

Edgar Snow

RED STAR OVER CHINA

First Revised and Enlarged Edition

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1973

Books by Edgar Snow

Far Eastern Front

Living China

Red Star Over China

The Battle for Asia

People on Our Side

The Pattern of Soviet Power

Stalin Must Have Peace

Random Notes on Red China

Journey to the Beginning

The Other Side of the River

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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

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Introduction

by Dr. John K. Fairbank

(*Director, East Asian Research Center, Harvard*)

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 head-

quarters, 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 a historical record and as an indication of a trend.

As a uniquely durable modern classic, the original edition of *Red Star Over China* has gone through many printings in many languages, and has reached hundreds of thousands of readers. Now for the first time Edgar Snow has revised his book and enlarged its perspective to embrace more than three decades of new history, during which the band of young guerillas whom he first met in the caves of North West China have become the leaders of the world's most populous nation.

In 1936, when Edgar Snow ran Chiang Kai-shek's blockade and entered "Red China", he was the first Westerner to meet and interview the Communist leaders, and the first to bring back to the outside world (and even to most Chinese) news of the movement whose seemingly impossible goal was to remake the face of China.

This new edition includes:

- ★ extensive new notes on military and political events in China, with information about the 1930's that was unknown at the time (for example, clashes with the Russian Communist Party and struggles between Mao and his rivals for power), as well as related developments up to the 1960's;
- ★ further interviews with Mao Tse-tung, hitherto unpublished outside China;
- ★ a chronology of "125 Years of Chinese Revolution";
- ★ a chart of the present leadership of the Chinese Communist Party;
- ★ a bibliography of Chinese and Western writings on the period;
- ★ and ninety-seven detailed, comprehensive biographies, up to the present, of the men and women introduced in *Red Star Over China* when it first appeared, most of whom now form the power structure of contemporary China.

Edgar Snow is an American 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

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