

# I. EPSTEIN

The book cover features a black and white photograph of a man in a military-style uniform in the foreground, looking slightly to the right with a cigarette in his mouth. In the background, a group of about 15 men in various styles of jackets and suits are standing in a line outdoors. The title 'I VISIT YENAN' is printed in large, bold, orange letters at the bottom of the cover.

# I VISIT YENAN

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING

# I VISIT YENAN

*Eye Witness Account of the Communist-led  
Liberated Areas in North-West China*

by

**Israel Epstein**

Foreign Languages Press

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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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PART I  
DISPATCHES FROM YENAN



## 1

**The Anti-Communist Fortress of Sian***May 28, 1944.*

**S**ian, where our party of foreign press correspondents proceeding to the Chinese Communist areas—the first in five years—has been for the past three days, is an important city for the future of China and the future of the Allied continental counter-offensive in Asia—all the more important now that opening of the India Road seems imminent (opened recently—*Ed.*), The Honan campaign has made clear China's desperate need for internal unity, the country's highest governing body\* is meeting in Chungking, and a Communist plenipotentiary sits in the capital waiting to know if its decisions will make negotiations possible. The fact that major political decisions can come from Chungking only does not make Sian less of a key point because Sian is a great political and military fortress which the government has been building up since 1937 for a "settlement of the Communist issue" and whether the Central Government's policy is for unity or for civil war it is Sian which will have to give effect to it.

Being a politico-military fortress, Sian looks and feels like one. One's movements are not one's private business. Everything is traced, checked and counter-checked. Chungking by comparison is liberal in the extreme and the visitor's first sense of exhilaration at leaving the hot depressing dampness of the Yangtze valley for the sun-drenched Arizona-like Shensi plateau, which is invigoratingly cool as soon as the sun goes down, is almost immediately succeeded by a feeling that one is a piece on a chessboard with movements strictly circumscribed by fixed rules and generally not subject to one's own

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\*The Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang, the party holding exclusive power in China, was meeting in Chungking. The Communist delegate was Lin Chu-han, Chairman of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region Government at Yen-an and Member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party.

volition.

The welcome the press party received was royal. We were wined and dined daily and the official suite attached to us to guide and make us comfortable made us feel like visiting potentates. However, since our purpose was not social, we spent intervals between banquets, seeing key men and key places. General Hu Chung-nan is not here—*after* the Japanese had completed their occupation of the Peiping-Hankow Railway he moved to the front with some of his anti-Communist blockade troops—which are seeing action for the first time in this war—to check their advance in the direction of his own stronghold in Shensi. But his Chief of Staff, Major General Lo Tse-kai, who assured us that he spoke in Hu Chung-nan's name, declared flatly that the Communist-led Eighth Route Army had never fought the Japanese since the war began, that they have done nothing except impede and attack the Central troops, that all guerillas in Shansi, Hopei and Shantung really belong to the Kuomintang, and that if the Chungking talks achieve any sort of settlement, "we don't hope they will help us fight the Japanese because this is too much to expect. We only hope that they do not interfere with us."

Asked why the *Domei Agency* of Tokyo is constantly reporting Japanese battles with the Communists, General Lo Tse-kai snapped, "if you believe *Domei*, why is America fighting Japan?" Answering a question put by a correspondent of the official *Chinese News Agency*, the General said that armies in this sector never received American lend-lease equipment. This may be technically true but at the very moment he was speaking, planes of the Chinese-American composite wing were roaring overhead *en route* to the Honan front.

Besides the routine visit to the Military Academy where 5,000 cadets were being efficiently instructed in various branches of military science, the Sian authorities showed us their "Labour Camp" for the re-conversion of political malcontents to fit them for return to law-abiding existence in accordance with rigorous local standards. The camp is headed by the Director of the Shensi Kuomintang Headquarters, Ku Cheng-ting, German-educated brother of the German-educated Ku Cheng-kang, national Minister for Social Affairs, and Ku Cheng-lun, Governor of Kansu and former Commander-in-

Chief of the Chinese Gendarmerie. This concentration camp is a somewhat milder Dachau\*, a model of superhuman Spartanism scrubbed to superhuman cleanliness for our visit. We were told that the "course" was of two years—one year political, one year vocational—but senior inmates, close to "graduation" who were asked to come to tea with us said that some of them had been there for four years.

Information regarding the camp is hard to come by. A whole group of trusties (trusted inmates of the camp) were brought by the authorities to tea told us that they themselves and all other inmates had come voluntarily because they felt that after leaving the Communist areas or party they needed to have their thoughts straightened before becoming normal citizens again. But they were immediately contradicted by the speech of the Camp's commanding officer who said that while one-third of the students had come voluntarily the remainder were sent to the camp for infraction of laws. Later other campers said that they had been sent in from various places of detention for rehabilitation following "confession." Unofficial people in Sian—both foreign and Chinese—intimated that the camp consists exclusively of confesseees or unimportant people who have not yet confessed (the bulk of political prisoners being in secret police jails) and laughed heartily at the suggestion of voluntary entry.

The inmates also told us many stories regarding the Communist areas which, while varying considerably in detail, all contained certain common points. These will be sent later as correspondents were told before leaving Chungking that they would not be allowed to send Communist statements without appropriate refutation and we are all storing up refutations to include in messages from Yen-an.

It would take a long time to reach any detailed conclusion about this "Labour Camp." All I can add to facts given above is that while trusties exhib-

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\*Dachau is the worst of the Nazi torture camps for internal political opponents. The comparison with Dachau was the only way the writer could get a suggestion of the real nature of the Sian camp past the Kuomintang censor—who was fortunately not conversant with the names of German prisons.

ited remarkable self-possession, other inmates whom we, with accompanying officials, buttonholed on the drill ground and other places blanched and trembled when approached. A correspondent asked one boy who has been interned ever since the New Fourth Army incident in 1940 whether there are many Communists in the Camp. The boy answered "a few." The official broke in: "What, you mean they are still Communists?" The boy quavered: "Most of them, of course have relented."

This is Sian. Whatever decisions are taken in Chungking, Sian will be required to carry them out. Much—perhaps everything—depends upon whether it is this Sian or a different one.

## 2

**Tungkwan—  
Gateway to Northwest China**

*May 29, 1944.*

**T**ungkwan, which stands at the elbow of the Yellow River and the meeting point of frontiers of three provinces—Shensi, Honan and Shansi—is one of the most important strategic points in all China. As such it possesses the strongest fortifications in the country and is manned by what is perhaps China's best-equipped division. Although it has faced the Japanese across a thousand yard wide river for six years, nothing has happened here during this time except intermittent artillery bombardment. Wherefore the fortress became a show-place where visitors such as Wendel Willkie and the British Parliamentary Mission could—if they were lucky—actually see Japanese soldiers on the opposite bank, and enjoy the thrill of witnessing realistic battle manoeuvres of the garrison within sight and sound of the enemy. The recent Honan campaign, however, changed the whole situation. The enemy is now not only across the river but a little more than a day's march away on the Tungkwan side. This has made Tungkwan the starting point for counter-attack, the guardian corridor, through which all reinforcements are bound to come and a possible base for diversionary sorties across the river, preventing the Japanese forces crossing into Honan from southeast Shansi, which is the chief source of enemy troops operating against Loyang and other points west of the Peiping-Hankow Railway.

We arrived at Tungkwan by a highway winding perilously through loess cliffs. We came this way in order to keep out of sight of nearby Japanese batteries of whose existence we were forcibly reminded when on entering the city gate we found two unexploded 280 mm—eleven inch—shells which had come over two days before from great howitzers installed behind Fen Ling Tu.

English-speaking Captain Chiang Wei-kuo, the second son of the Generalissimo, who had just returned to his permanent station here following a brief tour of training under Stilwell in India, welcomed us and told us that small groups of the enemy had made nine recent attempts to cross the river mainly along the northern leg. This suggested that they are exploring possibilities of outflanking Tungkwang by cutting the railway to Sian while investing it from the east and south, as well as north. Chinese patrols also crossed to the other bank last week, and succeeded in bringing back one Japanese prisoner. However, there is no evidence that these activities are anything more than exploratory at this stage. What both Chiang and his divisional commander told us, and which was later confirmed, was that there were only 60 Japanese directly opposite the fortress with some 5,000 a little way behind, and, furthermore, that these forces were not only not increased during the Honan campaign but other troops which might have formed their immediate reserves were transferred away to Honan and along other routes.\* The only circumstance that remained puzzling was why the Tungkwang garrison did not take advantage of this position while it lasted to clean up this spearhead, at least gaining a temporary footing on the Shensi bank of the Yellow River, averting an immediate threat of outflanking from the west, and making the Japanese more wary about sending more troops to the critical Honan front.

The major surprise of our half-day visit to Tungkwang was the sudden appearance of General Hu Chung-nan, commanding all Chinese forces in Shensi, and therefore a key man of Kuomintang-Communist balance as well as a person directly responsible for the Yellow River defence. Hu Chung-nan is notoriously inaccessible to visitors, and an American Embassy representative who has been in Sian for more than a year has never yet seen him. Now Hu travelled three and a half hours in a little Soviet-made staff car, over roads under Japanese airplane observation, to come to greet the Press party. He said he was

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\*Some of them were sent to Sinkiang (Chinese Turkestan) thousands of miles to the West where they busied themselves in suppressing a national minority (the Kazakhs) and got into a conflict with Outer Mongolian forces.

particularly happy to meet us only a thousand yards from the enemy, but declined to answer a question regarding the effect of a possible Government-Communist understanding upon this front after the representative of the Chungking Ministry of Information, who was accompanying us, broke in to say that this question had already been answered by General Lo Tse-kal in Sian. Regarding military operations, Hu indicated that the Chinese-American Composite Wing, which is taking an active part, promised cheering news within a week. Then he excused himself.

The only net result of the meeting was that we have seen and talked to Hu Chung-nan, who is usually as invisible as he is important. This in itself is a surprising experience. Instead of the stiff regular army martinet that everybody had imagined, Hu turned out to be a small, rather mincing, delicate featured man of about forty, with Bohemian hair growing down over his collar. His face, Mediterranean rather than Chinese, made the General's appearance like that of a patrician of Rome at its nadir. His whole figure expressed extreme self-consciousness, combined with nervous energy and ambition. The tour of Tungkwan's main fortifications as well as the most forward outworks revealed that they are strong and in good repair, but the fortress is certainly not in a state of alarm. The garrison was in quarters at some distance away and the newest magazines in rest rooms behind action stations were dated 1942.