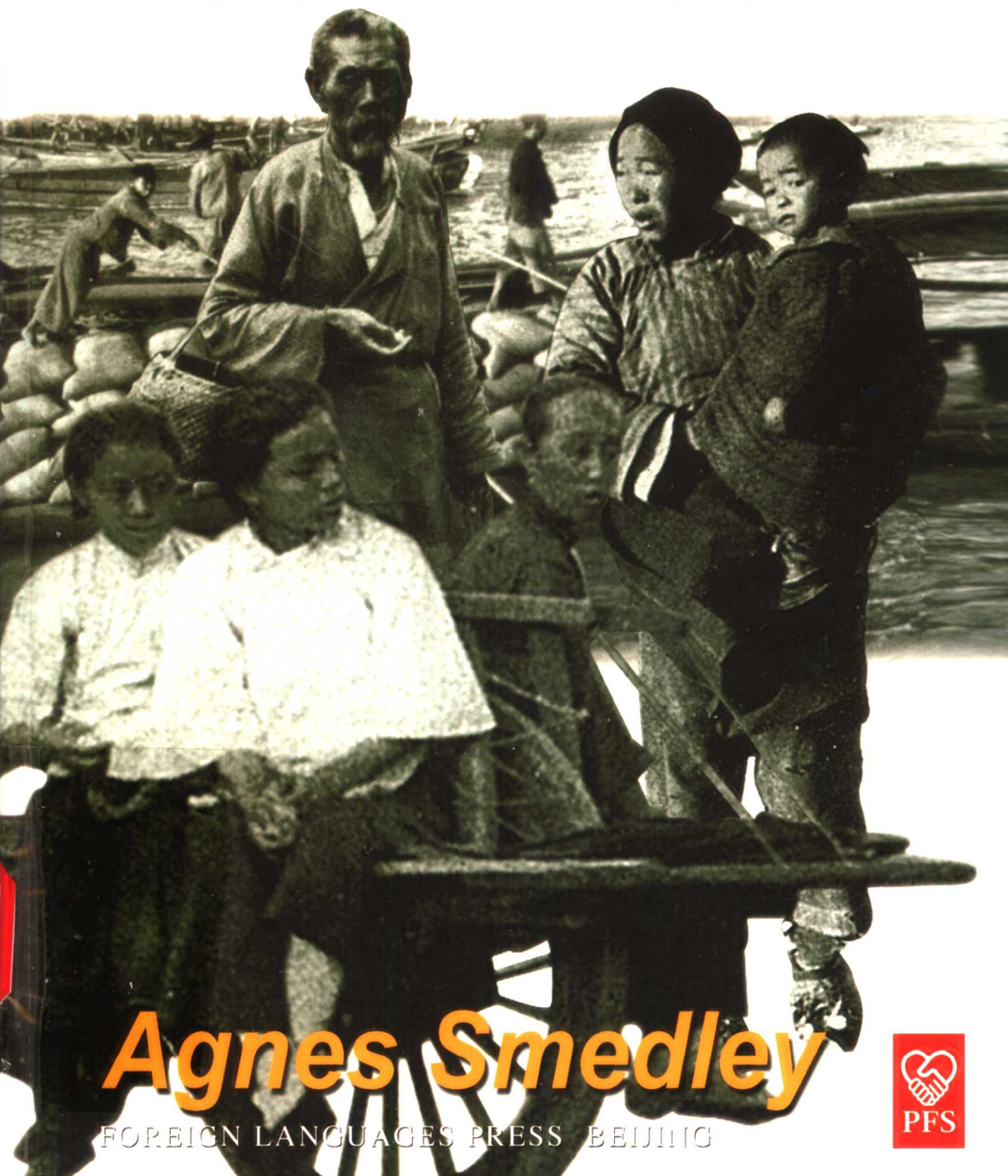


Chinese Destinies



Agnes Smedley

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CHINESE DESTINIES

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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

CONTENTS

A CHINESE SON REBELS	1
HSU MEI-LING	7
A MOVING PICTURE OF SHANGHAI	12
PEASANTS AND LORDS IN CHINA	23
SHAN-FEI, COMMUNIST	31
THE BANDIT	38
THE DEDICATED	60
"WE ARE ALL POOR!"	79
THE LIVING DEAD	85
THE FOREIGNER IN CHINA	96
CONTRASTS	102
THE REVOLT OF THE HUNAN MINERS	106
MOSQUITOES TURNED GUERILLA WARRIORS	121
THE STORY OF KWEI CHU	129

“SCORN MONEY AND FEAR NOT DEATH”	141
A RED ARMY	148
AMONG THE PEASANTS OF KWANGTUNG	155
MACAO—“PEARL OF THE ORIENT”	168
SOME WOMEN OF MUKDEN	176
DEMONSTRATION!	182
LESS THAN THE DUST	191
THE FIVE YEARS	196
“PATHS OF GLORY—”	208
THE MARTYR’S WIDOW	212
CANTON ATMOSPHERE	227
SOLDIERS	236
HUMAN TARGETS	247
NANKING	252
THE FALL OF SHANGPO	260
THE SONG OF SUFFERING	279

ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>following page</i>
SOOCHOW CREEK, SHANGHAI	20
ROLLING A HANK OF RAW SILK	108
IN A SHANGHAI SPINNING MILL	108
WHARF COOLIES	108
A TAILOR'S APPRENTICE	108
CORPSES LEFT IN HANKOW STREETS	118
A TEASHOP	118
TAKING CHICKENS TO MARKET	118
COOLIES HITCHED TO A HEAVY LOAD	118
TAKING VEGETABLES TO MARKET	160
A PEASANT FAMILY	160
PEASANTS ACTING AS BOATMEN	160
REELING SILK COCOONS BY HAND	160

ARRESTS	188
AN OLD MAN	188
A 16-YEAR-OLD RICKSHA COOLIE	188
A STREET WHERE WORKERS LIVE	188
CHILDREN'S DORMITORIES	228
A SICK CHILD WORKER LEFT TO DIE	228
HOT TEA AND NOODLES	238
COOLIES HARNESSSED TO HEAVY ROLLERS	238
HOUSEBOATS	238
FACTORY WOMEN ON THEIR WAY TO WORK	238
HOUSES OF THE HUMBLE	254
PEASANT PLOUGHING	254
A CHILD HARVESTING RICE	254
HUSKING RICE IN KIANGSU	254

A CHINESE SON REBELS

WE entered the old-style Shantung restaurant through the kitchen, as is the custom, because the kitchen is in front so that guests may look at the food being cooked on the earthen stoves. For such is the practise in a land where cooking is an art. Passing through into a large dining room, we were greeted by a yell. It was not just a cry, or a call, or a shout, but a yell out of the open, full throat of a husky waiter. It was a yell of welcome: "Three guests have arrived!" For such is also the custom of restaurants frequented by the people in Manchuria.

The yell was taken up by a waiter on the floor above, just as we arrived there. We entered one of the many private dining rooms separated one from the other by board partitions reaching half way to the ceiling. Just as the waiter handed us hot steaming towels with which to wipe our hands, other guests arrived, and their mutual greetings almost set the house a-tremble. For when Shantung peasants in Manchuria greet one another, they leave nothing to the imagination. If you are welcome, they let you know it. They don't just clasp their hands together and give that gentle, graceful bow that the more elegant Chinese do. Nor are they quiet. Nor do they think anything of waving an arm, or even two, and shouting so that all within ear-shot may hear:

"Hello, Shen Po-ying!" Or, "Good day, Shen Po-ying—you're in town

again with your pockets full of money!" And when they talk to each other, they never use the word "ching", which means "please", but they speak right out, like men, without using any frills. And they are especially frank and open-hearted after having sold a load of wheat or soya beans. Then they can afford to go to a restaurant and spend as much as a dollar for a dinner, drink hot wine, compare their troubles, and boast of their newly-acquired wealth in their adopted country.

A new party arrived, preceded by yells of welcome from the waiters, and we counted their feet as they passed before the half curtain across our door—six pairs of black, felt-clad feet, the black padded breeches bound closely about the ankles, the wool-lined coat above, swaying as they walked. They took the adjoining room, and their conversation, in rough Shantung dialect, was too loud to be regarded as private.

First, they began to gossip of the year's crops; then the difficulties of transportation on carts over the bad roads; and the price of products.

"Don't stand on ceremony!" one voice finally said to the others, and we knew that the big open bronze samovar, filled with cooking food, was being placed in the middle of the large round table, and that soon they would dig in with their chop sticks from all sides.

"The food is delicious," a voice remarked after a silence. "If we should live a hundred years, we could find such food only in the city."

"We peasants must be careful when we come to the city," another spoke up. "All the city people are cheats and deceivers."

"It's better to ask a policeman."

"No—policemen are cheats and deceivers, too. They are worse than the others."

Then one of them began to complain of his private troubles.

"I am trying to get my son married," he began. "He is twenty years old, but he refused to marry. Look at him—I sent him to a city school for three years, and he comes back with stylish ideas. He wants to go to school some more. I said to him, and I say to you, in these stylish city schools they only play and sing and draw pictures and do what they call exercise. I told him that

a peasant does not need to know how to draw pictures, neither does he sing all day. He said to me, 'It is good to have a beautiful spirit in a healthy body'—such silly things he has learned to say."

There was a roar of laughter from the table.

"I said to him, and I say to you, I have made money—enough to last my lifetime. What does he want to read books for, when I have enough money? He must get married and work and have children. But he said no, he would rather die than get married. Now what would you do?"

"I would give him a clout over the head," one peasant advised.

The father's voice was a bit boastful and masterful: "I did give him a clout over the head! Many of them! He could hardly walk for a week!"

A wave of satisfied laughter passed about the table again.

"That's the way!" someone said.

The father was silent for a time. Then he continued, in a worried, somewhat shamed voice.

"But clouts over the head didn't help. He has become new style with his wish to read books. He says he doesn't *know the girl! Know her!* The very girl he must marry! I thought I would clout him again for such disrespect, but it is no use. So I called all the old men from the village to give him good counsel. They came and gave him good advice. 'Marry,' they said, 'don't disobey your father. The girl's family is already angry and the girl is shamed. Her life is ruined if you don't marry her. And your father's name will be shamed.' But no. He just said to them, 'But what *about me?* Why should *my* father ruin *my* life?' Such a son I have, who has no respect even for the wisdom of men three times older than he is!

"I finally said to him, 'you cannot eat food from my hands if you don't get married!' But he replied that then I would have no son at all, for he would die of hunger. Now I see that I made a mistake about the food—a bad mistake. I should not have mentioned it, for it made him think up mischief. He loafed about for a week, and one day he came to me and said: 'Give me money to go and study, or I will not eat. From New Year's Day I will begin and starve to death.' New Year's will come soon, when we are to feast—and at this time my

son threatens to begin starving! What would you do?"

There was a long silence from the peasants as they considered this serious move on the part of a son. It was not a new problem to them, but the tactics seemed new. All about them sons were disobeying, or trying to disobey their parents, adopting all sorts of open and underhanded methods.

At last a voice spoke: "My neighbor has a son, too, like that. He said he would not marry. His father told him that unless he married, he would kill him or kill himself. And now the son has run away and has sent back a letter saying he will never come home."

"My neighbor," another voice began—and one wondered if "my neighbor" did not mean himself—"beat his son until he agreed to marry. Then when all the wedding guests were there, and had paid their presents to the parents for the couple, this boy disappeared in the crowd! It has been weeks and they don't know where he is."

"There are many kinds of disgrace," still another began. "My son obeyed me without a word, and made preparations to get married. But right before all the relatives and guests, when he saw his bride's face for the first time, he began to weep like a baby. He cried out, right before everybody, that she was ugly! We could not make him stop crying for a long time. Had it not been his wedding day, I would have thrashed him within an inch of his life."

From across the partition came the sound of two people clearing their throats with a loud, rasping noise, as if trying to keep from laughing in the face of a suffering father. But the father faced with the prospect of a hunger-striking son on New Year's Day seemed so deeply engrossed with his own troubles that he heard little else. He complained bitterly:

"I have always done honor to the gods, and prayed for good children. But look what I have got! I got just this one son—and see what kind he is! I have no virtue! I must have done some great evil in a former life, and in my next life I may even be born a dog or a goat. Oh, if I could only see my son married and his grandsons about my knees! But he is stubborn like a mule. If I beat him he will run away. If I don't beat him, he won't marry. If I don't give him money to go to a stylish school, he will starve to death before my eyes, and if I do give

it he will not marry. I am a miserable man."

"All sons are disobedient these days," a rough voice comforted him. "It is different than when we were young, when we honored our parents as sons should. But today our sons pretend to have ideas of their own. When they go to these new schools they get bad ideas. One of my three sons has even asked me why I take half of the crop from my tenants. Now I have three tenants and they pay me the rent that other tenants must pay. But my own son, who shares in this money, says to me, 'Why should we own more land than others, and why do we take half of the crop as rent?' he says. He says we squeeze the life from the poor. He called this a new word like 'exploitation'. I said to him, 'Who are you still with milk in your mouth talking to your father? Where did you get false ideas and what is this new word you are blowing about?' But when he began to talk my other two sons came between us and one of them said to him—'Come with us, younger Brother,' and they raked up an excuse and took him away. I caught all three of the rascals talking in secret an hour after; and with them was one of the sons of my neighbor and two tenants! I came up to them and they stopped talking, but one of them said with a lie on his lips, 'We want to know how much *kauliang* can be produced from one *mau* of land!' So they talked to me, as if I were a fool! And I said to them, I said: 'None at all if it were left in the hands of my worthless sons!'"

A voice from across the partition broke in: "Yes, it is bad. Did you hear what happened to the son of Hu Tso-ling in Hailun last week? They chopped off his head and said he was a Communist! Somebody said no, he was not a Communist, but he loved a sing-song girl and wanted to buy her from the 'house.' But the son of the chief of police visited this girl and did not want her to leave the 'house,' for she was sixteen and very pretty. The girl wanted to go as the wife of Hu's son and the two men had a big quarrel. Hu's son said he would buy the girl if it took his last cent, but before he could do this the son of the chief of police had him arrested as a Communist, and had his head chopped off in the streets...."

"Yes, yes, but I heard he was really a Communist," someone broke in.

"And what if he was?" one asked. "Is it so bad that one must lose one's

head?"

The voice of the man who had spoken of his three sons was heard: "May the gods protect me—can it be that my sons!..." but his voice went no further.

Someone spoke: "Even some of the girls—I have heard..."

His voice faltered also, as if treading on dangerous grounds. From below in the restaurant came the great noise of new guests arriving. The yell of greetings soon drowned the voices of the men in the adjoining room. Then, when comparative quiet reigned again, the voice of a waiter was heard yelling down the stairs that six guests, who had paid six dollars and given thirty cents in tips, were leaving. Six pairs of peasant feet, clad in felt shoes, passed before our door.

From the adjoining room, a waiter, clearing away the dishes, called out to another: "Hey—they have taken all the sugar with them!"

From downstairs we heard a waiter honoring the departing guests: "Guests who paid thirty cents in wine-money are leaving!"

HSU MEI-LING

HSU MEI-LING was an old-fashioned girl, with the faults and virtues of an old-fashioned girl. She was brought up in the old-fashioned way—taught reading, painting and embroidery on silk, household management, and how to write beautiful characters.

She is now thirty, the mother of four children. She is still young, attractive, and she has the delicate, fair skin so common to Chinese women who are not factory workers or peasants. Her glossy black hair was formerly drawn back from a lovely forehead and coiled softly at the base of her neck, and in the coil she often wore a cluster of sweet-smelling blossoms. Her high-throated silk Chinese gown, without one touch of decoration and without one break in the line, fell to the ankle in chaste beauty, softly suggesting her slender body. And her feet were always encased in soft, heelless shoes.

She is very graceful—until she walks. Then she is stiff and awkward, and if you look closely you can see the broad bands beneath her stockings. Her ankles are deformed and still half bound. When she was a little girl in interior China her feet had been tightly bound and crippled. But then came the anti-foot-binding movement and the revolution, and all women under thirty were urged to free their feet. The women's associations in south and central China sent emissaries from door to door to agitate against foot-binding and long