Shanghai "truce" was followed by the Tangku "truce." Henceforth, a part of the North was to be turned into a "demilitarized zone." That is, Chinese troops were not to be permitted to enter, but Japanese troops, by virtue of that holy script, the Boxer Protocol, could move as they liked along the railways. The Tangku capitulation gave Japanese aircraft the right to survey the territory to see that this unilateral demilitarization was fully carried out.

In the summer of 1935 came another humiliation. The Ho-Umetsu "agreement" was stuffed down the throat of supine China. By its terms, Central Government troops were expelled from the provinces of Hopei and Chahar. No units of China's ruling party, the Kuomintang, could function in these provinces — not even in the great cities of Peiping and Tientsin. Anti-Japanese patriots were to be prosecuted. A regional administration was to be created, employing Japanese "advisors".

The Chinese army was away chasing the Communists on the borders of Tibet.

Japanese officials and the Japanese Press openly discussed the forthcoming separation of five northern provinces — Hopei, Chahar, Shansi, Shantung, and Suiyuan — from the authority of the Central Government. Shansi has coal reserves sufficient, says the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, to last the whole world for a thousand years. Hopei is rich in coal, wheat, and cotton. Chahar and Suiyuan have iron, hides, and wool; Shantung, coal, cotton, and wheat. These provinces, said Japanese theorists, would form an economic bloc with Japan and "Manchukuo" and provide raw materials for the Imperial dream of world conquest.

But the dreams of the Japanese were never to materialize. Then and there, this new encroachment met from the Chinese people the resistance which the Chinese Government had not dared to make. On December 9 and

16, 1935, thousands of Peiping students, braving the carbines of Sung Cheh-yuan's police and the machine-guns which the Japanese threatened to turn against them, paraded through the ancient city with slogans which were to become the watchwords of the National Salvation Movement, then of the Sian revolt, and finally of the United Front for National Resistance. In 1935, however, "Down with Japanese Imperialism" and "Stop Civil War to Fight Japan" were rank treason, and a number of students paid for their boldness with their lives. Japan was officially a "friendly Power" — and to suggest that civil war existed was heresy. The endless campaign against the Red Armies was not civil war but a punitive expedition against "bandits".

Nonetheless, the Peiping demonstrations and the wave of protest they aroused throughout the country checked the immediate plans of the Japanese. To shoot down these boys and girls would have been dangerous (history showed that the entire nation had begun to move after the massacres of students in 1919 and 1925), and the fever into which their patient had suddenly been thrown made the Japanese surgeons pause before undertaking another operation on the body of the Chinese giant. It was necessary first to calm him down and to administer more anaesthetic.

But it was too late for anaesthetics.

Through the students of Peiping, the people of China had said to the Japanese: "This land is ours, and you will not take it without war." To their own Government, they had declared: "This land is ours. You shall not sign it away."

The Peiping "agreement" of June 1935, concluded between China's Minister of War, General Ho Ying-chin, and the commander of the Japanese North China garrison, General Umetsu, was the last instrument of capitulation the Central Government was to sign.

Half a year after the student demonstrations came a real test for China's unity. The military leaders of Canton and Kwangsi had long nursed ambitions of attaining national power. Now they prepared to march against Nanking and to muster support throughout the country by waving the anti-Japanese banner. The Peiping events had shocked and disquieted Japan.

But this new development did not worry her particularly. She sat back and hoped — for civil war.

She even discreetly and in devious ways gave comfort to the incipient rebels of the South, though they marched under anti-Japanese slogans. What matter what they shouted, so long as they fought, and China's painfully accumulated store of armaments and her carefully trained divisions of regulars were wasted in the struggle?

But the students who had cried "Down with Civil War" in the streets of Peiping had not done it, as was charged by the authorities, merely as a veiled attack on the Government.\* They had expressed the deep-rooted conviction of the entire Chinese people that in the face of the Japanese danger all internal strife must stop. And despite its slogans, the Southern adventure did not result in a civil war. On the contrary, the people of Kwangtung utterly refused to support it — and without a struggle the diarchy of years was ended and the South was brought under the administration of the Central Government.

That summer, the Red Army marched into Shansi province with the slogan: "Chinese Must Not Fight Chinese. We Demand an Anti-Japanese National Defence Government!"

At the same time, a significant incident took place when the Japanese sought to extend their feelers to Chengtu, in the Far West. They sent "investigators" to visit the city preparatory to opening a consulate there — something they had insisted on despite the fact that they had no trade in the region and that the Central Government had strenuously objected to their doing so. The investigators never came back. Demonstrators in the streets of Chengtu

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\* At the time of the demonstrations, Professor Tao Hsi-sheng, of the Peiping University, published a statement to the effect that the student upheaval was financed from Moscow. This became a stock joke in Peiping, and the students themselves laughingly claimed that the allegation was highly useful to them — since the printers, long unpaid, who were producing their propaganda materials, agreed to grant them credit after reading it! What no one knew was where the learned professor had obtained the money to pay for the full-page newspaper advertisements in which he made his charges. But a guess may be hazarded on the strength of the fact that, to-day, three years later he is in the camp of Wang Ching-wei and one of the chief proponents of the Japanese brand of "peace in East Asia". History finds its own.



tore them to pieces.

In the autumn, the Japanese organized a mercenary Mongol army to invade the province of Suiyuan. Instead of negotiations, capitulation, and a Chinese withdrawal, they met resistance. Chinese forces, which included Central Government troops, won an important victory at Pailingmiao. The whole country went wild with enthusiasm. "We are not afraid of the Japanese," said the puzzled, matter-of-fact, professional soldiers of the Suiyuan garrison. "But what are we to do with the delegations? Every day more of them come. How are we to feed them? Where are they all from, all these students and workers and women and members of the professions who come with gifts in their hands?"

"This land is ours!" felt the people of North China. "Why should we not pay tribute to those who defend it?" The lesson was not lost on the troops. They had not been bothered with delegations and with volunteer ambulance units when they had fought in the civil wars. No one had called them heroes. They were of the disinherited, and now, for the first time, they too began to feel: "This land, and all these people — are ours."

In Shanghai, Tsingtao, and Tientsin, there occurred a development of tremendous importance. More than a hundred thousand workers in Japanese textile mills walked out in a general strike.\* The demands of the strike were economic, but its background was political. A hundred thousand Chinese workers were demonstrating their solidarity with the fighters in Suiyuan. "Why should we be exploited by the invaders of our country?" was their slogan.

The strike lasted a month. Although the authorities attempted to suppress it, as they did all popular movements at this time, the entire Chinese people recognized it as an event of the greatest national significance. In

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\* Among forward-looking circles in China — the importance of the strike as the first participation of the great mass of the people in the anti-Japanese struggle was immediately recognized. At a round table discussion with a group of six young Chinese journalists in Tientsin during the last days of 1936, which had witnessed the South-western and Sian crises, I asked everyone to reply to the question: "What was the outstanding event of the year in China?" Three of my six friends replied — "the anti-Japanese strikes".