

THE BATTLE FOR ASIA

BY EDGAR SNOW

In the middle of the twentieth century Japan will meet Europe on the plains of Asia and wrest from her the mastery of the world.

Count Okuma (1915)

You thieves who oppress and injure the poor, how great a boldness you have! . . . Have you not come to pull the whiskers of a tiger?

Juan the Fifth, in Pearl Buck's translation of the *Shui Hu Chuan*



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Part One



GOOD-BYE, PEKING



I

Fugitives

*In order to conquer the world we
must first conquer China.*

Tanaka Memorial

AFTER the Japanese occupied Peking there was a mad scramble, too late, to get out of the city. The ancient Tartar walls that had formerly given a false sense of security were now in grim reality a cage. The apocalypse had come; people felt like prisoners awaiting sentence.

The invaders handed the reorganized puppet police a list of nationalists, radicals and assorted patriots whom they wanted arrested, and the police tipped off many to do a vanishing act. But the high heavy gates were closely guarded by Japanese, while for about two weeks no trains moved to Tientsin. Fugitives spent their days changing addresses, and their nights plotting ways and means of getting out of the "dead city," as they called it. Newspapers were suppressed and people lived on rumors.

A distinguished Chinese professor found his way to my house to inquire whether I would request the British Embassy to "guarantee the safety of the anti-Japanese intellectuals." It seemed plausible to him, after having heard that the Embassy had used its "good offices" to persuade General Sung to transfer the city peacefully to the Japanese. One of my former students at Yenching University arrived out of breath to ask if it were really true that United States Marines were about to garrison Peking, "in accordance with the Nine Power Treaty." Another student from Pei-ta came in hopping mad because he could not get out of the city to join the guerrillas. He asked whether the British and American authorities would convoy anti-Japanese students to the hills on their military trucks. Such optimism was shared by many professors, who believed that America and Britain would now break off relations with Japan, for having violated her international treaty obligations. They were flab-

bergasted when I suggested that neither government could be expected to give any effective help to China, and that our merchants would continue to arm Japan throughout the war. The next few years were to provide a political education for millions of Chinese.

But I could at least do a little to express my appreciation to friends in whose city I had lived safely for over four years, and where I had been treated with invariable courtesy and consideration. I shared a large compound with a Swedish broker and as there was much unoccupied space it soon filled with political refugees. The president of Northeastern University found a convenient room by the gate, where a puppet policeman came and visited every day to give him the latest news of Japanese activities. Half a dozen others occupied corners here and there and left when an opportunity of escape appeared. I expected to be raided any day.

Before the Japanese arrived there was a housing shortage in Peking, but now I was offered houses on all sides, at ridiculously low rental or no rental at all. The Japanese were seizing the best premises and foreign occupation was the only protection. Everybody suddenly wanted to give away his radio, which in Japanese eyes marked the owner a Communist. But most pathetic were the students, who could not bear the thought of destroying their books, and came round wanting to bury them in my courtyard "until Peking was reoccupied."

After a week some of the students stopped coming. A few were seized by the Japanese, but many found places on the city walls where the police obligingly turned their backs when they climbed over. In this manner small groups made their way beyond the Summer Palace to the Western Hills, where they began to organize the first farmers for partisan warfare. In August, 1937, the Japanese bombed those hills in an effort to disperse the growing nuisance. They are still bombing them today.

One afternoon when the summer rains were falling, a young Chinese named Wu entered my door, dripping rain and sweat from his shaved head, and grinning from ear to ear. He had a card from an old friend of mine, Chang Yu-sheng, a former Manchurian official, who was now leading a guerrilla band outside the city. He told me how, a few days before, they had "occupied" the military prison, near the western wall. They had disarmed the Chinese guards, seized all the rifles and ammunition in the building, and recruited nearly all the inmates (mostly political prisoners) for their

new army. It was a well-planned coup. They all escaped—with the guards!—before the Japanese reached the scene.

But Wu had something else on his mind. He said his group—they were part of an army later commanded by Chao Tung, the famous guerrilla leader who was to be killed near Peking in 1940—had rifled one of the Western Imperial Tombs, near Miaofêngshan, apparently anticipating by only a few hours a similar intention of the Japanese. They had thereby secured enough rubies, diamonds, pearls, jade and gold, to arm and provision their recruits, provided they could dispose of the precious objects. Wu wanted to know whether the American government would be interested in purchasing them. He was deeply disappointed when I gravely expressed doubts, and he asked for suggestions.

"Harboring anti-Japanese bodies," to use the expression made popular with us by Colonel Hiraoka, the Japanese press spokesman, was one thing, and other foreigners found themselves unable to refuse asylum to political refugees. Facilitating the sale of "anti-Japanese loot," even though it might be considered legitimate spoils of war, was quite another. I very much feared my Embassy might frown upon it, while my newspaper, though extraordinarily liberal in such matters, might feel it was going too far to get a story which most likely would be written by somebody else, if at all.

But a possible justification occurred to me. A few days before, a band of guerrillas had taken several Italian friars and priests from a monastery in the Western Hills, and had sent in a demand for ransom money to the Japanese military authorities in Peking. Their purpose was not only to embarrass the Japanese in foreign eyes; they desperately needed cash to buy food for their hungry men. I suspected that Mr. Wu knew something about the incident, and I was right. He admitted that his companions were holding the victims near Miaofêngshan.

"That's no way to win foreign sympathy for China," I said. "You'd better release those priests immediately if you don't want to become known as bandits."

"But the priests turned over part of their mission to Japanese troops," Wu defended the snatch. "They gave a feast to the Japanese officers. They gave them information about us and later the Japanese burned our friendly villages used as a guerrilla base. The Italians recognized Manchukuo, and signed the anti-Comintern pact. Are they not fascist allies of Japan?"

Although I was baptized and confirmed a Catholic, I had lived in China long enough to be able to see the Chinese point of view in this logic, so I spent an hour explaining to Wu why any possible benefit to them would be more than offset by adverse publicity abroad. At last he seemed to agree. I told him that if they released their captives, I would find a market for their jewels. With that understanding he left.

I doubt very much if my advice influenced the decision, but soon afterward the priests were, in fact, set free, and returned in good health none the worse for their experience. As far as I know the guerrillas never afterward repeated the mistake. On the contrary, once they acquired able political leadership they established friendliest relations with priests and missionaries throughout the country.

A few days later, when I was expecting Wu to return, a professor's wife phoned and asked me to dinner. I went over and after we had talked half an hour a Chinese woman with long bobbed hair, and wearing heavy dark glasses, entered the room. There was something familiar about her, but I could not place it until she took off the spectacles and greeted me with a laughing *Shih Lo T'ung-chih, ni pu jen-shih wo!* "You don't recognize me!" And it was no wonder, for she was the last woman I expected to see in Peking, and the first the Japanese would have liked to seize. She was Têng Ying-chao, wife of Chou En-lai, vice-chairman of the former Chinese Soviet Government, and chief of the Women's Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party. Ying-chao possessed one of the most astute political brains I have encountered among Chinese women.

"I thought you were in Shensi!"

Ying-chao explained that she had secretly come up to the Western Hills, five months earlier, to recuperate. And she looked infinitely better than when I had last seen her, nearly a year earlier, lying pale and gaunt in the sun at Pao An, making a losing fight against tuberculosis which she developed during the Long March. Living in an isolated temple with plenty of good food and rest, in the dry northern spring, had apparently cured her. But she had known nothing of the outbreak of war until the Japanese approached her temple; and she nearly lost her life fleeing through their lines, dressed as a peasant woman, into Peking.

"But surely you aren't going to stay here?" I demanded.

"No, I want to go to the Northwest as soon as possible," she said. "Can you go with me on the train to Tientsin?"

Rail communication to the sea had just been restored, with one train a day that covered in 12 hours a distance formerly made in two. The Japanese were carefully searching all passengers and, especially at the Tientsin end, hauled off anybody whose face suggested the possibility of political thought. Dozens of students had been robbed, arrested, and heard from no more. So the trip involved a certain danger for somebody like Têng Ying-chao. But the Japanese had not attempted to detain foreigners (the strip-tease days had yet to begin in Tientsin), and I told Têng I would go along with her, and see that she got through safely as my family servant.

It fitted into my own plans; as all telegraph communications were now in Japanese hands, one could not get out a "spot" story except under Japanese censorship, and Peking was dead as a news center. I had received a delayed cable from the *Daily Herald* ordering me to Shanghai, where hostilities had broken out. I also had to locate a missing wife somewhere in Northwest China. In April, Nym had gone up to Yen-an to see for herself what the Chinese "Reds" were like, not being the sort to take news second hand from her husband, and I had had no word from her for nearly three months. No news is good news was an aphorism of small comfort. I decided to attempt a detour to Shensi, a matter of a thousand miles, to see whether she had permanently forsaken her neglected meal ticket.

There remained the matter of Wu, the tomb breaker. When he called next day I told him I was leaving and that he must move fast. He agreed to bring me his inventory within three days, together with some "samples," which I was to take to a reliable American dealer who would, I knew, gladly risk his neck for such rare objects. But a Japanese punitive expedition against Wu's friends at Miao-fêngshan interfered with his itinerary. After five days I could wait no longer. I turned over the Manchu heirloom business to a fellow countryman who, I believe, eventually brought it to a satisfactory conclusion for all concerned.

Ying-chao arrived at Ch'ien Môn station, looking the complete amah; her bobbed hair had miraculously disappeared. I saw her safely deep into a car, whence she remained lost to view behind the quite unbelievable mass of legs, heads, and elbows which squeezed in after her. Well, there was some safety in numbers, I tritely

reflected. Once inside, passengers were unable to move till they reached Tientsin late that night. But they did not seem to mind. As far as fugitive Peking was concerned, each day's train was the last left on earth. For the first time in Peking history, nobody was putting off till tomorrow.

I found a toehold on the last step of the last car. Eventually I improved that by an improvised seat on the hand brake, where I rode with my head and bare legs in a blazing sun all day through flooded fields toward the sea. I was not sorry to say good-bye to Peking's crenelated walls; the Peking foreigners loved was gone. As I had nothing better to do I used the hours to arrange, in my mind, a rough pattern of the events which had preceded its end.

And here are a few fragments from that pattern as I saw it.

A Gentleman and a Rascal

Ju-pei wished to see Confucius but Confucius declined on the ground of being sick. . . . Confucius took his harpsichord and sang to it in order that Ju-pei might hear.

The Analects

SOMETHING had to happen to Peking.

It was an anomaly whose days were numbered, a medieval survival where over a million men dwelt among the glitter and loot of centuries accumulated within its wonderful maze of walls. (How many generations of thieves it takes to build a thing of beauty!) Peking was a city of retired courtiers and soldiers of empire, of scholars and absentee landlords, of monks and artisan merchants, and of ricksha coolies speaking a cultured tongue; a city nobly conceived and nobly made, a treasury of art, a place of gentle birth and of decadence, of diplomatic intrigues over rapturous food, of more charm than character, and of more knavery than downright wickedness; a city of warm vivid springs and shadowed autumns, and of winter sunshine sparkling on snow-covered trees and frozen lakes; a city of eternal compromise and easy laughter, of leisure and of family love, of poverty and tragedy, and indifference to dirt; and yet a place of unexpected violence, where regenerate students coined the fighting slogans of a nation, and blinding Mongolian storms swept down from the Gobi Desert, leaving the graceful temples and golden palace roofs strewn with the oldest dust of life.

Peking had become a frontier again in 1934, after the Japanese occupation of Jehol, and we who called it home marveled only that the defenseless city managed for so long to defer its doom. We woke up a little surprised after successive crises to find the towers still manned by Chinese troops. Perhaps it is a little true that even the