

THE CLASSIC INSIDE ACCOUNT  
OF MAO'S CHINA  
THE REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION

**EDGAR SNOW**  
**RED STAR**  
**OVER CHINA**

# RED STAR OVER CHINA

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Edgar Snow

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and Enlarged Edition

Grove Press, Inc.



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*To Grenville Clark  
who was taller than his time*

*"Laid sweet in his grave,  
the hope of humanity  
not yet subjugated in him."*

*—Emerson*

## Preface to this Edition

After the first revised and enlarged (1968) edition of this book appeared I was able to return to China (August 1970–February 1971). Now the opportunity arises to make limited modifications and additions to the text, which are to be found mainly in the Notes and Appendices. One result of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was to make available rich if largely still unevaluated material relating to the period originally covered by my first report. It would be impossible to incorporate in this single volume everything relevant to the subject and epoch which is now known, of course. I have had to content myself with merely indicating a few selected new sources which may assist the reader in a search for further knowledge opened by a rapidly expanding world of historical revelation.

E.S.

August 1971

## Introduction

by Dr. John K. Fairbank

*Red Star Over China* is a classic because of the way in which it was produced. Edgar Snow was just thirty and had spent seven years in China as a journalist. In 1936 the Chinese Communists had just completed their successful escape from Southeast China to the Northwest, and were embarking upon their united-front tactic. They were ready to tell their story to the outside world. Snow had the capacity to report it. Readers of the book today should be aware of this combination of factors.

Edgar Snow was born in Kansas City in 1905, his forebears having moved westward by degrees from North Carolina to Kentucky and then into Kansas Territory. In 1928 he started around the world. He reached Shanghai, became a journalist, and did not leave the Far East for thirteen years. Before he made his trip to report the Chinese Communists, he had toured through famine districts in the Northwest, traversed the route of the Burma Road ten years before it was operating, reported the undeclared war at Shanghai in 1932, and become a correspondent for the *Saturday Evening Post*. He had become a friend of Mme. Sun and had met numerous Chinese intellectuals and writers. Settling in Peking in 1932, he and his wife lived near Yenching University, one of the leading Christian colleges which had been built up under American missionary auspices. As energetic and wide-awake young Americans, the Snows had become widely acquainted with the Chinese student movement against Japanese aggression in late 1935. They had studied Chinese and developed a modest fluency in speaking. In addition to

publishing his account of the Japanese aggression, *Far Eastern Front*, Edgar Snow had also edited a collection of translations of modern Chinese short stories, *Living China*.

Thus in the period when the Japanese expansion over Manchuria and into North China dominated the headlines, this young American had not only reported the events of the day but had got behind them into some contact with the minds and feelings of Chinese patriotic youth. He had proved himself a young man of broad human sympathy, aware of the revolutionary stirrings among China's intellectuals, and able to meet them with some elementary use of the Chinese language. More than this, Ed Snow was an activist, ready to encourage worthy causes rather than be a purely passive spectator. Most of all, he had proved himself a zealous factual reporter, able to appraise the major trends of the day and describe them in vivid color for the American reading public.

In 1936 he stood on the western frontier of the American expansion across the Pacific toward Asia, which had reached its height after a full century of American commercial, diplomatic, and missionary effort. This century had produced an increasing American contact with the treaty ports, where foreigners still retained their special privileges. Missionaries had pushed into the rural interior among China's myriad villages and had inspired and aided the first efforts at modernization. In the early 1930's American foundations and missionaries both were active in the movement for "rural reconstruction," the remaking of village life through the application of scientific technology to the problems of the land. At the same time, Chinese students trained in the United States and other Western countries stood in the forefront of those modern patriots who were becoming increasingly determined to resist Japanese aggression at all costs. Western-type nationalism thus joined Western technology as a modern force in the Chinese scene, and both had been stimulated by the American contact.

Despite all these developments, however, the grievous problems of China's peasant villages had only begun to be attacked under the aegis of the new Nationalist Government at Nanking. Harassed by Japanese aggression, Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang were absorbed

in a defense effort which centered in the coastal treaty ports and lower Yangtze provinces, with little thought or motive for revolutionary change in the rural countryside. Meanwhile, in 1936, the Chinese Communists were known generally as "Red bandits," and no Western observer had had direct contact with their leadership or reported it to the outside world. With the hindsight of a third of a century, it may seem to us now almost incredible that so little could have been known about Mao Tse-tung and the movement which he headed. The Chinese Communist Party had a history of fifteen years when Edgar Snow journeyed to its headquarters, but the disaster which had overtaken it in the 1920's had left it in a precarious state of weakness.

When he set out for the blockaded Red area in the Northwest in June, 1936, with an introduction from Mme. Sun Yat-sen, he had an insight into Chinese conditions and the sentiments of Chinese youth which made him almost uniquely capable of perceiving the powerful appeal which the Chinese Communist movement was still in the process of developing. Through the good will of the Manchurian army forces at Sian, who were psychologically prepared for some kind of united front with the Communists, Snow was able to cross the lines, reach the Communist capital, then at Pao An (even farther in the Northwest than the later capital at Yen-an), and meet Mao Tse-tung just at the time when Mao was prepared to put himself on record.

After spending four months and taking down Mao Tse-tung's own story of his life as a revolutionist, Snow came out of the blockaded Red area in October, 1936. He gave his eye-opening story to the press in articles, and finished *Red Star Over China* on the basis of his notes in July, 1937.

The remarkable thing about *Red Star Over China* was that it not only gave the first connected history of Mao and his colleagues and where they had come from, but it also gave a prospect of the future of this little-known movement which was to prove disastrously prophetic. It is very much to the credit of Edgar Snow that this book has stood the test of time on both these counts—as an historical record and as an indication of a trend.



## Preface to the Revised Edition

Travels and events described in this book took place in 1936 and 1937 and the manuscript was completed in July, 1937, to the sound of gunfire by Japanese troops outside the walls of Peking, where I lived. Those guns of July in China opened eight years of Sino-Japanese battle which merged with the Second World War. The same guns also heralded the ultimate Communist victory in China which profoundly altered the balance of power, both inside and outside what was formerly called "the Communist camp."

In time and space this report concerned an isolated fighting force in an area far removed from the West on the eve of its greatest catastrophe. The League of Nations had been destroyed when it failed to halt Japan's conquest of Manchuria in 1931-33. In 1936 the Western "Allies" permitted Hitler, still a cardboard Napoleon, to reoccupy the Rhineland without a fight. They impotently watched Mussolini seize Ethiopia. They then imposed an arms embargo against Spain under the hypocrisy of neutralism, which denied the Republic the means to defend itself against reactionary generals led by Franco, who had the open support of thousands of imported Nazi and Fascist troops and planes. They thus encouraged Hitler and Mussolini to form an alliance ostensibly aimed at Russia but clearly intended to subjugate all of Western Europe. In 1938 Hitler was allowed to swallow Austria. He was then rewarded, by Chamberlain and Daladier, with Czechoslovakia as the price of "peace in our time." In compensation they soon received the Hitler-Stalin pact.

Such was the international environment of China when this journey was undertaken. Domestic conditions inside

that disintegrating society are defined in the text. In 1936 I had already lived in China for seven years and I had, as a foreign correspondent, traveled widely and acquired some knowledge of the language. This was my longest piece of reportage on China. If it has enjoyed a more useful life than most journalism it is because it was not only a "scoop" of perishable news but likewise of many facts of durable history. It won sympathetic attention also perhaps because it was a time when the Western powers, in self-interest, were hoping for a miracle in China. They dreamed of a new birth of nationalism that would keep Japan so bogged down that she would never be able to turn upon the Western colonies—her true objectives. *Red Star Over China* tended to show that the Chinese Communists could indeed provide that *nationalist* leadership needed for effective anti-Japanese resistance. How dramatically the United States' policy-making attitudes have altered since then is suggested by recalling that condensations of this report originally appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Life* magazine.

Other circumstances contributed to prolong the utility of this book. I had found Mao Tse-tung and other leaders at an especially favorable moment, in a lull between long years of battle. They gave me a vast amount of their time, and with unprecedented frankness provided more personal and impersonal information than any one foreign scribe could fully absorb. After my second visit to see Mao Tse-tung, in 1939, all the Red bases in Northwest China were blockaded by Nationalist troops, in their rear, and cut off by Japanese occupation around the guerrilla areas. For another five years, while no foreign newsmen were able to reach Yen-an, the Red capital, these reports remained a unique source.

Much of this work is history seen from a partisan point of view, of course, but it is history as lived by the men and women who made it. It provided not only for non-Chinese readers, but also for the entire Chinese people—including all but the Communist leaders themselves—the first authentic account of the Chinese Communist Party and the first connected story of their long struggle to carry through the most thoroughgoing social revolution in China's three millenniums of history. Many editions were

published in China, and among the tens of thousands of copies of the Chinese translations some were produced entirely in guerrilla territory.

I do not flatter myself that I had much to do with imparting to this volume such lessons of international application as may be drawn from it. For many pages I simply wrote down what I was told by the extraordinary young men and women with whom it was my privilege to live at age thirty, and from whom I learned (or had the chance to learn) a great deal.

In 1937, when *Red Star Over China* first appeared, in England, there were practically no sources of documentation for most of the material presented here. Today many foreign China specialists—helped or led by Chinese scholars of different political colorations—have produced dozens of works of varying importance and quality. With an abundance of new information available, aided by my own and others' wisdom of hindsight, many improvements might be made in the text to minimize its limitations—and yet deprive it of whatever original value it may possess. Therefore it was my intention to leave it as first written except for corrections of typographical errors and mistakes of spelling or of factual detail. That hope has not proved wholly practicable and departures from its fulfillment are acknowledged below.

Since *Red Star Over China* was completed under conditions of war I did not have the opportunity to see or correct galley proofs of the first edition. Nor have I been able to do so with subsequent editions until now. In extenuation for one kind of mistake: my handwritten field notes contained many names previously unknown to me, and I could not always get them down in Chinese characters. Phonetic transliterations into English resulted in misspellings as judged by Wade-Giles standards. These have now been (I hope) uniformly corrected.

Aside from that kind of conformance I have widely altered former present-tense verbs to past tense in order to eliminate many seeming anachronisms and make the story more accessible to contemporary readers. Where the book quotes or paraphrases the testimony of others, the wording of the original text has generally been pre-

served—to avoid tampering with a *priori* historical material—even when it conflicts with more believable information now available. In a few instances where secondary material has been proved manifestly inaccurate I have cut or corrected, rather than perpetuate known errors. In either case readers may refer to the Biographical Notes or the Notes to this edition to supplement or modify some textual facts or opinions. Here and there (with a certain macabre sense of looking backward on myself) I have reworked lines which the passage of time—or murky writing in the first instance—has made unintelligible to me. The great bulk of the volume, all the happenings, the main travel notes, interviews, and biographies—including Mao Tse-tung's—remain intact.

Such liberties as I have taken in shortening, condensing, or discarding tedious accounts of a few matters no longer of importance helped to make room for the chronology, an epilogue, new footnotes, some heretofore unpublished documents, chapter commentaries, and some fascinating lessons of history in the form of biographical sequels to the early life stories of the truly extraordinary people first introduced here. Cuts of paragraphs and even whole pages necessitated composing new transitional passages. Such “spin-ins” are confined to knowledge available to me no later than 1937, and the same applies to page footnotes—but not to the end-of-book materials, of course.

Doubtless this tome would not have suffered (and the reader would have profited) if I had omitted several whole chapters. Revision was not easy, and I daresay someone less connected with the subject could have done it with less pain to himself and with more grace for the reader.

And so, salutations and thanks to all persons mentioned in this book for their help and permission to use their remarks and photographs, especially Mao Tse-tung; to John Fairbank, for taking one more look at these ancient spoor; to Peter J. Seybolt for a reappraisal against a background of far wider perspective than we could know in the thirties; to Enrica Collotti Pischel, for painstaking scholarship in translating into Italian and bringing up to

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date the 1965 edition (*Stella rossa sulla Cina*) which inspired this effort; and to Mary Heathcote, Trudie Schafer, and Lois Wheeler for assistance and encouragement in general.

Edgar Snow

Geneva, February 14, 1968

## Chronology of the Chinese Revolution

### *I. Last Days of the Monarchy*

- 1840-42 The "Opium Wars," during which Great Britain forcibly opens China to foreign trade. They are followed by the granting of territorial concessions and rights of inland navigation and missionary activity. The British take Hongkong.
- 1860 China accepts Russian annexation of eastern Siberia.
- 1864 Near-victorious T'ai-p'ing (Great Peace) Rebellion crushed by Sino-Manchu forces under General Tseng Kuo-fan, helped by British army regulars and mixed European and American mercenaries. Chinese revolution "postponed sixty years." Following French penetration and seizure of Indochina (1862), encroachments increasingly reduce the Manchu-Chinese Empire to semicolonial status.
- 1866 Sun Yat-sen (founder of Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party, 1912) born in Kwangtung province.
- 1868 Czarist Russia annexes Bokhara and begins penetration toward Chinese Turkestan.
- 1869 Suez Canal completed.
- 1870 Lenin born.
- 1874 Churchill born.
- 1879 Ch'en Tu-hsiu (first general secretary, 1921-27, of Kungch'antang, or Chinese Communist Party) born in Anhui province. Rapid expansion of French and British colonial empires in Africa.
- 1883-85 Franco-Chinese War. Chinese troops in Indo-

- china, defending Peking's claim to suzerainty there, are defeated. France also acquires new territorial-political concessions in China. Britain ends China's suzerainty in Burma.
- 1889 Cecil Rhodes establishes British South African Company.
- 1893 Mao Tse-tung born in Hunan province. France extends its Indochinese colonial power to Laos and Cambodia.
- 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War. China forced to cede Taiwan (Formosa) to Japan and abandon ancient claims to suzerainty over Korea.
- 1898 "Hundred Days Reform" under Emperor Kuang Hsu. Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi imprisons Kuang Hsu and returns to power, to remain real ruler till her death (1909). United States defeats Spain, takes Philippines.
- 1899 "Open Door" doctrine proclaimed by U.S.A.; "equal opportunity" for foreign powers in the economic and commercial "development" of China.
- 1900 So-called Boxer Rebellion. Antiforeign uprising. Allied reprisals include mass executions, crushing indemnities, new concessions, legalized foreign garrisons between Tientsin and Peking, etc. Czarist Russia takes China's port of Talien (Dairen), builds naval base (Port Arthur), acquires railway concessions across China's three northeastern provinces (Manchuria). Mao Tse-tung works as laborer on his father's farm.
- 1902 Anglo-Japanese alliance.
- 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War. Japan gets Port Arthur, Dairen, Russia's concessions in South Manchuria (China), and additional "rights." Dr. Sun Yat-sen forms revolutionary Alliance Society in Tokyo.
- 1905 First Russian Revolution.
- 1911 Republican revolution (the "First Revolution") overthrows Manchu power in Central and South China. At Nanking, Sun Yat-sen declared president of provisional government, first Chinese Republic. Student Mao Tse-tung joins rebel army; resigns after six months, thinking "revolution over."

II. *The Republic and the Warlords (1912-27)*

- 1912 Rulers of Manchu Dynasty formally abdicate. Sun Yat-sen resigns in favor of Yuan Shih-k'ai, as president of the Republic of China. Peking is its capital. Kuomintang (Nationalists) dominates first parliament, forms cabinet. Italy takes Libya.
- 1912-14 Provisional constitution and parliament suspended by militarist Yuan Shih-k'ai, who becomes dictator. Japan imposes "Twenty-one Demands," their effect to reduce China to vassal state. Yuan Shih-k'ai accepts most of the demands. Cabinet resigns. European war begins. Japan seizes Tsingtao, German colony in China. Mao first studies books by Western scholars.
- 1915 *New Youth (Hsin Ch'ing-nien)* magazine, founded by Ch'en Tu-hsiu, becomes focus of revolutionary youth, and popularizes written vernacular (*pai-hua*) language; death knell of Confucian classicism. Mao Tse-tung becomes *New Youth* contributor, under pseudonym. Yuan Shih-k'ai attempts to re-establish monarchy, with himself as emperor.
- 1916 Second (Republican) Revolution: overthrow of "Emperor" Yuan Shih-k'ai by "revolt of the generals" led by Tsai O. Nullification of Yuan's acceptance of Japan's "Twenty-one Demands." Era of warlords begins.
- 1917 Peking "shadow government" declares war on Germany. Generalissimo Sun Yat-sen, heading separate provisional regime in Canton, also declares war. In Hunan, Mao Tse-tung becomes co-founder of radical youth group, New People's Study Society. The October Revolution occurs in Russia.
- 1918 End of First World War. Mao Tse-tung graduates from Hunan First Normal School, aged twenty-five. He visits Peking; becomes assistant to Li Ta-chao, librarian of Peking University. Li Ta-chao and Ch'en Tu-hsiu establish Marxist study society, which Mao joins. All three later become founders of Chinese Communist Party.
- 1918-19 175,000 laborers sent overseas to help allies;



- 400 "Work-Study" student interpreters include Chou En-lai. Mao Tse-tung accompanies students to Shanghai. Back in Hunan, Mao founds *Hsiang Chiang Review*, anti-imperialist, antimilitarist, pro-Russian Revolution.
- 1919 May Fourth Movement. Nationwide student demonstrations against Versailles Treaty award of Germany's China concessions to Japan. Beginning of modern nationalist movement. Hungarian (Bela Kun) Communist-led social revolution suppressed.
- 1920 Mao Tse-tung organizes Hunan Branch of Socialist Youth Corps; among its members, Liu Shao-ch'i. Mao marries Yang K'ai-hui, daughter of his esteemed ethics professor at normal school. Mao helps found Cultural Book Study Society. League of Nations established.
- 1921 Chinese Communist Party formally organized at First Congress, Shanghai. Mao participates; is chosen secretary of CP of Hunan. Ts'ai Ho-sen, Chou En-lai, and others form Communist Youth League in Paris. Revolution in Mongolia.
- 1922 Sun Yat-sen agrees with Lenin's representative to accept Soviet aid and form united front with CCP; Communists may now hold joint membership in Kuomintang, led by Sun. Washington Conference restores Germany's colony to China.

*III. Nationalist (or Great) Revolution: Kuomintang-Communist United Front (1923-27)*

- 1923 Agreement between Sun Yat-sen and Adolf Joffe provides basis for KMT-CCP-CPSU alliance. At Third Congress of CCP, in Canton, Mao Tse-tung elected to Central Committee and chief of organization bureau.
- 1924 First Congress of Kuomintang approves admission of Communists. Mao Tse-tung elected an alternate member, Central Executive Committee, Kuomintang. Lenin dies.
- 1925 Mao returns to Hunan, organizes peasant support for Nationalist (Liberation) Expedition. Writes his first "classic," *Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society* (published 1926). Sun Yat-sen dies. Russian