

EDGAR SNOW

RED STAR
OVER CHINA

*Revised and Enlarged
Edition*

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PELICAN BOOKS

RED STAR OVER CHINA

Edgar Snow was a native of Missouri who went to the Far East when he was twenty-two. Before writing *Red Star Over China* he had made his home in China for seven years, studied the country and the language, and lectured at Yenching University, where his friends included students who are among China's leaders today. In Asia he worked for the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Sun*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, and the *London Daily Herald*. During the Second World War he was associate editor and war correspondent of the *Saturday Evening Post*, and in the post-war era he became the *Post's* widely quoted specialist on China, India, and the U.S.S.R. He was the author of several books which include *The Battle for Asia*, *People on Our Side*, *Journey to the Beginning*, and *Red China Today: The Other Side of the River*. Edgar Snow died in 1971.

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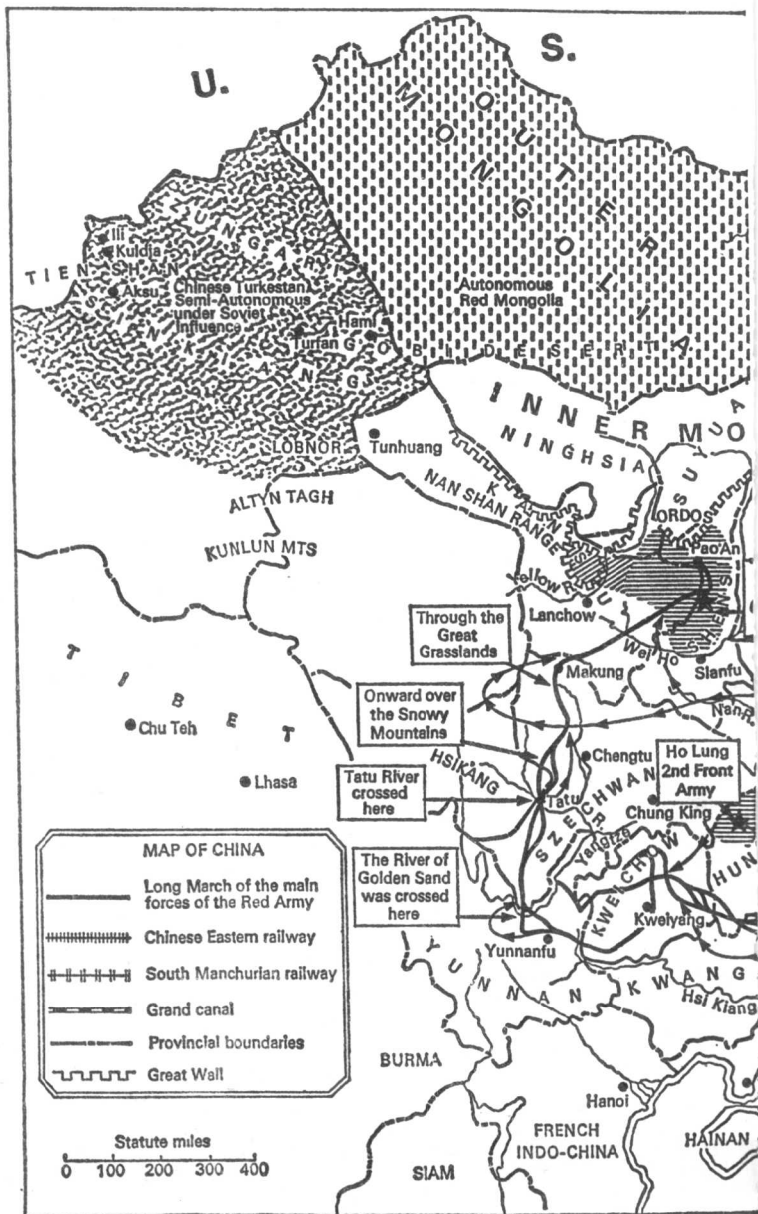
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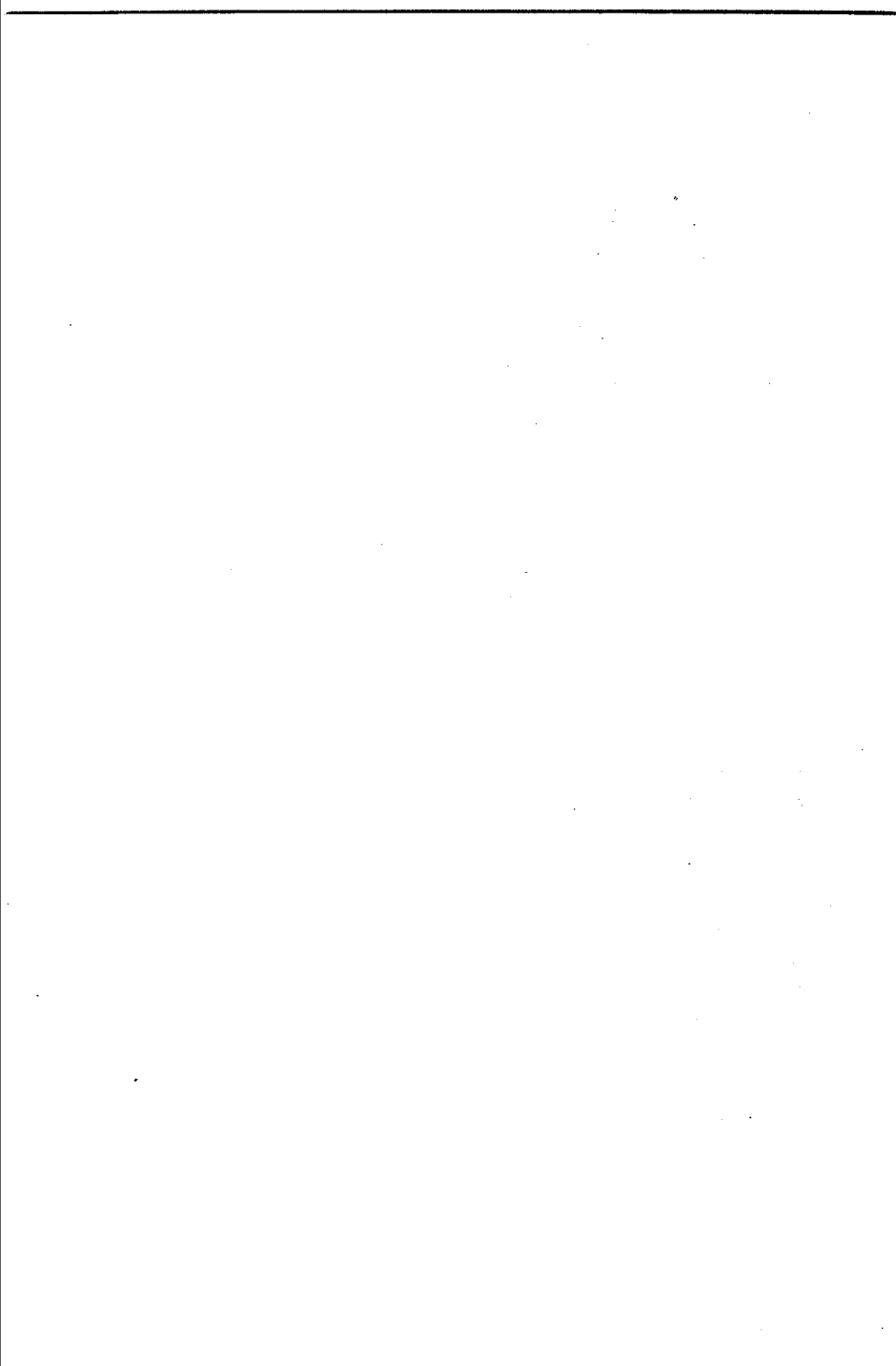
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Introduction

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 South-East China to the North-West, 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 North-West, 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 colour for the American reading public.

In 1936 he stood on the western frontier of the American expansion across the Pacific towards 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 1930s 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 defence effort which centred 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 1920s had left it in a precarious state of weakness.

When he set out for the blockaded Red area in the North-West 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 further in the North-West 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.

Snow came out of the blockaded Red area in October 1936, after spending four months there and taking down Mao Tse-tung's own story of his life as a revolutionist. 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 a historical record and as an indication of a trend.

