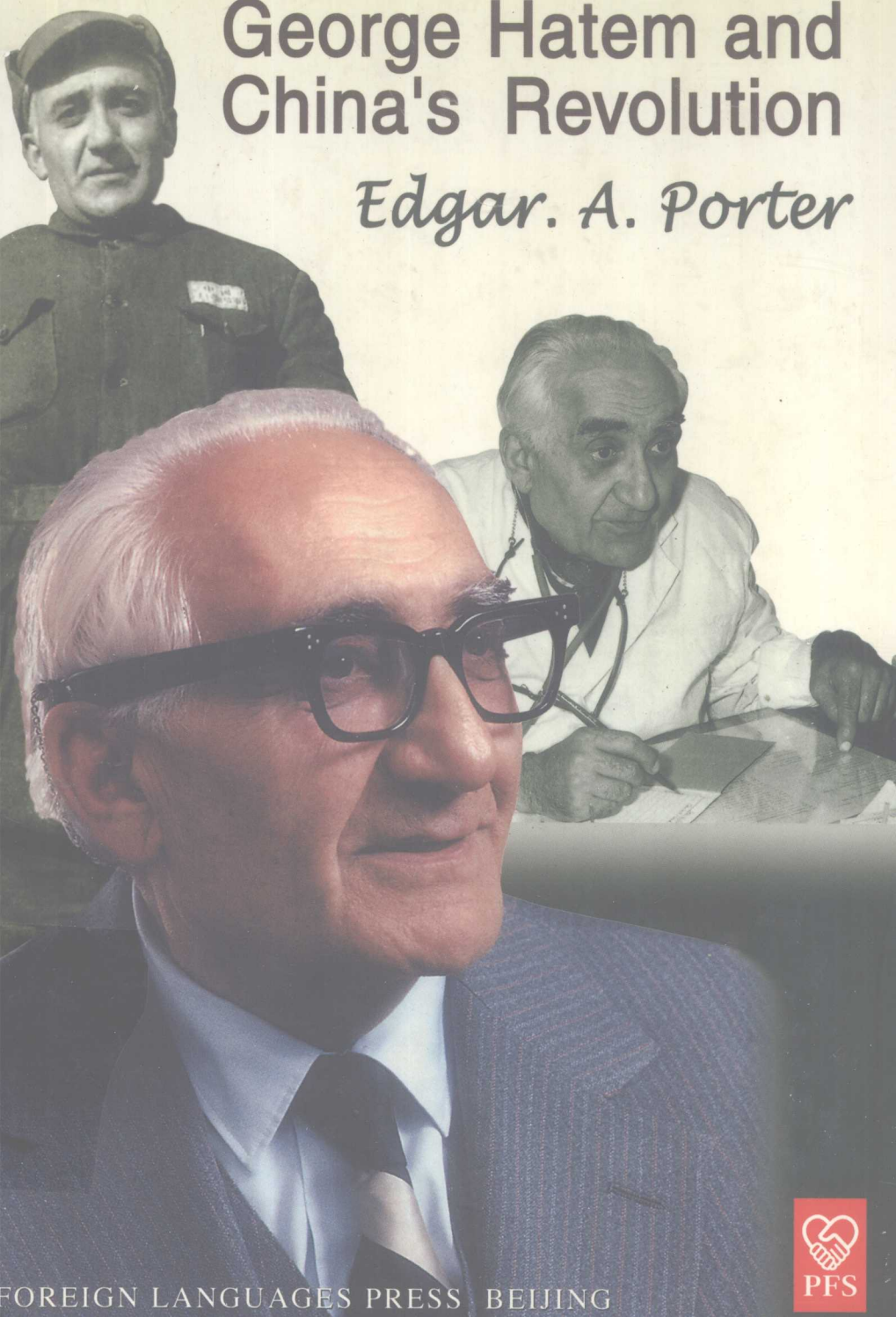


# THE PEOPLE'S DOCTOR

George Hatem and  
China's Revolution

*Edgar. A. Porter*



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING



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AND CHINA'S REVOLUTION

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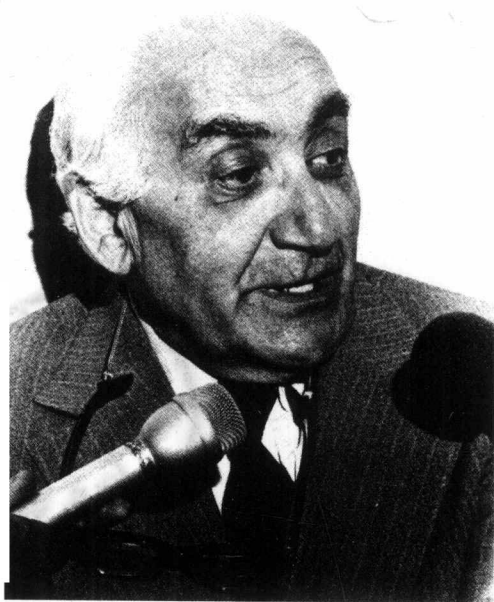
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## PREFACE

*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*



*This book is dedicated to my sons Ron,  
Patrick, and Michael*

The test of a Party member's loyalty to the Party, the revolution and the cause of communism is whether or not he can subordinate his personal interests absolutely and unconditionally to the interests of the Party, whatever the circumstances.

Liu Shaoqi, *How to Be a Good Communist*

Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him: and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.

Luke 15:22-24

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this biography has allowed me the opportunity to meet with a rich cross-section of Americans and Chinese who knew George Hatem as a colleague, friend, or family member. After beginning to research Hatem's life it became clear that some in China were suspicious of an American wandering about, asking detailed questions of a man they universally admired. It was only after two years of research that the Chinese door opened to me, and for this I want to thank Gu Wenfu, Xiong Lei, and Zhao Hong at Xinhua News Agency. They introduced me to Ambassadors Huang Hua, Han Xu (deceased), and Ling Qing and to Madam Wang Guangmei, Chair of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress and widow of former President Liu Shaoqi, all old friends and comrades of George Hatem. After others discovered that government leaders of this stature met with me, interviews with them followed quickly and easily.

John Colling, a long-time friend of George Hatem, provided an important introduction to Hatem's wife, Su Fei, who welcomed me to her home, where she spent several days answering my questions and sharing stories. She also allowed me the opportunity to read through her husband's personal papers. The combination of her detailed description of Dr. Hatem's life and access to his letters and other documents proved crucial to the completion of the biography. I am indebted to Su Fei for her support and for her gracious hospitality.

On the American side, the Hatem families in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Buffalo, New York, welcomed me into their homes and kindly shared their memories and family documents. In Raleigh I am especially grateful to Greg Hatem for his support. I will never forget the day he handed me a box of

letters to and from his uncle Shag dating from the 1920s through the 1980s. He also shared pictures and introduced me to family members and friends. Greg's brothers Joe Pat and Mickey and his mother, Marie, joined Greg in supporting me in my research, and to all the North Carolina Hatems I remain appreciative. In Buffalo, the families of Theresa Hatem Ode, Ernie Hatem, and Martha Hatem Hashem also provided insights and encouragement.

Several colleagues at the University of Hawai'i assisted in various stages of this book. Of special note are Willa Tanabe, Dean of the School of Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Studies, Roger Ames, Director of the Center for Chinese Studies, George Simson, of the Center for Biographical Research, and Frank Tang, professor in the Department of American Studies. Others at the University of Hawai'i who supported this effort are Daniel Kwok, Chair of the Freedom Forum Asian Studies Fellowship Program for Journalists and Mark Jurgensmeyer, former Dean of the School of Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Studies. Several people read all or part of the original manuscript, making valuable suggestions about the text. They include Dawn Anderson, Paul Rausch, Allan Awaya, Deborah Sharkey, Denise Sugiyama, Tian Chenshan, Du Xiaoya, and Robert Valliant. I am especially grateful to Joel Bradshaw for his editorial suggestions and Rikki Scollard for her early encouragement. Travel grants received from the University of Hawai'i Matsunaga Institute for Peace and the Office of Research Relations were crucial in gathering data in the early stages of research.

Outside the university several people offered suggestions on the research and writing of this book. Of special mention are Sun Yizhi, Israel Epstein, Bob Dye, Peggy Porter, Mark Shlacter, and Giovanni Murator, who discovered and shared with me materials on George Hatem's medical school experiences in Geneva. I am especially appreciative for the assistance provided by Marilyn Burlingame, Senior Archives Specialist at the University of Missouri-Kansas City responsible for the Edgar Snow Papers. To all of those in China and the United States who granted me interviews I am especially grateful.

Finally, I want to thank my wife Ran Ying and my three sons Michael, Patrick, and Ron for their encouragement and patience. It is to the boys that this book is dedicated.

## INTRODUCTION

**D**uring his lifetime, Shafick George Hatem would be identified as a Jew, a Muslim, a Turk, an American, a New Zealander, a Russian, a Lebanese, an Iranian, a Uighur, and a Canadian. His family called him Shafick, some friends called him Shag, others called him George, and people throughout the world called him Dr. Ma. Raised in the Maronite Catholic Church in the United States, he died surrounded by his Communist comrades in China. He changed his name, his religion, his politics, and his nationality when it suited him. Or, more to the point, when it suited China's Communist party, for this American-born son of immigrants, never rooted to any land but comfortable in many, adopted China and its Communist party in his mid twenties and showed absolute allegiance to them both for the rest of his life.

In 1934, at age twenty-four, Hatem transported underground Party members around Shanghai. In 1936, he joined the Red Army at the end of the Long March. In 1937, he became the first Westerner to join the Chinese Communist party. He entered Beijing with the People's Liberation Army in 1949 as part of the conquering Communist force and soon afterward became the first foreigner granted Chinese citizenship in the People's Republic. He led the way in China's struggle against venereal disease and leprosy and joined the political struggles of modern China up until his death in 1988.

As a youth, Hatem was recognized as an intelligent yet unruly boy. His family loved and nourished him but eventually sent him away to reform school, then to a surrogate family thousands of miles from home. Hatem studied for a medical career, not because he wanted to, but only to fulfill the wishes of

his parents. As a college student, he was selfish, traveling around the world at his family's expense while misleading them with frequent hollow promises that he would return to them soon. He constantly pleaded for money. Yet after moving to China in his early twenties, this same carefree young man ultimately broke from his self-indulgent lifestyle to submerge himself in a dangerous political movement demanding uncompromising discipline and forbearance. This is the story of both men. It shows how one evolved into the other through a mix of historical circumstance, blind luck, and humanitarian ideals.

Few, if any, foreigners have come as close to seeing China as intimately as Shafick George Hatem/Ma Haide without also losing the ability to integrate back into their own culture with the ease he displayed. Few, if any, foreigners have been accepted into Chinese society as readily and appreciatively as he was. Certainly none have had such intimate access to some of the most powerful figures of twentieth-century China as Hatem did. His story stands alone in the history of modern China.

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# I

## FAMILY AND CHURCH

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**D**r. Sun yat Sen, as the leader of the “Juokmoun Jow Foke Houn Hou,” which in English means “Down with the Manchus,” in a speech in the Chinese Theatre in New York last April, predicted the success of the Chinese revolution.

*New York Times*, October 15, 1911

Shafick George Hatem was born in America but raised in the tradition of the Maronite Catholics of Lebanon, a people isolated from their Islamic neighbors by their religious heritage and steeped in a hard life close to the soil.<sup>1</sup> Above Beirut lies the Shuf Mountain village of Hamana, a Maronite stronghold whose roots date to the eighth century. In 1902, a Lebanese labor contractor working for American textile manufacturers entered Hamana looking for strong young men to work the mills of Lawrence, Massachusetts. He promised free room and board in return for five years of labor. When the contract expired, the young immigrants could seek regular wages in the mill or look for other employment. One man who accepted this offer was George Hatem’s father, twenty-six-year-old Nahoum Salaama Hatem.

Nahoum worked three years in the mills, then escaped the rest of his five-year contract by joining the U.S. Army in the summer of 1905. However, he did not remain a soldier for long. By September he was discharged from his regi-