

# MY CHINA YEARS



Helen Foster Snow

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A MEMOIR BY  
Helen Foster Snow

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BY HELEN FOSTER SNOW

My China Years

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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*

To  
G. L. and Sheril Foster Bischoff



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks go to the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in California, custodian of my files on the years I spent in China, a controversial period in the history of that great nation for which my historical notes constitute often the only contemporary written record; and to G. L. and Sheril Foster Bischoff of Costa Mesa, California, who handle my Literary Trust.

Most particularly, I am grateful to Betsy Boyd Cenedella, who undertook the difficult task of editing the manuscript of *My China Years*, and accomplished it expertly.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

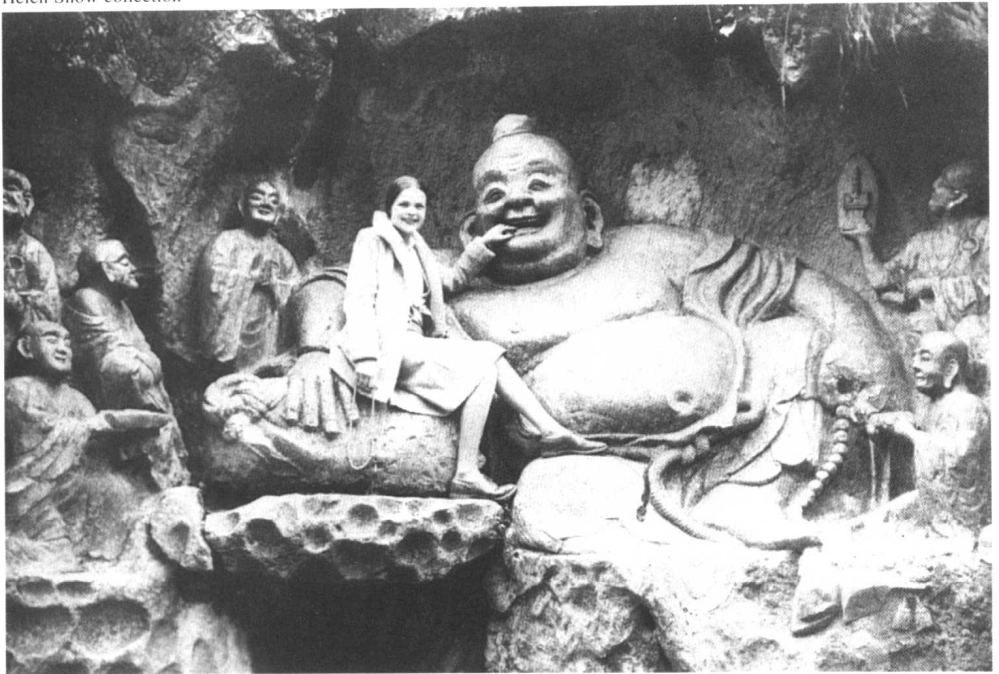
This book, like my other books on China, uses the Wade-Giles system for spelling Chinese terms and places. Wade-Giles was in general use from the nineteenth century until 1979, when the Chinese government introduced a new system of romanization called *pinyin*, which is in process of being adopted in foreign countries. For example, my favorite province of Shensi (in Wade-Giles spelling) is spelled Shaanxi in *pinyin*, while the neighboring province of Shansi is spelled Shanxi. A key to *pinyin* will be found in the back of the book.

The dialogue in this volume is based on memory—mine was known as phenomenal until recently—and I jotted down many of these conversations years ago. I have also drawn on six volumes of notes culled from my 1930s files before I sent the Nym Wales Collection to the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, California (Nym Wales was my pen name). It has turned out that my historical collection is a unique source, even to the Chinese, for the details of various incidents and situations. If for no other reason, I'm glad I dragged those forty boxes halfway around the world.

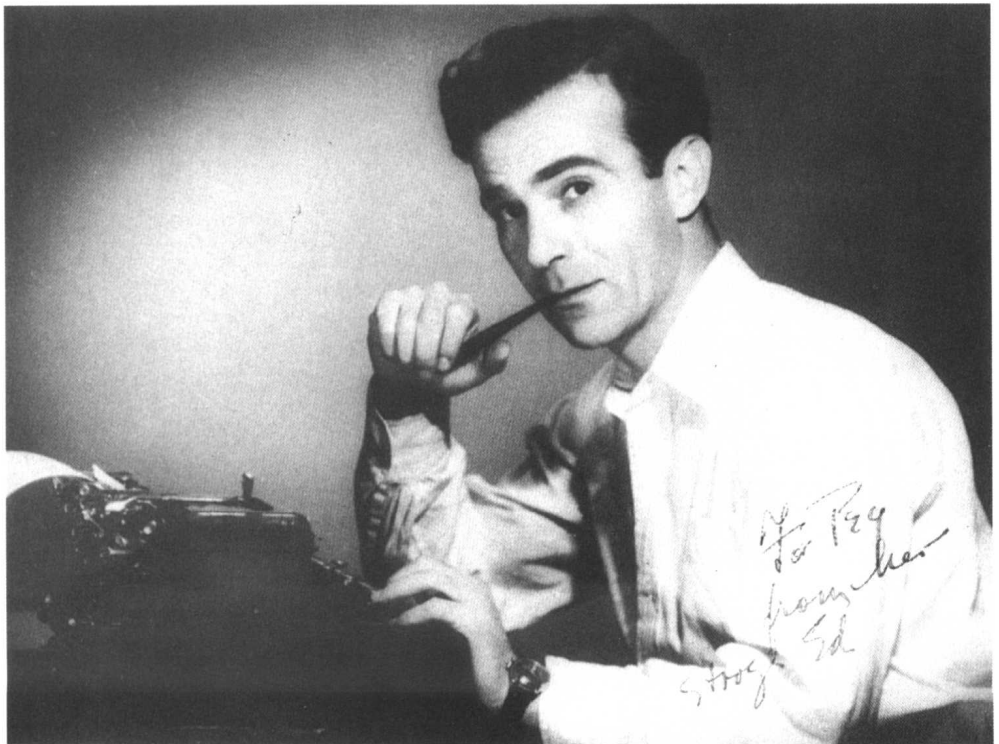


Before I left the United States for China, I sat for a formal portrait.

Helen Snow collection



*Above:* In the "golden, glamorous Orient," with the statue of the Laughing Buddha in Hangchow, 1931.  
*Below:* "For Peg from her stooge Ed" reads the inscription on the first picture of himself Edgar Snow gave me. "Peg" was one of my nicknames.





Photograph by Edgar Snow, from the Helen Snow collection

*"Ding hao!"*

Helen Snow collection



The ministrations of massage amah Mei were relaxing after a hard day's work.



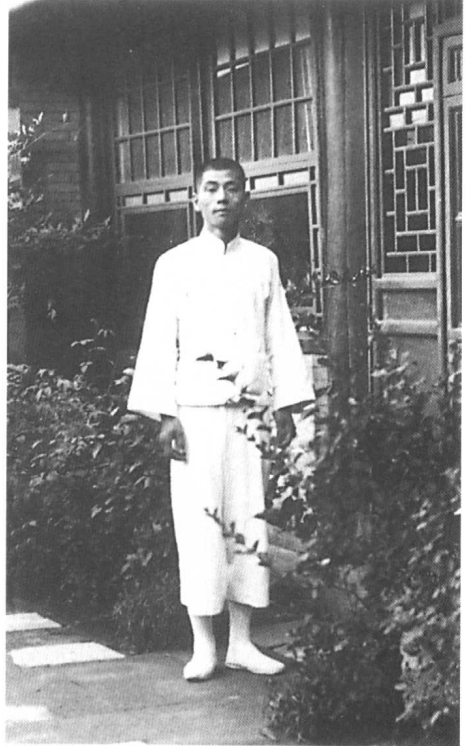
On the eve of our wedding,  
December 1932

Photograph by Sanzetti, Shanghai, from  
the Helen Snow collection

Honeymoon shuffleboard on  
the *Canada Maru*, January  
1933, wearing the red-white-  
and-blue scarf which was to  
see a lot of action



Helen Snow collection



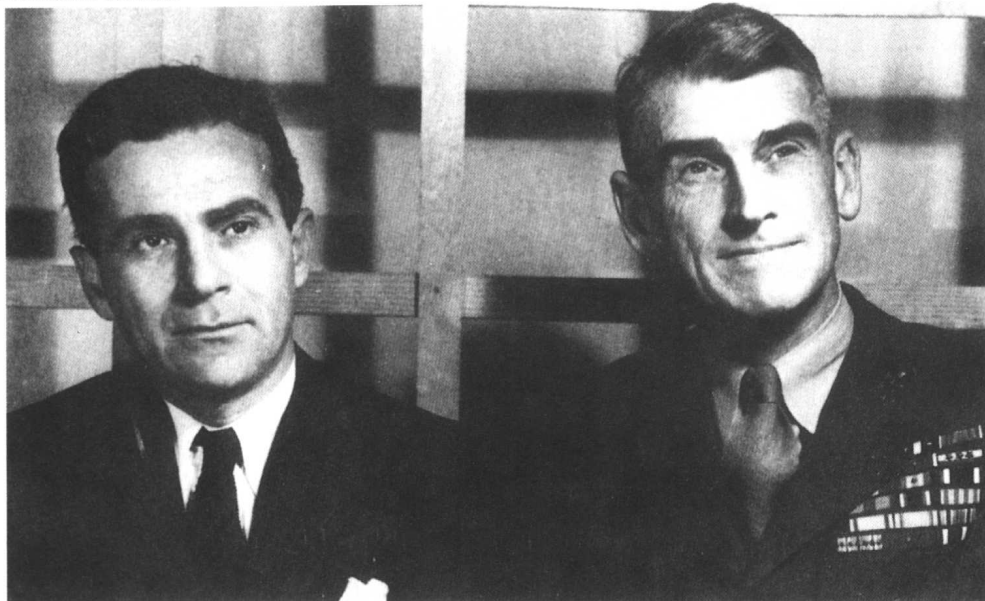
*Above left:* Teilhard de Chardin snapped this picture with my camera, by the old Jesuit astrolabe atop Peking's Tartar Wall.

*Above right:* Former rickshaman Shen I-pei, Number 1 boy at our first home in Peking.

*Below:* At home in Hait'ien, relaxing in beach pajamas and kimono with our greyhound, Gobi



Helen Snow collection



Above: Edgar Snow with Evans Carlson, whose World War II Marine Raiders served to put the term *gung ho* into the English language

Helen Snow collection



Left: With visiting author Pearl Buck.

Right: Our servant Ch'en with Gobi at No.13 K'uei Chia Ch'ang in Peking



Photograph © Helen Foster Snow





Among the prime movers of the December 9th student movement were: (*above left*) Chang Chao-lin, in student gown and Western hat; (*above right*) David Yui, in uniform in Yanan; (*below*) plotting strategy, Constance Chang at left, Huang Hua and Ch'en Han-p'o in goggles helmets, unidentified woman at right



Photograph © Helen Foster Snow