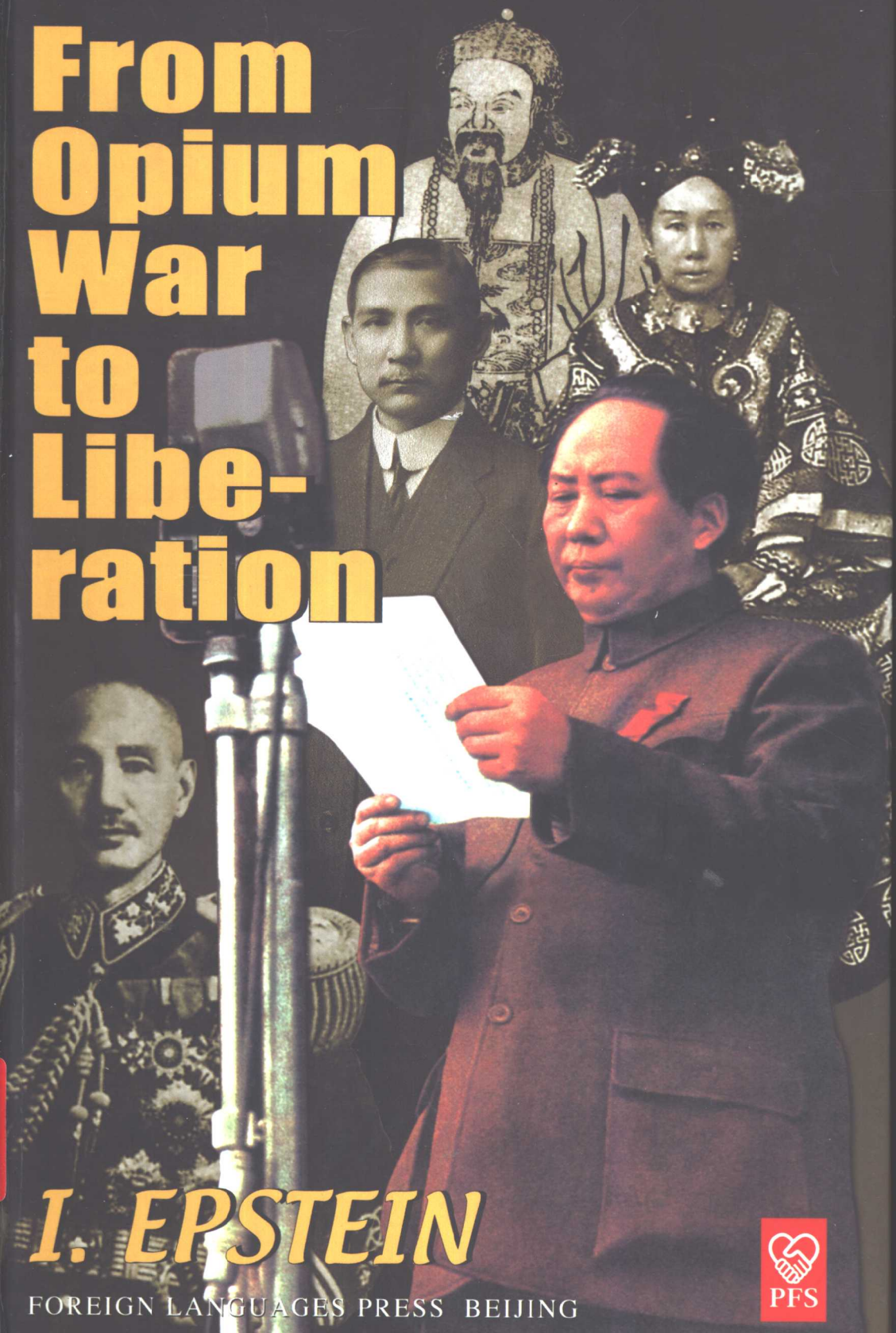


From Opium War to Libe- ration



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Israel Epstein

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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

PREFACE

At a time when our whole nation is celebrating the return of Hongkong, it is pleasing to hear that Israel Epstein's concise history, *From Opium War to Liberation*, is coming out in its fourth edition in English and first edition in Chinese.

Hongkong's return, an event of major significance in Chinese and international history, is promoting eagerness — among our compatriots in Hongkong and Taiwan and Chinese living abroad and among the public elsewhere in the world — to learn about China's road in the past 100 years and more — from humiliation, through struggle, to victory. And *From Opium War to Liberation* is most suitable to fill this need.

Why do I say "most suited", when such a multitude of books on modern Chinese history have been produced both at home and abroad? Not only is its size convenient. More importantly, the author writes with a penetrating understanding of world affairs and profound feeling for the Chinese people. These qualities, stemming from long and direct experience, make his book both convincing and moving. Its repeated publication attests to its effectiveness. Following the first English edition in 1956, enlarged and revised editions were printed in Beijing in 1964 and Hongkong in 1980.

And translations into ten languages, European and Asian, were brought out in China and abroad.

Epstein, born in a Jewish family in Poland, came to China with his parents at the age of two, spending his childhood and teens in a foreign enclave (“concession”) in Tianjin. There he attended American and British schools, receiving a Eurocentric education which extolled the “glories” of colonial aggression and consigned China’s language, history and culture to oblivion. Later, as he wrote, “personal experience as a journalist on China’s war fronts against Japanese aggression in the 1930’s and 40’s, contributed to my emancipation from such schooling — and a desire to place into historical context the things learned and unlearned.”

Seeking for truth, he delved into the historical record, and visited many people and places. On a group journey to Yan’an in 1994, which broke a window in a long-continued blockade by the Kuomintang, he interviewed many leaders of the Chinese Communist Party including Mao Zedong, Zhu De and Zhou Enlai. Then he went on to witness the bases of guerrilla resistance behind the lines of the invading Japanese. Already years earlier, in 1938, he had joined the China Defense League founded by Soong Ching Ling, (Mme. Sun Yat-sen), beginning a half-century of joint work and friendship with that great woman who devoted herself wholly to inheriting and developing Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary cause.

In short, Epstein’s understanding of China and its hundred years of revolution is genuine and convincing — and he came to his conclusions both through historical study and real life.

Moreover, with his knowledge of languages, own cultural background and painstaking diligence — Epstein has searched through more foreign historical writings than most Chinese authors and made effective use of them as the reader will see from many examples.

History is forging ahead. The days of the old colonialism are gone, as the return of Hongkong prominently signals. Yet ideas rooted in the colonial period hang on for a long time, or re-emerge in new guise. There are still persons who defend defunct colonialism, think China's only way forward is to "westernize", and the like. So it is important to uncover and comprehend the main track of China's 100-year historical development, and the inevitability of the choice to build a socialist country with Chinese characteristics as charted by Deng Xiaoping. Conducive to this understanding are the extensive "author's introduction" and "postscript", especially written for the new edition. They will help the reader, after the narrative of a century of history in the main text, to evaluate current trends of thought stemming from that history.

Epstein is my good friend whom I admire. He upholds the truth, and continues to work with his accustomed conscientious and diligent energy though now over eighty. I warmly congratulate him on this new edition, and am very happy that he accepted my suggestion of a translation to meet the needs of Chinese readers. I also thank Fu Jiaqin, a veteran translator, likewise advanced in age, and physically handicapped, who gladly accepted the arduous task of putting the book into Chinese and accomplished it with high quality in a short time. Finally I am grateful to the staff of the China Today Press for their successful effort to publish on time.

Let us once more hail the restitution of Hongkong! May the new edition of *From Opium War to Liberation* add its spark to the joyous fireworks of the celebration.

* * *

The above was written in 1997. The present 1998 English edition is brought out, as was the Third Edition in 1980 by the Joint Publishing Co. of Hongkong. Some technical errors have been noted and corrected. The for-

mat is suited for an extended market. Its publication coincides, happily, with the 60th anniversary of the China Defence League founded by Soong Ching Ling (Mme. Sun Yat-sen) in Hongkong in 1938, during the War of Resistance against Japanese invasion. The founding of the League (now the China Welfare Institute) was a significant event in the history of Chinese patriotism in Hongkong. The author, Israel Epstein, is now the only survivor of the League committee in its opening year. But the book is not just an anniversary edition but for readership for years to come. For undertaking the present edition, I add my thanks and congratulations to the Joint Publishing Co.

Huang Hua

April 1997

and

April 1998

Beijing

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

From Opium War to Liberation was first published in Beijing in 1956 and in enlarged and revised editions here in 1964, and in Hongkong in 1980. The present — 1997 — edition is the fourth. Its predecessors, over the years, were translated and published in China and abroad in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, and Urdu. A reprint of the original English appeared in India.

People from the Third World seemed most responsive to the book. An unexpected number, when meeting me for the first time, said they knew it.

Readers included national leaders. Soong Qing Ling — Madame Sun Yat-sen — then Vice-Chairperson of the People's Republic of China — who liked the book, also wrote me in 1961, "When I met Ghana's Kwame N'Krumah... he praised it most warmly."*

Among western writers on China, Edgar Snow called it "... a masterful job of condensation of a big (very big) subject — presented from a point of view seldom heard around these parts."**

These reactions are cited not in self-praise but to show that this brief book did do something to fulfil its purpose. It never aimed at being a full account of China's century of crucial change — that would have taken a

* Letter, Soong Qing Ling to author, November 10, 1961.

** Letter, Snow to author, May 25, 1958.

whole library. It was intended, as Snow perceived, as a voice “seldom heard” — to help Western-educated people (not just those of Western origin but many on all continents who had been schooled under colonial influence) to “shift gears” from what they had been taught as history to what they had not been taught. In short, to awaken them to the need for “reversing the reversal of history,” in Mao Zedong’s graphic phrase, and direct their attention to rock-bottom realities.

As bridges to this re-focussing, many older English-language accounts — which unlike sources in Chinese the readers could check for themselves — were dug into for self-revealed evidence of aspects not only of Chinese but of Western history which had been habitually obscured. Among these was the impact of imperialism not just on China and other invaded lands but on the peoples of the imperialist countries themselves. And also, importantly, the mutual support, sometimes conscious and sometimes historically implicit, of the past progressive struggles of both.

Work on the book helped this author’s own re-education. Growing up in a foreign-administered and garrisoned enclave in old China, I had been taught in the European-centered manner of those days or, in plain words, stuffed with the self-justifications — indeed self glorifications — of colonialist aggression. In the British school I attended in my teens in China, we did not have even a minute’s instruction in her language, much less her history and culture. By contrast, the British concession in Tianjin where we lived, streets bore names in memory of foreign invaders of China and suppressors of Chinese national and social uprisings — Elgin, Gordon, Seymour and the like — as did the “houses” of our school. This nomenclature was a daily insult to the country on whose soil we were.

Changes in the world, and personal experience as a journalist on China’s war fronts against Japanese aggression in the 1930’s and 40’s, contributed to my emancipation from such schooling — and a desire to place into historical context the things learned and unlearned.

To spark a similar reappraisal by readers seemed necessary when this book first appeared in the 1950’s. Since then the illusion-dispelling work has

been done, better than by books, by major global shifts. One was the further rise of the new China. Another was the chain reaction of national liberation and decolonization struggles in what is now termed the Third World. That the pre-war colonial empires would have lasted much longer if not for the China's great breakthrough cannot be seriously disputed.

The writing of China's history in English also changed. No longer was it so blatantly Eurocentric. Authors who knew Chinese and could go directly to Chinese sources ceased to be the exception. Yet the new crop, too, often inclined toward imperialism and the overthrown ruling classes of old China. Leading "Pekinologists" bewailed China's alleged misfortune in having missed out on the "normal" road of capitalism. Things would have been different... if only. If only, in the 19th and early 20th centuries China's initial advocates of Westernization had found some base in the officialdom of her last monarchic dynasty. Or if only, at a later date, the United States had backed certain private banks instead of the Kuomintang's semi-feudalism bureaucrat-capitalism and Chiang Kai-shek. And more in similar vein.

Academics by now equipped not only with knowledge of Chinese but with access to computerized data banks, industriously sifted the archives for grounds for their desired "if onlys." What most avoided was the root reason why what actually happened was so different — China's Marxist-led revolution and launching on the socialist road.

To this, such scholars have conceded at most a temporary inevitability. Sooner or later, they have argued, China must take the capitalist road in one form or another. To their minds, it is the only normal avenue of long-term development, especially industrial development — all else seems aberration. Socialism itself, in one fashionable view, is merely a mode of capital formation for countries where large private capital did not accumulate, and hence destined to evaporate after doing that job. The motive for such research, and certainly for the official and corporate grants it has readily received, seems to be a desire to make socialism vanish more quickly both as theory and as practice. Tunes of this kind have been played ever louder since the breakup of the Soviet Union.

But such analysts carefully turn their eyes away from one basic fact — that it was world capitalism itself, in its imperialist state, that blocked the capitalist road for China and similar countries, making all the historical “if onlys” into impossibilities. The socialist road became the normal choice for China through the defeat of all other alternatives in actual practice — over more than a hundred years.

In the times when foreign “great powers” dominated China, especially the earlier times, imperialist chroniclers often did not bother to conceal the bullyings and cruelties of colonial aggression and rule — which they regarded as matters of right by self-styled superior races over “lesser breeds.” Only later, when they were put on the defensive by social and national revolutions, did they begin to shame-facedly admit some evils. But even when recognizing the legitimacy of victorious revolutions they persisted in their plea that the empire-builders were mainly well-meaning. Today one encounters even an open nostalgia — after an interval during which it had become publicly unseemly — for old-style colonialism. Was it as oppressive and exploitative as painted by opponents? Rather, its apologists contend, there were good intentions and generally good results, marred by bungling and blindness (on both sides — those of the foreign rulers and the nation they ruled) that led to avoidable collisions. Most to blame — in their barely concealed opinion — were those who rose against foreign rule.

The latest (1990s) twist is the much discussed philosophic-historical thesis of Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington who pictures the next great war as not between nations and political ideologies but between cultures — the white man’s and that of peoples of other colors. This concept, as one witty American critic warned, means “retreating to our Eurocentric womb.” Or to racism, to give it its correct name. Parts of Huntington’s book were dignified by reproduction in *Foreign Affairs*, the most prestigious U.S. journal on international policy. So the battle for understanding is far from over.

The present edition of *From Opium War to Liberation*, in English and in Chinese translation, comes at the time of a new forward step in real history, the restoration of Chinese sovereignty in Hongkong. This auspicious event

rights a crying historical wrong — Britain's seizure of the area in the Opium War of 1839-42 which ushered in a century of successive unjust wars and humiliating unequal treaties that violated China's territory and sovereign rights and almost extinguished her as a nation. But that same century was one of patriotic arousal of the Chinese people to heroic and protracted struggles which can be summed up as their revolution against imperialism and feudalism or more simply as China's hundred-year war of independence — because without independence there could be no other progress. The main text of the book, beginning with the Opium War, ends with the Liberation — the decisive triumph of the Chinese revolution in 1949 when the People's Republic of China was proclaimed and, in Mao Zedong's words, "the Chinese people have stood up."

But the consequences of China's having been trampled on for so long did not thereby all disappear. Recovery of Hongkong came almost 50 years after the 1949 victory. It is the result of the subsequent self-strengthening of China in all fields — and of the policy of one nation, two systems, enunciated by Deng Xiaoping. These two elements will also make possible the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland. Both Hongkong and Taiwan are expected to remain capitalist for another half-century. But on the mainland the building of socialism is to be persisted in and perfected.

Parenthetically, the "if onlys" school of Western Pekinologists had, from the 1960's on, their Soviet counterparts. These bewailed the misfortune of China's revolution in having departed from their version of "normal" road — the more or less carbon-copying of the Russian revolution and the Soviet state it created as advocated by Wang Ming and his like. That course, history's hard facts proved, led to many defeats and, if persisted in, would have pushed China toward dependence in a new context.

History has shown that there can be no stereotyped model of any society — professing similar ideals, much less dissimilar ones — to suit all nation-states. Their circumstances vary. So, accordingly, must the respective methods and detailed forms of their development, shaped by their locations in geographical space and historical past and present. The future will prove, this

writer believes, that the crack-up of the former Soviet Union was not the downfall of socialism in general but of one particular model which thought itself compulsorily universal, something that no model can ever be. What is universal is the supplanting of a given system by another in society's forward motion.

China has taken her own road to socialism. It is longer and more complex than was thought. Though her economy is mixed, she does not equate modernization with privatization. The goal is to build a socialist society in the modern world. Foreign investment is welcome, and allowed due profit, because the country and its system can no longer be dominated or forced. China's hard-won sovereign, equal status ensures this and will not be bartered.

In international relations, too, China's socialist nature is evident. Old China could not repel or deter foreign aggression. The new China is armed only for these purposes. She has no troops or bases abroad, and belongs to no alliance. Her treatment of other countries, strong or weak, big or small, and whatever its social system, is equal and reciprocal.

Of all this more will be said in the "Postscript."

Now, back to history.