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# P R O B L E M S

(formerly: Problems Of Capitalism & Socialism,  
Problems Of Communism)

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**New Series, Number 23**

## China: Nurturing Red Stars

by Gwydion M Williams

Why it became the job of the Chinese Communist Party to complete the necessary nationalist revolution that the Kuomintang had backed away from in 1927.

The unexpected role of Madam Sun (Soong Ching-ling) in publicising and strengthening Mao Zedong via Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*.

A detailed study of how much Snow wrote about the various leaders of Red China.

Also how Chang and Halliday's *Mao, The Unknown Story* omit some of their own earlier books. And how they see nothing remarkable in the following dialogue:

"As [Kuomintang official] Tai left, he said: 'if you were anyone but Madam Sun, we would cut your head off.'

"Ching-ling smiled. 'If you were the revolutionaries you pretend to be, you'd cut it off anyway.'"

Printed and Published by Problems Of Communism Committee  
33 Athol Street, Belfast BT12 4GX

# China: Nurturing Red Stars

by Gwydion M Williams

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Most political collapses are caused by a changing world exposing the limits of something that at one time worked well. China's Blue Republic was an exception: the state lasted from 1912 to 1949, but never did lift China above the status of what we'd now call a Failed State.

In *Problems 22*, I said: *China's 'Blue Republic'... achieved nothing because it was trying to erect a copy of the complex political structures of the USA or Western Europe on top of a society that had very different value. And doing it with a false understanding of the intricate political processes that had occurred there.*

*China faced the extra problem that Europe's global Empires wanted either to carve up China between them, or else keep it as a weak state that they could make money out of. It would have needed boldness and a willingness to suffer in order to force those countries to accept China as an equal, particularly since almost all of them viewed Chinese as an inferior race. It was not impossible: Mustafa Kemal Ataturk had managed it with a vigorous Turkish Republic that replaced the decaying Ottoman Empire. But no one before Mao actually managed it.*

The rest of the article explains this in detail. (And *Problems 21* explained why the earlier attempt to modernise within traditional forms failed, in sharp contrast to Japan's Meiji Restoration.) I will now give my reasons for believing that the Chinese Communists were the only functional alternative.

## **The Middle Ground**

Had Sun Yat-sen lived longer, he might have modernised China a couple of decades sooner, and on a more Western and less collectivist basis than actually happened. His death from cancer in 1925 left the leadership uncertain. But Chiang Kai-shek got control of most of the armies, and then organised a massacre of the Chinese Communist: a treacherous attack on people who thought they were part of the broad Kuomintang alliance. He managed this with the help of his old friends in the Shanghai Underworld, the 'Green Gangs'.

Chiang claimed that the Communists were trying to take over, of course. Which is nonsense: at that time they accepted the conventional Marxist notion that the 'bourgeois revolution' must happen first, with the Kuomintang as the proper agent of this change. Oddly, a lot of Western books about China both criticise this and also implicitly or explicitly endorse the claim by Chiang (and later by the Left Kuomintang government) that the Communists were trying to take over. They fail to notice that both of these things cannot be true.

Most commentators blame Comintern advice for the tremendous setback to Chinese Communism that happened in 1926. I disagree: I suspect that without the alliance with the Kuomintang, Chinese Communism would have remained marginal, as happened in Japan and many other Asian countries. Like other ventures by mainstream Leninism, the intervention in China was crude and

imperfect but *it worked*. Most of the left-wing critics come from political movements that have strikingly failed to come up with anything that worked.

Stalin gets blamed, of course. My view is that Stalin's main error was to suppose that Chiang had more guts than he actually had. The simple truth is, Chiang Kai-shek backed away from the radical and semi-socialist program of Sun Yatsen's *Three Principles of the People*. A bolder or wiser man in Chiang's position would have tried to implement Sun's program and quite possibly succeeded, producing a very different future for China and for the entire world.

Chiang lost his nerve when faced with the prospect of actually confronting global imperialism. That was the difference between him and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk: Ataturk always did what he saw as his duty, regardless of the consequences.

Chiang did show considerable courage in battle, playing his chosen role of Hero of the Nation. I very much doubt he could have done what an obscure Lieutenant-Colonel called Mustafa Kemal did in 1915 when he faced the forces of the British Empire advancing at Gallipoli and said:

"Men, I am not ordering you to attack. I am ordering you to die. In the time that it takes us to die, other forces and commanders can come and take our place."<sup>1</sup>

He was in the lead: he would have been among the first to die if he'd faced a battle-hardened regiment. As it happened, they faced an Australian force that later became formidable, but at that time was inexperienced and confused.<sup>2</sup> So Mustafa Kemal survived and held the line and gained a grand reputation, later being given the very dignified name Ataturk (Father of Turks).

Ataturk began as a military man. Chiang had trained for the military, but then spent many years as a shady Nationalist politician with strong links to the Shanghai underworld. This must have rotted his character. Sun Yatsen also had connections with the twilight world of semi-criminal and semi-revolutionary secret societies, of course. But he remained a professional revolutionary who looked for support wherever he could find it. Chiang definitely crossed the line, as I detailed in *Problems 22*.

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mustafa\\_Kemal\\_Ataturk](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mustafa_Kemal_Ataturk)

<sup>2</sup> Military historian Peter Hart in his book *Gallipoli* gives a good account of the incident, pages 96-7 of the paperback edition of 2013.

No successful politics has ever emerged from gangsterism. Lots of successful political movements *make use of* gangsters as enforcers. Fascist leaders are sometimes agitators and sometimes military men, but never career criminals. I think Chiang Kai-shek came closest, and it's part of the reason he failed.

(Some people may find this puzzling, because of the popular notion of gangsters as major power-brokers. Except in slums, they never are – and a community confined to a slum is obviously not powerful. People confuse being dangerous with being powerful: slums are dangerous and gangsters the most dangerous people within them. But they are only dangerous to peaceful people. They are no match for even a second-rate military. And they seem to know it, since the language of the more formidable gangsters includes a pretence that they are real military. The Mafia have 'soldiers' and 'captains', and an even more elaborate system is used by the Russian thieves-within-code.<sup>3</sup>)

So, Chiang Kai-shek failed. Was there any other way, besides Chinese Communism? For that matter, how was Chinese Communism able to recover and become all-powerful?

In 1927, there was briefly an alternative, a Left Kuomintang based at Wuhan. But it had a highly unsuitable leader, Wang Jingwei. He was suspicious of Communists, and later became sympathetic to Nazi Germany. His career ended ignominiously: he formed a puppet Chinese Republic in territory conquered by the Japanese before dying in 1944.

Others from the Left Kuomintang stuck to their original ideas. The best of them was Sun Yat-sen's widow, Soong Ching-ling. Her father, known to Westerners as Charlie Soong, was a self-made millionaire who had been trained by US Methodists as a Christian missionary.<sup>4</sup> But he found himself discriminated against and chose to start printing bibles instead. He was unexpectedly successful, and was also a man of principle, funding Sun Yat-sen in his years of exile. He

<sup>3</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_mafia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_mafia) for details of those people. In Russian they are *vory v zakone*. This is sometimes translated as 'thieves-in-law', but I think my version is better.

<sup>4</sup> His original name was Han Jiaozhun. Just why and how he adopted the name Soong is uncertain. *The Soong Dynasty* by Sterling Seagrave says more about this and other interesting issues.

did not approve of his daughter Ching-ling marrying Sun Yat-sen, who was much older, but he did accept it.

Soong Ching-ling was a pioneer in China of the idea of women having a public role and wives appearing along with their husbands: a choice copied later by her younger sister, who became Chiang Kai-shek's wife. But that happened with Chiang already in power: Ching-ling became Sun Yat-sen's wife when he was an exile and she shared a lot of the danger and hardship, including a miscarriage during one stressful escape.

Ching-ling did her best to continue her husband's policy of an alliance with the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communists. When the Left Kuomintang collapsed, she fled to Moscow. But when her younger sister married Chiang Kai-shek it became safe for her to return: family ties counting for more than politics. Her elder sister meantime married China's richest man H H Kung, sometimes finance minister. So it was said of the three sisters, "*one loved money, one loved power, and one loved China*".<sup>5</sup>

To understand Soong Ching-ling (Madam Sun), it is necessary to step back and explain why Chinese Communism became important. The revolution in Russia attracted great interest in China, as did the new government's repudiation of the privileges enjoyed by most foreigners in China under the various Unequal Treaties. Chinese radicals were already well aware of Marxism, which was very far from being identical with Leninism at the time, or for many decades thereafter. I mention later how Mao's initial introduction to Marxism included a book by Kautsky, Lenin's foe from 1917 but the official ideologist for most Marxists including Lenin before 1914.

Between the two World Wars, there were quite a few left-wing movements that were Marxist but anti-Leninist. At least one survives down to modern times, the Socialist Party of Great Britain and its various offshoots overseas. But none of them achieved much. They were adapted to the world as it existed before the First World War, and were like fish out of water after it. Only Leninism could cope with the new world that had been created by people bitterly opposed to all socialism, however moderate.

The Russian Revolution had been noticed as a possible example by existing Chinese radicals. Mao mentioned some early

examples to Edgar Snow:

"I built up a wide correspondence with many students and friends in other towns and cities [in Hunan]. Gradually I began to realize the necessity for a more closely knit organization. In 1917, with some other friends, I helped to found the Hsin-min Hsueh-hui [New People's Study Society]. It had from seventy to eighty members, and of these many were later to become famous names in Chinese communism and in the history of the Chinese Revolution...

"Another society that was formed about that time, and resembled the Hsin-min Hsueh-hui, was the 'Social Welfare Society' of Hupeh [Hubei]. Many of its members also later became Communists... Lin Piao, now president of the Red Army University, was a member... In Peking there was a society called Hu Sheh, some of whose members later became Reds. Elsewhere in China, notably in Shanghai, Hangchow, Hankow, and Tientsin, radical societies were organized by the militant youth then beginning to assert an influence on Chinese politics.

"Most of these societies were organized more or less under the influences of Hsin Ch'ing-nien [New Youth], the famous magazine of the literary renaissance, edited by Ch'en Tu-hsiu [Chen Duxiu]...

"At this time my mind was a curious mixture of ideas of liberalism, democratic reformism, and utopian socialism. I had somewhat vague passions about 'nineteenth-century democracy,' utopianism, and old-fashioned liberalism, and I was definitely antimilitarist and anti-imperialist.

"I accompanied some of the Hunanese students to Peking. However, although I had helped organize the movement, and it had the support of the Hsin-min Hsueh-hui, I did not want to go to Europe. I felt that I did not know enough about my own country, and that my time could be more profitably spent in China...

"Our group had demanded equal rights for men and women, and representative government, and in general approval of a platform for a bourgeois democracy. We openly advocated these reforms in our paper, the New Hunan. We led an attack on the provincial parliament, the majority of whose members were landlords and gentry appointed by the militarists. This struggle ended in our pulling down the scrolls and banners, which were full of nonsensical and extravagant phrases.

"The attack on the parliament was considered a big incident in Hunan, and frightened the rulers. However, when Chao Heng-t'i seized control he betrayed all the ideas he had supported, and especially he violently suppressed all demands for democracy. Our society therefore turned the struggle against him. I remember an episode in 1920, when the Hsin-min Hsueh-hui organized a demonstration to celebrate the third anniversary of the Russian October Revolution. It was suppressed by the police. Some of the demonstrators had attempted to raise the Red flag at that meeting, but were prohibited from doing so by the police. The demonstrators pointed out that, according to Article 12 of the Constitution, the people had the right to assemble, organize, and speak, but the police were not impressed. They replied that they were not there to be taught the Constitution, but to carry out the orders of the governor, Chao Heng-t'i. From this time on I became more and more convinced that only mass political power, secured through mass action, could guarantee the realization of dynamic

<sup>5</sup> [[http://listing-index.ebay.com/movies/Soong\\_sisters.html](http://listing-index.ebay.com/movies/Soong_sisters.html)]

reforms.

"In the winter of 1920 I organized workers politically for the first time, and began to be guided in this by the influence of Marxist theory and the history of the Russian Revolution. During my second visit to Peking I had read much about the events in Russia, and had eagerly sought out what little Communist literature was then available in Chinese. Three books especially deeply carved my mind, and built up in me a faith in Marxism, from which, once I had accepted it as the correct interpretation of history, I did not afterwards waver. These books were the *Communist Manifesto*, translated by Ch'en Wang-tao and the first Marxist book ever published in Chinese; *Class Struggle*, by Kautsky; and a *History of Socialism*, by Kirkup. By the summer of 1920 I had become, in theory and to some extent in action, a Marxist, and from this time on I considered myself a Marxist. In the same year I married Yang K'ai-hui."<sup>6</sup>

I say a lot more about Edgar Snow and *Red Star Over China* later on. Note for now that Moscow's main efforts in China was building up the Kuomintang: a 'commitment of money, men and arms' successfully strengthened them and allowed the 'Northern Expedition' to extend Kuomintang power from its base in Guangzhou (Canton) to Wuhan, Nanking and Shanghai. At which point Chiang Kai-shek pulled a double-cross, treacherously massacring Communists and radicals who thought they were allies, breaking with the Soviet Union and getting accepted by the Western Imperialists as a substitute for the older crowd of warlords.

The later independent efforts of the Chinese Communists owed very little to Moscow: almost all of their weapons were captured from rival Chinese armies.

### **War With Japan**

Japan had very successfully imitated the west. But what the Japanese imitated was Europe's late-19th-century pattern of popular militarism and expanding empires. By modern standards, the entire world headed in the wrong direction for several decades from the 1870s.

Japan had an opportunity to champion the liberation of Asia, and sometimes pretended to be doing so. But their actual policy was to create their own Empire. Because they broke up the existing colonial system and were defeated before they could consolidate their own rule, the actual effect was liberating. But only because Japan lost, and there was

nothing to say they'd lose in advance of the actual event.

It would be nice to suppose that 'modern standards' would somehow have won out anyhow. But my own strong feeling is that it was a matter of luck: rival right-wing authoritarian systems wrecking each other and giving different politics a chance in the 1940s. And it needed politicians on the left shrewd enough to take advantage of the opportunity. I can't forget how a rather better set of opportunities for the left in the 1970s was wasted, with loud and deeply ineffective Trotskyist being the main bunglers.

In the 1930s, things were much grimmer. Japan had created a brutal and unjust system from the 1880s to 1930s, but it was not entirely their fault. At the time when Japan copied the West, there would have seemed to be no alternative. The 'scramble for Africa' from the 1880s extended European rule over a continent that had been mostly self-governing. Burma was gradually taken over by British India between 1824 and 1886. France was likewise expanding in Indochina, with Thailand left precariously between territories ruled by the French and British. Japan had every excuse to apply the same pattern to its weaker neighbours, and every reason to fear that an independent non-European power would not be tolerated for long. Or not unless it rapidly became extremely strong: stronger than would be possibly for Japan's Home Islands. Japan saw an opportunity for expansion in Korea, and then Manchuria, and then China as a whole. The Chinese Republic was too weak to do much about it.

But Japan messed up politically, ruling mostly by force and doing too little to attract real loyalty to the new state. I'm puzzled that they never tried proposing that the Japanese Emperor had become a new Chinese Emperor: or maybe that the Crown Prince would take the title. There were plenty of precedents for 'Zhongguo' being ruled by a non-Han dynasty, and plenty of Han who had loyally served such regimes. The Japanese got large numbers of loyal recruits from Korea, despite treating them as despicable inferiors. But in Manchuria and the rest of China, they preferred to rule through puppet regimes that no one took seriously. This remained the case even when Wang Jingwei joined them. He had been the main alternative to Chiang Kai-shek in the Kuomintang and in the 1920s had tried to work with the Chinese Communists, but working for the Japanese he was a nothing.

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<sup>6</sup> Mao's short autobiography from *Red Star Over China*. Available on-line at <http://www.humanrights-china.org/meetingchina/Meeti2002114155438.htm> & <http://www.humanrights-china.org/meetingchina/Meeti2002114155623.htm>

The West had been happy to leave China as a nominally independent state that gave them access for trade without the need to bother about the welfare of those they exploited. Japan thought seriously about creating a new China, but alienated most Chinese by the way it went about it. The Japanese army pulled off pieces of China with a pretence of autonomy, and Chiang Kai-shek failed to act. He had to be kidnapped by some of his own generals before he'd drop his policy of waging war against the surviving Chinese Communists and agree to unite with them against the Japanese threat. This led on to a full-blown invasion of China by Japan, beginning in 1937 and merging into World War Two.

After a series of defeats – which included much Chinese heroism and a lot of Japanese brutality, notably the Rape of Nanking – Chiang's government found refuge in Sichuan, right next to Tibet. Chiang's government played a large role in getting the present Dalai Lama recognised and enthroned in Lhasa in 1940, though most current Western accounts leave this out. Back in 1940, when China was assumed to be being remoulded by the USA, US newspapers were happy to report it:

"The exotic ceremonies of religious ritual centuries old will go hand in hand with symbols of a new-found political unity between Tibet and China with the new dalai lama, fourteenth of the line, is enthroned at Lhasa..."

"China is making efforts to use the ceremony for greater strength in the new political ties between Tibet and China, and the Chinese government will be represented fully. Chungking [Chongqing] officials have shown great interest in the selection of the new Dalai Lama, who will come to be the principle force in this semi-autonomous region of China.

"Tibetan circles have revealed that the portrait of Dr Sun Yat-sen, 'father of the Chinese republic', will have the place of honour in the main ceremonial hall, surrounded by Buddhist pictures.

"The Kuomintang's party song, which is also the Chinese national anthem, will be sung by Tibetan masses for the first time in history at the general enthronement ceremony on the first day of the festival.

"The 'white sun in the blue sky' flag on the Chinese government will hang in the main ceremonial hall, while the streets of Lhasa will be decorated with the flag and similar bits of bunting.

"All these, Tibetan sources pointed out, mark 'the cordial friendship and political ties between Tibet and the central government'..."

"The Chungking government was quick to take advantage of an invitation to participate in the enthronement ceremonies. China hopes to establish better political and economic relations with its Tibetan provinces, and ultimately open up new trade routes making available the vast mineral resources of the area.

"Greater friendship and cooperation also is aimed at growing Japanese influence in Tibet... 100 Japanese 'lamas' are now studying at various monasteries. Nominally they are disciples of Buddha, but actually they act as Japanese secret service agents.

"These 'lamas', the Tibetans sad, have been fomenting anti-Chinese and anti-British feeling in Tibet, although 'not too successfully'. Their activities, it was reported, had created enemies for them who are starting an anti-Japanese movement to clear Tibet of all Japanese influence..."

"The boy is a pure Tibetan, son of a well-to-do land-owning farmer..."

"There are two other children who theoretically have an equal chance of being chosen. Both were born near Lhasa at the time of the thirteenth Dalai Lama's death. However, Tibetan and Chinese officials favor the Kokonor boy... the belief that he was foreordained to be the next spiritual ruler of Tibet, without the usual ceremony of drawing lots from the 150-year-old golden urn in the central temple."<sup>7</sup>

Few Westerners at that time cared much about Tibet: the war in Europe was the key, but the war in East Asia was also highly important. Chiang and his elegant wife Meiling managed to present themselves to the USA as heroic allies. Those US citizens who got close enough to look got a very different impression, it was a weak and corrupt government and they set a bad example:

"At the beginning of July, Meiling flew back to Asia with her niece in a converted Liberator bomber... The two women had amassed such a treasure trove of American goods to take home that some had to be brought in on another aircraft. At Assam, one of the crates was dropped and broke open. The US army grapevine had it that inside were ermine brassieres, which was probably not true; but there was certainly a lot of cosmetics, groceries and lingerie, wrote Graham Peck. Angered, the American soldiers dropped other crates, kicked the contents around and then threw them into the Liberator."<sup>8</sup>

This wasn't just ordinary abuse of public resources: the trip from Assam to West China meant flying over the Himalayas and was both difficult and dangerous. Medical supplies and military supplies were both vitally needed, but Chiang's wife preferred to use limited air-freight for her own comfort.

A corrupt government is tolerable if it also modernises – British governments were pretty solidly corrupt when the Industrial Revolution began. But Chiang Kai-shek wasn't interested in change, and was foolish enough to document it:

"There was also cause for concern about Chiang's literary activities. As Meiling had begun her tour of the United States, he had a book published... *China's Destiny* had been largely ghosted for the Generalissimo... The 213-page work became a must-buy for anybody who wanted to be in with the regime. Sales soared through the hundreds of thousands, some said up to a million. The book insisted on the supremacy of traditional Chinese ways and blamed foreigners for all the country's ills..."

"China's highly reactionary message could have alienated the public of China's main ally; so an English language version was shelved, and then issued in a version which cut out the objectionable passages... The State Department classified its copy of the Chinese original as 'top secret'. Washington was about to award the Generalissimo the Legion of Merit... it would hardly do for the recipient to be known as an opponent of everything the allies were meant to be fighting for."<sup>9</sup>

I've read Chiang's book in an unauthorised edition critically annotated by an American Communist sympathiser, Phillip Jaffe. It is even

<sup>7</sup> Boy, 6, becomes fourteenth Dalai Lama in weird ageless rites on Thursday, from *The Billings Gazette*, February 18th 1940. Found in an on-line newspaper archive. There is also an on-line Chinese account of the matter at [<http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/ljzg/3585/3592/3596/t17966.htm>]

<sup>8</sup> Fenby, Jonathan. *Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek and the China He Lost*, Free Press 2003. Page 401

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Pages 400-401.

worse than Fenby describes it. Among other things, he exaggerates China's historic claim on Tibet:

"Following the conversion of the Tufans in Tibet to Buddhism, the orientation of the Tibet's development was towards China. Under the Sui and T'ang dynasties, Tibet looked to China for direction. Thus, Tibet's period of assimilation has lasted over thirteen hundred years."<sup>10</sup>

Western Tibet – the Lhasa Valley and the rest of the Tibetan Plateau – had no connection to the Chinese Empire until late in the Tang era. Chiang seems to be confusing this with earlier connections to what became Eastern Tibet. He is just as casual with China's other main minority:

"As to the so-called Mohammedans in present-day China, they are for the most part actually members of the Han clan who embrace Islam. Therefore, the difference between the Hans and Mohammedans is only in religion and different habits of life. In short, our various clans actually belong to the same nation, as well as to the same racial stock."<sup>11</sup>

To refer to Muslims as Mohammedans is an insult. It was also the Western norm in the 1940s and might be the fault of the translator. But again Chiang is either confused or twisting facts. Some Muslims in China are indeed very like the Han: the Chinese Communists were later to classify them as Hui Muslims. Others are Turkic people with very little similarity – notably the Uighurs of Xinjiang.

When he talks about Chinese politics, his own area of expertise, Chiang is much more interesting. He says of the 1911-12 revolution:

"They had overthrown the absolute monarchy, but they could not eliminate the bad habits of idleness, greed, and aimlessness developed under autocracy nor the tradition of unrealistic learning and discussion without practical results. With such habits and traditions... the operation of the parliamentary system was marked by bribery and the [illegal] revision of the provisional constitution. Even members that joined the revolutionary party were so governed by bad habits that they lacked steadfastness."<sup>12</sup>

Most Western readers would be shocked by his scorn for two-party systems: I myself would say he got that bit right. Competitive Electoral Politics only work when the main parties accept that it's a political game in which keeping the rules is more important than winning. The British elite arrived at that conclusion in 1688, after about half a century of civil wars which no one faction had been strong enough to rule for long.

What Chiang leaves out is the need to revolutionise the society, unleash the dangerous power of ordinary people. He failed to do what Mao has been condemned by the West for doing: but Mao left China enormously stronger, richer and more respected than when he came to power.<sup>13</sup> Chiang

stayed within the boundaries the West set for him. China under the Kuomintang version of the Blue Republic remained an impoverished mess.

Note also that the people that Chiang condemns for "idleness, greed, and aimlessness" were much the same people that Mao unleashed popular anger against in his various campaigns. See the connections now?

Chiang was inhibited by his fear of radicalism and the popular will. But he knew just why the first attempt had failed. He describes what Sun Yatsen had done: how he had tried "to implant the foundation of the Three People's Principles in the minds and life of the people. There were very few men in the party that understood this idea... They also copied the form of British and American politics, believing that if two major parties existed side by side, the mould of democracy would have been set. However, though two major parties were organised, they did not help the parliament to increase its authority... nor could they prevent a president like Yuan Shih-k'ai from abusing his prerogatives." (Ibid., page 69)

Although Chiang was nominally a Christian, the book shows no real interest in Christian beliefs. He was very much part of the doomed old culture:

"China's own philosophy of life, developed by Confucius... automatically became a lofty system, superior to any other philosophy in the world. Yet the Chinese nation also accepted foreign religions..."

"During the past hundred years, Christianity in China exercised a beneficial effect in introducing scientific knowledge and reforming social traditions."<sup>14</sup>

"Although the Chinese people originally studied Western civilisation because of their unwillingness to become slaves, the result was that they unconsciously became the slaves of foreign theories because of their studies of Western civilisation.

"After the May 4<sup>th</sup> [1919] Movement, the ideas of Liberalism [Democracy] and Communism spread throughout the country. But those that advocated these ideas had no real knowledge of the enduring qualities of Chinese culture, they were simply looking for something new..."

"[In the revised edition, the foregoing passage was altered to read: 'After May 4<sup>th</sup>, two types of thought – individualistic Liberalism and class-war Communism – were suddenly introduced among the educated classes.'" (Ibid., page 98)

But what was the alternative? Chiang cites Ataturk's achievements: "Turkey, after its successful revolution, established a free and independent national government which further stimulated and aroused the peoples of Asia".<sup>15</sup> But Ataturk did the two key things that Chiang never tried, he showed his willingness to fight the European empires by rejecting the treaty they tried to impose after World War One, and he overturned centuries of Turkish tradition when in

<sup>10</sup> Chiang Kai-Shek, *China's Destiny & Chinese Economic Theory*, with Notes and Commentary by Phillip Jaffe. Dennis Dobson, London, 1947. Pages 38-39

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., page 68

<sup>13</sup> Western books from the 1980s onwards are

misleading, saying a lot about particular errors but never giving the overall picture. I detailed this in *Problems 17-18*, available on-line as <http://gwydionwilliams.com/42-china/mao-and-china/>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., page 95

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., page 116

power. Ataturk imposed Western dress, a Western alphabet and the Western system of surnames. In China, radical nationalism of that sort had to wait for Mao, who combined it with the class-war Communism that Ataturk did not allow.

Ataturk also decided that western-style liberalism should be the end point, though he maintained an autocratic government while the nation was being modernised. What Chiang would have ended up with if he'd retained power is anyone's guess. He did say:

"It should be noted that China's democratic system will certainly not be patterned on the nineteenth-century democratic theories of individualism and class consciousness of Europe and America." (Ibid., p 169)

Chiang looked to European Fascism, in as far as he had any coherent ideas. Had Hitler chosen to keep the Chinese links that the German military had made, rather than making an alliance with Japan, history might have gone differently. For it wasn't just political liberalism that Chiang rejected: he viewed economic liberalism as outdated as well:

"Those who favoured the theories of liberalism approached the problems the problems that faced China as a result of the prolonged oppression of the unequal treaties, without recognising that the trend in world economics after the First World War had been from free competition towards monopoly and centralisation. They regarded themselves as new and modern when they were actually applying the economic theories of the first industrial revolution to a China that was faced with the second industrial revolution in Europe and America." (Ibid., page 127)

This muddles two distinct issues: the state of the world economy and China's role within it. China's home-grown industry made no progress until Mao sealed it off from outside competition, exactly as Bismarck sealed off Germany and as the US Republicans from the 1860s sealed off the USA. After 1949 and fearing the spread of Communism, the USA allowed East Asia to build or rebuild its industries behind high tariff barriers while selling freely into US markets. This would have been unlikely without the existence of Communist China as a major alternative.

Chiang was never very realistic, not even about war. Of the highly unsuccessful defence of China against Japan, a much smaller nation that from 1941 was also fighting the USA, he says:

"Although the Japanese militarists considered themselves extremely clever, they were really stupid and stubborn. In their war of aggression against our country, they thought that they had the initiative in their hands... What they did not know was that, from the beginning of the war, their policy and military strategy were entirely under our control... and proceeded along the road to inevitable collapse."<sup>16</sup>

'What they did not know' is also something that no one else seems to know, apart from Chiang. A general loathing of Imperial Japan in the West has not prevented historians from recognising its remarkable military efficiency. In as far as Japan

got bogged down in China, this was due to the massive underground war waged by the Chinese Communists. US military advisors who tried to help the Chinese against the Japanese soon came to view the Kuomintang with complete contempt.

(There's an excellent book called *Two Kinds of Time* that was originally published in 1950 and is available in a modern edition, that gives a very clear account of what was wrong. A similar message is given by Barbara Tuchman's *Stilwell and the American Experience in China: 1911-1945*, and most other accounts based on direct experience of Kuomintang China.)

Why on earth does Chiang bother to make a claim that obviously contradicts the reality of Chinese weakness and Japanese success? Before finding this passage, I'd never been quite sure whether Lu Xun's famous novel *The True Story of Ah Q* was exaggerating when he parodied the habit in China of his day of dressing up defeat as success – he has two chapters entitled *A Brief Account of Ah-Q's Victories* and *A Further Account of Ah-Q's Victories*. From this passage it seems entirely accurate and to have lived on in Taiwan.

I assume most readers won't have read *Ah Q*, so I'll quote an example:

"If the idlers were still not satisfied, but continued to bait him, they would in the end come to blows. Then only after Ah Q had, to all appearances, been defeated, had his brownish pigtail pulled and his head bumped against the wall four or five times, would the idlers walk away, satisfied at having won. Ah Q would stand there for a second, thinking to himself, 'It is as if I were beaten by my son. What is the world coming to nowadays. . . .' Thereupon he too would walk away, satisfied at having won."<sup>17</sup>

*The True Story of Ah Q* is one of the books you need to read if you want to understand China's 20th century history. Lu Xun was one of many who supported the Communists because there simply wasn't anyone else who could cure China's existing weakness. How he'd have fared in Mao's China is moot: maybe he was personally lucky not to have lived to see it, and some of those close to him fared badly. But it's not impossible that he'd have been wise and large-spirited enough to understand that only someone like Mao could put together a shattered and demoralised nation.

## **The Final Civil War**

The 'Second Civil War' that happened after World War Two saw the rapid collapse of the pro-Western Republic in the face of a small but determined People's Liberation Army that had been created by the Communist Party. It was the conclusion of the period of disorder that had begun in China after the First Opium War. It was a second Tai-Ping, nearly a century after the first effort at Chinese Communism. And vastly stronger by being

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<sup>17</sup> The entire short story is available on-line at [http://www.marxists.org/archive/lu-xun/1921/12/ah-q/ch02.htm]

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., page 145

organised around Leninism rather than a muddled version of Christianity.

If Chiang Kai-shek had been a plausible unifier, you'd have expected him to be much stronger after World War Two, with the Japanese threat removed and with massive US support. But every source I've read, no matter how anti-Communist, agrees that his rule was hopeless and quickly alienated those who'd previously accepted him. This includes Juan Chang in *Wild Swans*, the book that made her famous, though she fudges the issue in *Mao, The Unknown Story*.

Chiang Kai-shek hankered after traditional China, and seemed to think that it was only Manchu rule that had allowed Europe to overtake China. He disliked anything that seemed revolutionary or involving the people as a whole. He ignored the very slow rate of change that occurred in traditional China even at the best of times, a sluggishness that ensured that a restoration of China's old norms could never have worked in the face of Western pressures.<sup>18</sup>

As it happened, the Japanese invasion had damaged Chinese norms beyond repair, wherever they had managed to hang on during the time of the Blue Republic. The same gentry who had supported the various warlord regimes and then the Kuomintang lost authority under the Japanese occupation, frequently collaborating with the invader. And as happened elsewhere in the world, the Communists were best adapted to underground resistance and gained huge prestige in what became an anti-fascist war.

The war ended with Japan in possession of a huge chunk of China. Their conquests may have been a net burden to the Japanese cause, but that would have been mostly due to the Communist underground. Meantime the Kuomintang regime retreated inland and did little fighting after the US-Japanese war began. It was solidly despised by almost every Westerner who got a close look at it. In all the stuff I've read about China, I've not found any Westerner who was in a position to see first-hand who actually liked the Kuomintang regime. Most – though not all – were fond of the culture and found many likable people among those Chinese they met: but very few in the Chinese state apparatus. Most saw the Kuomintang as an obstacle to whatever project they had in mind.

World War Two revolutionised many societies. The needs of war often broke down racial barriers. Britain during World War Two had some West Indian pilots and even squadron-leaders, most notably Ulric Cross. Many of them were treated unfairly afterwards, but when times were tough their usefulness was recognised.<sup>19</sup> But in Kuomintang China the reverse happened – when

the famous 'Flying Tigers' were created, it was decided to simply ignore the existing Chinese air-force and organise something made up exclusively of foreigners, insulated from Kuomintang politics.

Initial Chinese resistance to the Japanese invasion was serious and ended in some costly defeats. Other causes in world history have been able to rally and come back stronger from such defeats: the Kuomintang preferred to hang onto what they had left.

And lost it all. The USA tried to keep the Kuomintang / Communist alliance going in the post-war world, but the link had become nominal during the war. Himself subservient to foreign interests, Chiang Kai-shek must have assumed that he would remain secure as top boss of China for as long as the USA needed him. They did indeed give him lots of weapons and air-lifted his troops into Manchuria, telling the Japanese to stay in place till then in order to prevent the Communists taking over. But the Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-shek had become hopelessly weak. As happened in many other countries, the Communists had become the most vigorous part of the underground resistance, and came to be seen as the most effective upholders of the national interest. Large numbers of Kuomintang troops surrendered or changed sides: they felt that their own cause was not worth dying for.

It's worth looking briefly at some of the other ways that China might have put itself together. In *Problems 21*, I speculated about how China might have modernised under the authority of its traditional Emperor, as Japan did. Whether this would have been good for the rest of the world is a moot point. We can only speculate about the 'road not taken', but it seems to me that China had the potential to create something quite as nasty as Imperial Japan actually became. Before it embarked on its sudden Westernisation and expansion, Japan had had long periods of peace and of lack of interest in the outside world. And after being defeated, it rebuilt and remains a very peaceful society, not much interested in the outside world. Someone should do an 'Alternate History' in which the two societies swap their 19th century roles, with Japan fragmenting and China become the militarist-traditionalist empire.

Another possibility is that the Kuomintang would have become proper Fascists. This might have happened if Hitler had preserved and strengthened the alliance that had been in place before he took over. It was German advisors who helped the Kuomintang evict the Chinese Communists from their southern bases, surviving narrowly thanks to the Long March. But with Japan wanting to take more and more of China, it was not possible to be in alliance with both of them. Hitler chose to work with Japan, which was probably against his long-term interests. The USA in the 1930s was quite sympathetic to Hitler, as they had been to Mussolini earlier on. But the USA saw China as a place that it could shape in its own image. They might have

<sup>18</sup> See <http://gwydionwilliams.com/42-china/traditional-china-resisted-modernisation/> for details

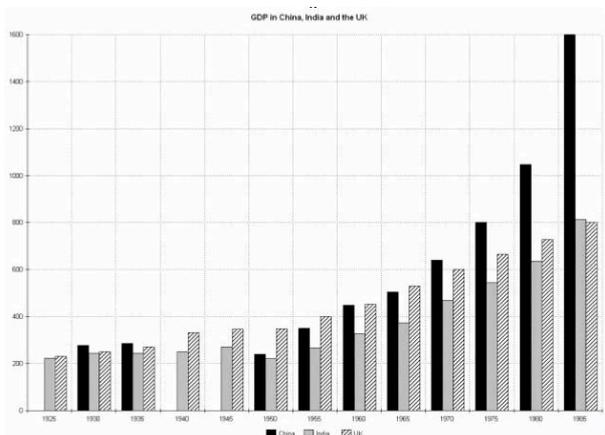
<sup>19</sup> <http://www.search.co.tt/trinidad/ulriccross/index.html>, <http://thepoormouth.blogspot.com/2008/09/pathfinder-and-idiot.html>

been willing to share influence with Germany, but they were definitely not ready to risk Japan taking over China as a whole.

## The Red Emperor

Both the Manchus and the Blue Republic were scared of mobilising their own people. The Chinese Communists had built their power on mass mobilisation, creating the first real national culture in China. Mao's Chinese version of Leninism got China moving after centuries of stagnation.

The attempt at creating a Chinese version of the Western system between 1911 and 1949 had been a dismal failure, because there was no system other than Marxism that explained the actual workings of a modern society to people who had not grown up in such a society. In India, the Congress Party had managed its own blend of ancient Hindu values and things they'd learned from the British during many generations of British rule. But while they started off at much the same level in the 1940s, China quickly pulled ahead.



China under Mao doubled its population and tripled its economy.<sup>20</sup> Most accounts nowadays give you the impression that growth only began after Deng's reforms. Growth speeded up under Deng, certainly, and standards of living rose. Partly this was because Deng imposed drastic curbs on the number of children, something that was pretty much new in the world, but got very little protest from the West at a time when the West supposed that Deng was on their side. But China under Mao was making steady progress and pulling ahead of India, having once been at much the same level in the late 1940s.<sup>21</sup>

People who see the usefulness of the original 1949 revolution mostly fail to see why Mao insisted on additional ideological campaigns. They assume that the middle class that had grown up under

<sup>20</sup> This is based on Angus Maddison's *The World Economy: Historical Statistics*, OECD 2003. Figures for pre-Mao China are incomplete, because at no time did it have a single government in full control. But clearly there was little growth before the Communist take-over, which had similar effects to India's achievement of independence.

<sup>21</sup> See <http://gwydionwilliams.com/42-china/mao-and-china/> for more on this.

China's abortive modernisation before 1949 was fit and able to be part of a modern society. Actually it wasn't: it was still burdened by the heritage of centuries. In his famous *Red Star Over China* account of his life, Mao notes the problem. The key weakness was that traditional Chinese culture was built *on top of* the peasantry and did not really include them:

"I continued to read the old romances and tales of Chinese literature. It occurred to me one day that there was one thing peculiar about such stories, and that was the absence of peasants who tilled the land. All the characters were warriors, officials, or scholars; there was never a peasant hero. I wondered about this for two years, and then I analyzed the content of the stories. I found that they all glorified men of arms, rulers of the people, who did not have to work the land, because they owned and controlled it and evidently made the peasants work it for them."

Later he discusses his own very minor part in China's First Revolution:

"Many students were now joining the army. A student army had been organized... I did not like the student army; I considered the basis of it too confused. I decided to join the regular army instead, and help complete the revolution. The Ch'ing [Qin] Emperor had not yet abdicated, and there was a period of struggle."

He describes his own freeing of himself the prejudice against educated people doing manual labour. As the son of a rich peasant who was on track to becoming a typical Chinese intellectual. At this time he had most of the prejudices of this class:

My salary was seven yuan a month--which is more than I get in the Red Army now, however--and of this I spent two yuan a month on food. I also had to buy water. The soldiers had to carry water in from outside the city, but I, being a student, could not condescend to carrying, and bought it from the water peddlers. The rest of my wages were spent on newspapers, of which I became an avid reader."

Many historians have noted the distaste for labour as a problem for the Classical Greeks: a probable reason why their clever philosophy and interesting scientific ideas came to nothing. In Europe, it was Christianity that gave a new meaning to work, saw something dignified in physical toil. This didn't get through to many ordinary Chinese converts to Christianity, unfortunately. It was left to the Chinese Communists to free themselves from China's ancient prejudice against manual work, and then impose the new attitude on the rest of the society.

Of course Mao also tapped into Chinese traditions, wherever these could be made use of. After the Kuomintang declared war on the Chinese Communists in 1927, he was able to get together some troops and form his own little military base. He could command as a scholar with little military experience and no apparent fitness to command, because that was a long-standing Chinese pattern and one that had worked quite well. If some good generals come from military families or rise from the ranks, many others came in from the outside

and master 'military science'.

Mao proved himself to be a gifted military commander, but he made no claim to have been anything special as an individual fighter. Indeed, he mentions an incident in *Red Star Over China* that illustrates how ordinary he was in this regard:

"I was then living in a guild house for natives of Hsiang Hsiang district. Many soldiers were there also – 'retired' or disbanded men from the district, who had no work to do and little money. Students and soldiers were always quarrelling in the guild house, and one night this hostility between them broke out in physical violence. The soldiers attacked and tried to kill the students. I escaped by fleeing to the toilet, where I hid until the fight was over.

"I had no money then, my family refusing to support me unless I entered school, and since I could no longer live in the guild house I began looking for a new place to lodge. Meanwhile, I had been thinking seriously of my 'career' and had about decided that I was best suited for teaching. I had begun reading advertisements again. An attractive announcement of the Hunan Normal School now came to my attention, and I read with interest of its advantages: no tuition required, and cheap board and cheap lodging. Two of my friends were also urging me to enter. They wanted my help in preparing entrance essays. I wrote of my intention to my family and I received their consent. I composed essays for my two friends, and wrote one of my own. All were accepted—in reality, therefore, I was accepted three times. I did not then think my act of substituting for my friends an immoral one; it was merely a matter of friendship."

Mao's account of his self-development is surprisingly well-developed for what was supposed to be a casual response to a Westerner's curiosity. Snow himself had noticed that none of the leading Communists knew much about each other's background:

"During Mao's recollection of his past, I noticed that an auditor at least as interested as myself was Ho Tze-nien – his wife. Many of the facts he told about himself and the Communist movement she had evidently never heard before, and this was true of most of Mao's comrades in Pao An. Later on, when I gathered biographical notes from other Red leaders, their colleagues often crowded around interestedly to listen to the stories for the first time. Although they had all fought together for years, very often they knew nothing of each other's pre-Communist days, which they had tended to regard as a kind of Dark Ages period, one's real life beginning only when one became a Communist."

But whereas Snow seems to have pieced together biographies from scattered replies by the other leaders, from Mao he got a single coherent narrative:

"I had given to Mao a long list of questions to answer about himself... Mao had talked for a dozen night, hardly ever referring to himself or to his own role in some of the events described. I was beginning to think it was hopeless to expect him to give me such details, he obviously considered the individual of very little importance..."

"He was sceptical, anyway, about the necessity for supplying an autobiography. But I argued that in a way this was more important than information on other matters. 'People want to know what sort of man you are', I said,

'when they read what you say'...

"Suppose; he said at least, 'that I just disregard your questions, and instead give you a general sketch of my life? I think it will be more understandable, and in the end all of your questions will be answered just the same.'

"But that's exactly what I want!' I exclaimed..."

"Mao related everything from memory, and I put it down as he talked. It was, as I have said, re-translated and corrected."

In two later publications, *Random Notes on Red China* and *Journey To The Beginning*, Snow explains how Mao had given him a surprising amount of time:

"I found little difficulty in arranging to interview anybody I wished to see. Once given the word to open up, they all welcomed the opportunity to speak to someone from the outside world for the first time in years.

"Every word then was fresh and informative – even crude propaganda – and I wrote down nearly everything I heard and was often busy with pen or pencil from early morning till after midnight. Mao Tse-tung spoke to me nearly every night for several weeks, usually starting after supper at about nine or ten and often continuing until I fell asleep at two or three A.M."<sup>22</sup>

"We would take for hours, sometimes nearly till dawn... There was a kind of lull in war and politics at that moment and Mao had some leisure. Perhaps my intense interest and questioning also won a response in him. Frequently he put aside piles of reports or telegrams, and cancelled meetings, to be with me. After all, I was a medium through whom he had his first chance to speak to the world – and, more important, to China. Legal access to the press of China was denied him, but his comments published in English were bound to filter back, he knew, and reach the ears of most literate Chinese, despite Kuomintang censorship."<sup>23</sup>

The spread of Snow's reports about Mao actually happened after the Xian Incident, the United Front and the Communists moving into Yen-an, which they did not hold at the time of Snow's visit. Yen-an became the capital of a different sort of China and lots of educated youths got given a new outlook on the world after visiting there.

The result is surprisingly polished, considering that Mao spoke in what Snow called a 'soft southern dialect', a regional variant of Mandarin different from the Beijing version that Snow was fairly fluent in. Snow needed a translator. But as a journalist he lent a sympathetic ear and wrote what he heard, without necessarily believing it at the time:

"Inwardly I often smiled at the extravagance of Mao's claims, which then seemed more naive than Ghandi's hopes of conquering the British by 'love power'. There he sat, with two pairs of cotton pants to his name, his army a miniscule band of poorly armed youths, facing a precarious existence in the most impoverished corner of the land. Yet he spoke as if his party already had an irrevocable mandate over 'the

<sup>22</sup> *Random Notes on Red China*, page viii

<sup>23</sup> *Journey To The Beginning*, page 160-1

workers and peasants' of all China, acted as if he believed it, and told the foreign powers just how a free China of the future 'could' and 'could not' co-operate with them. 'Every man is an impossibility until he is born,' said Emerson. Mao was real enough and yet still a kind of impossibility. For 'everything is impossible,' to finish the epigram, 'until we see a success' – and at that moment Mao looked a failure...

"His step-by-step reasoning gradually took hold of me as 'just possible' reality. As his personal story unfolded, thoughtfully told, well organised and dramatic, I began to see that it was a rich cross-section of a whole generation seen in the life of a man who had deeply analyzed and studied its meaning... Unconscious, inarticulate China's needs might be in 'the vast majority of the people,' but if social revolution could provide 'the dynamics which can regenerate China, then in this deeply historical sense Mao Tse-tung may become a very great man."<sup>24</sup>

Mao's account of his own life is also interesting psychologically, a very coherent account of Mao's own thinking and how it developed. It seems remarkable that he composed it pretty much on demand – if that's how it really happened. As Snow says, Mao sometimes spoke from memory, but he always had an astonishingly good memory and could have been reciting something he'd been working on for some time. Snow does also say:

"To the series of nightly interviews that followed Mao brought sheets of his own notes. He was not giving me just dead facts to which I had to bring life, but a nearly finished piece of self-analysis and explanation of a generation of revolutionists."<sup>25</sup>

Biographies were a form peculiar to the modern European middle class, though the Greeks also had them. That Mao picked up and *thoroughly understood* this form is surprising. He had never left China, and had never had much contact with Westerners. But I think that Mao had absorbed *and understood* far more from Western culture than most educated Chinese of his era. He read and he thought and it appears that he understood the useful aspects of Western thinking far better than any other Chinese I've come across. And he was also able to apply it to Chinese conditions in ways no Westerner was able to do.

But why did he go to so much trouble to talk to Edgar Snow? I doubt that Mao had any interest in an autobiography as such, but he may have realised that it would be a useful political weapon. Madam Sun may have advised him on this, and of course he would remember his own feelings as a youth when he read accounts of the lives of the famous.

Biographies and especially autobiographies have the subtle effect of making the reader feel more sympathetic. Mao at the time he spoke to Snow knew that something like the Xian incident was likely to happen, and was expecting to become part of a broader coalition of anti-Japanese forces. He may have anticipated the need to impress and

reassure non-Communists who were potential allies.

Snow's account was published in English, but naturally it was soon translated back into Chinese. It became a useful supplement to Mao's political essays, which were the main thing people knew about him outside of his own small Liberated Area. His account of his life was an advertisement, but also a statement of political intent. He described how his own thinking had changed, and he was determined to bring about similar changes in others.

I don't suppose many people expected in 1950 that Mao would be just as concerned with transforming the culture as the economy. But at least one man did, the British writer Robert Payne:

"Mao holds all the arts of China in his hands. Lenin had neither the learning nor the inclination to assume the role of *transformer* of culture. Mao, far more widely read and with a comparative subtlety of mind, has clearly determined to accept the position thrust on him, and no one can foresee the changes in the basic structure of Chinese culture which will derive ultimately from his will."<sup>26</sup>

This is something deserving of a lot more study, which I plan to do eventually. The point for now is that Payne fails to grasp that Mao could only be effective working through the Chinese Communist Party. The party had accepted him as its supreme leader but remained broadly committed to replicating the Soviet pattern as it had been created by Stalin. Mao was never satisfied with this model and kept trying to push through to something better. With the Soviet Union having collapsed ignominiously in 1989-91 and then the revived Fundamentalist Capitalism coming apart in the current financial crisis, Mao has to some degree been vindicated by history. If he didn't entirely find the answer, he did turn China into a vibrant society with an open-ended potential. And the problems he tried to resolve remain problems for all existing societies.

Not many people have thought about Mao Zedong and Mahatma Gandhi as parallel lives. They'd normally be classified as total opposites, if they were linked at all. Maybe only Edgar Snow made a link:

"Ghandi understood the masses by suffering with them, and through this they understood him. His great service was to make a bridge of himself between the intellectual and the root strength of the peasants. It has often occurred to me that Mao Tse-tung and Gandhi, though opposite in most things, were curiously alike in this respect. Mao also inured himself to extreme privations in youth and later led the Communist intellectuals to immerse themselves in the hardship of rural life, and equalise themselves with the peasants. He thereby established a genuine rapport with the people, largely peasants as in India, which the

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pages 162-3

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., page 163

<sup>26</sup> Payne, Robert. *Mao Tse-tung: Ruler of Red China*, Secker and Warburg 1950. Payne revised the book a couple of times in later years, but without adding any new insights that I could see. The original has been republished and is available from Amazon Books.

Generalissimo [Chiang Kai-shek] and other Kuomintang leaders never attempted."<sup>27</sup> [

Both Mao and Gandhi have ended up on the banknotes of their respective countries, rather unsuitably. You could say that the states they did



such a lot to create have moved well away from their principles. But Gandhi wanted India's traditional small-scale economics to survive, and it is perishing. Mao based himself firmly on the actual development of the world, the gradual collectivisation and global interdependence of work. This has continued since the 1970s, even though a lot of it has been moved from public to private ownership. And after a low point from the mid-1980s to early 1990s, the Chinese have once again



seen the limits of Western culture and moved back towards their own traditions as modified by Mao.

### Nurturing Red Stars

The probable back-story to *Red Star Over China* is as interesting as the book itself. All the writers I've seen treat it as something that "just happened". For me: it was the unexpectedly successful result of the work of Soong Ching-ling, Madam Sun. As I said earlier, she was determined to continue her husband's work. By using a liberal-left US journalist to publicise Mao, she succeeded brilliantly.

She was helped by Chiang Kai-shek's old-fashioned attitudes. After becoming her brother-in-law, Chiang wanted to include Ching-ling in the government, as he had other former foes. But she refused. Her position became ambiguous and dangerous for those associated with her – the Kuomintang Secret Police were quite ready to arrest, torture and murder her friends and followers. We have a good picture of her in the mid-1930s from Edgar Snow, at that time a young journalist with no strong political beliefs but seeking a story for US newspapers. As he explains it:

<sup>27</sup> Snow, Edgar, *Journey To The Beginning*, page 406

"Ching-ling was not easy to meet. It was not convenient for her to see many strangers; for one thing, her home was constantly guarded and watched by Kuomintang plain-clothesmen and French Police. Ostensibly that was for her protection, Was she not the saint's widow and continuing spokesman, as well as the sister-in-law of Elder-Born Chiang himself? Her seclusiveness was also a protection against all kinds of people with doubtful claims on her time...

"Through her I met the thought and sentiment of China at its best. Over the years she would introduce me to young writers and artists and fighter who were to make history. I would later work with her to organise co-operatives among thousands of refugees, to provide homes for orphans of war and famine, to equip hospitals and to help young people learn to serve their old land in new and useful ways. Ching-ling contributed to my education about the Kuomintang, about Sun Yat-sen and his unwritten hopes, about her own family, the Soongs, and why she refused to share their role in Chiang's rule, and many other facts I could never have learned from books.

"Knowing Ching-ling early made me comprehend that the Chinese people were capable of radically changing their country and quickly lifting it from bottom place to the rank its history and multitudes merited in the world. For years she could not express her opinions openly nor permit me to quote them abroad...

"Now that her position is clear a few things can be said without abusing her trust...

"What she never forgave was Chiang's 'betrayal of the revolution' in 1927 and her sister's 'betrayal' in lending the Soong name to it.

"He has set China back years' she said, 'and made the revolution much more costly and terrible than it need have been. In the end he will be defeated just the same."<sup>28</sup>

Madam Sun gave Edgar Snow the broad outlook that he was to brilliantly express in *Red Star Over China*. It was she who persuaded him that Chiang was a betrayer and that Mao was the best hope left for China. Snow's previous experience had led him to view the whole place as hopeless, especially after a Chinese man in Shanghai tried to charge him for a bucket of water used by Snow to help another Chinese man who was fire after an explosion.<sup>29</sup> He had also been distinctly impressed by the way the Japanese ran Taiwan, which they had taken from China after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5:

"When I first visited Formosa (Taiwan) it had been in Japanese hands for thirty-five years. It was a colony, of course, but the administration seemed free of graft and the people seemed secure in their homes and property as long as they obeyed the law. The land was clean and prosperous, beggars were rare, public service including sanitation and health were good, there were numerous schools, and Formosa had a higher standard of living and a higher percentage of literacy than any province of China."<sup>30</sup>

Both Taiwan and Japanese-run Manchuria were

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pages 83-5

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pages 33-4

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pages 37-8

awarded to Chiang Kai-shek at the end of World War Two, without bothering to consult the will of the inhabitants. In both places, the local Chinese had not been fond of the Japanese, but soon concluded that the Kuomintang were worse. Manchuria – which by then was almost wholly Han Chinese with very few ethnic Manchu – was to settle down contentedly under Mao's rule. Taiwan became Chiang's refuge and was ruled for many years by refugees from the mainland. Had it been allowed to go its own way as an independent state after World War Two, it might have done very nicely. Since a Chinese government had given it away by treaty, this would probably have been accepted, just as the People's Republic accepts the loss of anything else that was once attached to the Chinese Empire but was validly given away. But in history as it actually happened, the USA persuaded the international community to return Taiwan to China, so that almost all Chinese view the link as once again solid.

Snow doesn't make any connection between the relatively good conditions he saw in Japanese-ruled Taiwan and the decision of Wang Jingwei and others to join the Japanese cause. Maybe the only real way forward for China was either home-grown Communism or else becoming a Japanese colony. But thanks to Ching-ling's influence, he became committed to a policy that accepted the Communists as part of the solution, while still seeking some middle ground:

"During the Thirties when Mme Sun lived in Shanghai, she supported whatever opposition existed to Chiang's dictatorship...

"I do not know whether Mme Sun was ever a member of the Communist party. Perhaps she worked under the discipline of the party but remained outside it because as Dr. Sun's widow she had a first duty to him. By retaining her membership in the central executive committee of the Kuomintang she felt that she personified that fraternal collaboration between the two parties which Dr. Sun had decisively affirmed in the last years of his life...

"As long as there was a Left Kuomintang underground alive (it was Socialist, not Communist) Mme. Sun adhered to it, along with many of Dr. Sun's former comrades. After its leader, Teng Yen-ta [Deng Yanda], was caught and executed by Chiang early in the Thirties, it virtually disappeared...

"Thereafter Ching-ling was almost alone in her protests against continued assassinations, arrests and executions. She embraced all revolutionaries as her own and through her personal intervention saved many lives. Among her failures the one that most saddened her was the immolation of six young Chinese writers in 1932. They were members of a league of left writers – historians, novelist, short-story writers and poets led by Lu Hsun [Lu Xun], China's greatest contemporary writer. One of those executed was the talented woman novelist, Feng Kung. Shanghai's foreign police had arrested twenty-four young men and women accused of membership in the organisation and turned them over to the Kuomintang garrison at Lunghwa. Six of the best-known were made to dig their own graves. Then they were bound, thrown into the pits, and buried alive, an old

Chinese punishment for subversives.

"These details were well authenticated and appeared in foreign papers although suppressed in Chinese. Nothing was done about it by us foreign Christians in Shanghai, however. Some of the victims were probably Communists, and weren't they – 'red bandits' – killing people in the interior? But I knew Lu Hsun and Yang Ch'uan very well... They were all merely Western-oriented liberal individualists – anachronisms in China then as today.<sup>31</sup>

Madam Sun herself was not in tune with Chinese Communism as it actually developed:

"In leaning to the side of the Communists and Russia, Ching-ling unquestionably thought she was acting as Dr. Sun, the Christian Socialist, would have acted. But she was not without reservations in her acceptance of the party line. Once when I made some criticisms of Trotsky she suddenly smiled and went to her bookshelf. She pulled out Trotsky's newly published *The Revolution Betrayed*. 'There's a lot of truth in this,' she said, handing it to me. 'Read it.'<sup>32</sup>

Trotskyism in China never amounted to much: people in the middle of a desperate fight for survival cannot have had much regard for a man who used his considerable talents mostly for bad-mouthing his own side. There were features in common between Mao and Trotsky, but Mao was smart enough and modest enough never to become an oppositionist when he was out of favour.<sup>33</sup> He waited patiently as a loyal alternative. When the existing leadership lost authority during the Long March, he was given a chance to show he could repeat his earlier military successes. From there, he moved quietly but decisively into the top job.

Anyone who prefers Trotsky to Mao does not understand power-politics, the intricate game that both played. Mao won a great deal of what he was after, while Trotsky's go-it-alone policies after Lenin's death achieved nothing beyond damaging both Leninism and Moderate Socialism. He left behind a collection of ineffective left-wing sects who have yet to show any positive achievements. But also people who have done a great deal to sabotage socialist alternatives that might plausibly have worked. In China, thankfully, they were marginal.

Most accounts of Chinese Communism note issues between Stalin and Trotsky. It's actually more complex than that: Stalin wasn't undisputed leader until 1929, when Bukharin lost power. Comintern advice was obviously imperfect, but it did turn the Kuomintang from a failed opposition movement into a party that governed for 20-odd years. It also helped turn the Chinese Communist Party from a group of a few hundred intellectual into a mass movement that eventually succeeded where the Kuomintang had failed. Trotsky was smart at blaming others for things that had gone

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pages 86-87

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., page 94

<sup>33</sup> Detailed at <http://gwydionwilliams.com/history-and-philosophy/why-trotsky-politics-achieved-nothing-solid/>

wrong, but neither Trotsky nor any of his political heirs have ever evolved any effective power-politics of their own.

When he took orders from Lenin, Trotsky was effective. Had he been willing to work with the other Bolshevik leaders he might have stayed effective, but that was not in his nature. And when Trotsky looked at China in 1932, he firmly rejected the methods that eventually won out:

"The peasant movement has created its own armies, has seized great territories, and has installed its own institutions. In the event of further successes—and all of us, of course, passionately desire such successes—the movement will become linked up with the urban and industrial centres and, through that very fact it will come face to face with the working class. What will be the nature of this encounter? Is it certain that its character will be peaceful and friendly?

"At first glance the question might appear to be superfluous. The peasant movement is headed by Communists or sympathizers. Isn't it self-evident that in the event of their coming together the workers and the peasants must unanimously unite under the Communist banner?

"Unfortunately the question is not at all so simple. Let me refer to the experience of Russia. During the years of the civil war the peasantry in various parts of the country created its own guerrilla detachments, which sometimes grew into full-fledged armies. Some of these detachments considered themselves Bolshevik, and were often led by workers. Others remained non-party and most often were led by former non-commissioned officers from among the peasantry. There was also an 'anarchist' army under the command of Makhno.

"So long as the guerrilla armies operated in the rear of the White Guards, they served the cause of the revolution. Some of them were distinguished by exceptional heroism and fortitude. But within the cities these armies often came into conflict with the workers and with the local party organizations. Conflicts also arose during encounters of the partisans with the regular Red Army, and in some instances they took an extremely painful and sharp character.

"The grim experience of the civil war demonstrated to us the necessity of disarming peasant detachments immediately after the Red Army occupied provinces which had been cleared of the White Guards. In these cases the best, the most class-conscious and disciplined elements were absorbed into the ranks of the Red Army. But a considerable portion of the partisans strived to maintain an independent existence and often came into direct armed conflict with the Soviet power. Such was the case with the anarchist army of Makhno, entirely kulak in spirit. But that was not the sole instance; many peasant detachments, which fought splendidly enough against the restoration of the landlords, became transformed after victory into instruments of counter-revolution.

"Regardless of their origin in each isolated instance—whether caused by conscious provocation of the White Guards, or by tactlessness of the Communists, or by an unfavourable combination of circumstances—the conflicts between armed peasants and workers were rooted in one and the same social soil: the difference between the class position and training of the workers and of the peasants. The worker approaches questions from the

socialist standpoint; the peasant's viewpoint is petty bourgeois. The worker strives to socialize the property that is taken away from the exploiters; the peasant seeks to divide it up. The worker desires to put palaces and parks to common use; the peasant, insofar as he cannot divide them, inclines to burning the palaces and cutting down the parks. The worker strives to solve problems on a national scale and in accordance with a plan; the peasant, on the other hand, approaches all problems on a local scale and takes a hostile attitude to centralized planning, etc.

"It is understood that a peasant also is capable of raising himself to the socialist viewpoint. Under a proletarian regime more and more masses of peasants become re-educated in the socialist spirit. But this requires time, years, even decades. It should be borne in mind that in the initial stages of revolution, contradictions between proletarian socialism and peasant individualism often take on an extremely acute character.

"But after all aren't there Communists at the head of the Chinese Red armies? Doesn't this by itself exclude the possibility of conflicts between the peasant detachments and the workers' organizations? No, that does not exclude it. The fact that individual Communists are in the leadership of the present armies does not at all transform the social character of these armies, even if their Communist leaders bear a definite proletarian stamp. And how do matters stand in China?

"Among the Communist leaders of Red detachments there indubitably are many declassed intellectuals and semi-intellectuals who have not gone through the school of proletarian struggle. For two or three years they live the lives of partisan commanders and commissars; they wage battles, seize territories, etc. They absorb the spirit of their environment. Meanwhile the majority of the rank-and-file Communists in the Red detachments unquestionably consists of peasants, who assume the name Communist in all honesty and sincerity but who in actuality remain revolutionary paupers or revolutionary petty proprietors. In politics he who judges by denominations and labels and not by social facts is lost. All the more so when the politics concerned is carried out arms in hand."<sup>34</sup>

The biggest weakness of the Bolsheviks was that they were largely an urban movement, and their links with the peasantry were always imperfect. The Chinese Communists had overcome this, recruiting large numbers of peasants for what had begun as a movement of intellectuals and initially became strong among China's relatively small working class. It helped that there wasn't much by way of rival socialists with a different vision; nothing equivalent to Russia's long-established Anarcho-Communists and Social-Revolutionaries. A weak development of Anarchism in China amounted to little and was largely absorbed by the Communists. The Chinese Communists stood pretty much alone in wishing to bring the ordinary peasantry into politics: everyone else just wanted them to go on obeying their superiors. The Kuomintang after their 1927 break with the Communists suppressed whatever independent peasant activity there was.

<sup>34</sup> Trotsky, *Peasant War In China and the Proletariat* [<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1932/09/china.htm>]

These were things that Trotsky might have noted and seen as positive. But all he could manage was a collection of elegant sneers, a talent which his heirs have inherited.

Mao and Trotsky were both children of prosperous farmers – Trotsky had come from a community of Jewish farmers in the Ukraine. But Trotsky turned his back on the land, and his commitment to the working class remained theoretical. He was a brilliant orator, but could not really connect with ordinary people in the way that Stalin and Mao managed. Nor could he work with equals: he had worked *for* Lenin, undisputed boss of the Bolsheviks, who chose to co-opt him into the central leadership during the chaos of 1917.<sup>35</sup>

Trotsky's masterwork *The Revolution Betrayed* is a long string of complaints with no serious acknowledgement that operating functional power-politics was a lot harder than being a glib and powerless oppositionist. I'm surprised Madam Sun took him seriously, but also I'm far from sure that she herself ever did have much understanding of the politics of actual power. She did get one thing right: she saw Mao's merits without ever supposing that they had the same beliefs. Thus:

"Once she said 'I have never trusted any Chinese politician except Dr. Sun Yat-sen'. Of course it went without saying that she didn't 'trust' any *Western* politician, either.

"'You don't trust a single Chinese politician today?' I asked, astonished.

"She shook her head. Then she added: 'I distrust Mao Tse-tung less than the others.'<sup>36</sup>

She does not mention Zhou Enlai: I have no way of telling whether that's significant. She would have known both of them fairly well from the days of the Kuomintang – Communist alliance. Zhou at that time was senior to Mao in the Communist Party, and he would also have been much closer to Madam Sun in his background and view of life.

Edgar Snow met many of China's 'middle ground' before his famous trip to Mao's Red Base, including Lu Xun, Lu Hsun in the older Wade–Giles system for the Chinese language:

"When I was living in Shanghai I began working with Yao Hsin-nung on a translation of Lu Hsun's *True Story of Ah Q*, which remains the most influential single piece of fiction produced in the republican era, as Lu Hsun was its most important writer..

"It was Lu Hsun, Dr. Hu Shih, later Ambassador to the United States [between 1938 and 1942], and Chen Tu-hsiu [Chen Duxiu], afterwards secretary of the Communist party and subsequently expelled [for Trotskyism] who largely initiated the 'literary renaissance' of 1919, which first firmly established *pai-hua* [the spoken language] as the national language – a literary revolution scarcely less important than the overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty...

"Lu Hsun was a short, dark figure in his fifties, with bright

warm eyes and a moist brow; he was incurably tubercular and had not long to live. Surprisingly, he had to stay in the French concession in hiding, and most of his books were banned by the Kuomintang Government. Although the Reds were later to make a national hero of him, Lu Hsun was not a Communist; only an ultra-conservative Confucian eye could discern anything very dangerous in his satire and humour.

"*Ah Q* is the story of a typical illiterate coolie whose experiences during the first revolution [1911-12], show the utter failure of that event to reach the people...

"Communist intellectuals saw in Lu Hsun's story both an allegory of China's degradation in the world and the message that until they themselves carried the revolution to the illiterate peasantry, and brought them into the main current of modern life, China would never recover her lost greatness.

"'Before the Republic the people were slaves' as Lu Hsun himself put it. 'Afterwards, we became slaves of ex-slaves.'

"'Now that you have had the second or Nationalist revolution,' I asked him, 'do you feel there are still as many *Ah Q*'s left as ever.'

"Lu Hsun laughed. 'Worse. Now they are running the country'.

"'Do you think Russia's form of government better suited to China?'

"'I know nothing of Soviet Russia, but I have read much about pre-revolutionary Russia and there are some similarities with China. No doubt we can learn from Russia. We can also learn from America. But for China there can only be one kind of revolution – a Chinese revolution. We too have our history to learn from.'

"It was through Lu Hsun (and Mme. Sun) that I met many of China's outstanding young writers and editors. Largely unknown to foreigners, they were, I discovered, the most popular and influential of their day with China's more serious-minded youths. Many of them, like Lu Hsun, lived in and out of hiding and exile, as their periodicals and books were in and out of legality or suppression. Few if any of those I knew were then Communists. They were Socialists in spirit, wanted freedom to agitate for reforms long since achieved in the West...

"Yao and I made only a beginning of the translation of Lu Hsun's work before he had to return to Shanghai. After Yao left I continued... It opened many doorways into the thinking of people my own age in China and taught me something about the conditions under which writers worked – in constant fear, mixed despair and hope, and nearly always semi-starvation.

"Pearl Buck and her husband Dick Walsh, who were editors of *Asia*, encouraged me by publishing many of these translated stories. John Day brought them out in book form, as *Living China*. This little volume may have had no significance as art but it was the first evidence of the growth of a modern spirit of protest and compassion in Chinese literature, and of a demand for social justice on the broadest scale, which for the first time in Chinese history recognised the importance of the 'common man'.

"While Nym and I worked on this book we discovered that the giants of Russian literature had already made a far greater impression in China than most Western observers

<sup>35</sup> See also <http://gwydionwilliams.com/history-and-philosophy/why-trotsky-politics-achieved-nothing-solid/>

<sup>36</sup> Snow, Edgar. *Journey To The Beginning*, page 95

realised. They established a real cultural contact between the two countries hitherto unknown. The Russian tide came to China later than the European and American, reaching the intellectuals chiefly during the republican period, when Pushkin, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Gogol and Chekhov were translated for the first time. By the mid-Thirties very few Soviet works had appeared in Chinese, and only the first volume of *Kapital* had been published. Even in the Red districts there was no complete Lenin.

"After 1928 nearly all Russian works came under official ban. Many a student was arrested for possessing even *War and Peace* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Later the Kuomintang 'index' was extended to books by Dreiser, G. B. Shaw, Erskine Caldwell, Sinclair Lewis, John Steinbeck, and a long list of famous Western writers. Possession of the dangerous books could bring imprisonment or worse."<sup>37</sup>

I think Snow misses the point about Lu Xun: the man was helping define a Chinese identity that could make sense of the modern world. Anyone governing China had to either co-opt him or destroy him. But the Kuomintang as led by Chiang Kai-shek could not co-opt him, because they were indeed a government of Ah Qs. Though some of them aspired to copy European Fascism, they never managed to mobilise large numbers of ordinary people on a right-wing basis, in the way that Fascism managed. They aspired to the millennia-old Chinese pattern of a governing elite and an inert peasantry concerned with its own local existence, and this was no longer possible. That was why the Kuomintang crumbled quite quickly after World War Two: the peasantry had been traumatised by the Japanese invasion and was no longer inert.

A significant point that Snow misses about the fictional Ah Q is the many indications in the story that he *isn't* a 'typical illiterate coolie' but "used to be much better off"<sup>38</sup>. Not from the eternal ranks of China's poor, but someone who had fallen from quite a high status. Just as China had fallen from being the world's most sophisticated Empire, a model to the Europe Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

A different sort of significance seems to me to apply to the incident with the 'small nun from the Convent of Quiet Self-improvement'. Ah Q insults her and bystanders think this hugely amusing – if most Chinese saw Buddhism as true in a sense, they had little respect for most of its monks and nuns, treating them as little better than vagrants. This may have been the typical status of Buddhism among the Han Chinese. And it's also notable that Lu Xun treats the little nun with sympathy – her curse on Ah Q more or less comes true later on.<sup>39</sup> My understanding of this is that their social status was low and so that a radical critic of established society had nothing against them and could even

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pages 131-33

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.marxists.org/archive/lu-xun/1921/12/ah-q/ch02.htm] Chapter Two: *A Brief Account of Ah-Q's Victories*

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., end of Chapter Three

feel some sympathy.

As for the banned Russian books, they might seem harmless in Britain, where the culture adapted over several generations to the social impact of an Industrial Revolution that it had itself started. In Britain, Russian authors could be treated as interesting exotics. I doubt that any of them inspired anyone to do anything they were not already doing. It was otherwise in China, where the old culture had ruptured and nothing very definite had replaced it. (Just as Gandhi got a lot of his ideas from Tolstoy, seen in the West as just an entertaining eccentric.)

As for Dostoyevsky *The Brothers Karamazov*, the theme is indeed highly un-filial. Three of Papa Karamazov's four sons wish to murder him, and the main mystery is which of them actually did the deed. What they found objectionable in *War and Peace* is less clear, but it is still a book that could not possibly have been written before the French Revolution and Napoleon's conquests, even though it seeks to ridicule them. Maybe a traditionally-minded Chinese intellectual would see in it too much of the modern world, independent thinking that they were determined to stifle.

One other little detail: Lu Xun's original name was Zhou Shuren and he came from an educated but declining family in the city of Shaoxing in Zhejiang province, a little south of Shanghai. Shaoxing has been named by the US software company Symantec as 'the world's malware capital'.<sup>40</sup> They deny it, naturally – but it would be a rather fitting occupation for heirs of Lu Xun.<sup>41</sup>

(Of course the problem only exists because the USA decided that the global internet should follow the modern US idea of a global unregulated and anonymous market, and because the USA follows its usual habit of blaming outsiders and fixing nothing when its cherished ideas fail to work.)

To return to Edgar Snow, he sees the Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-shek as failed fascists, unable to successfully copy what was then a flourishing and influential movement, widely admired in Britain and the USA:

"Except for Japan's impatient and greedy seizures of Chinese territory, China and Japan might have found a common meeting ground. Ideologically, the two regimes seemed not far apart. The Kuomintang was much impressed by both Fascist Italy and Hitler's Germany. Chiang chose German officers to train his army, and Italians... to train his air force. Germans helped organise his political gendarmerie, the *Lan I Shc*, or 'Blue Shirts,' modelled after the Gestapo."<sup>42</sup>

"I don't wish to leave the impression that Chiang Kai-shek

<sup>40</sup> [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-04/02/content\_9683336.htm]

<sup>41</sup> Shaoxing was also the ancestral home of Zhou Enlai, though he was born in neighbouring Jiangsu province. I don't suppose that makes him and Lu Xun related: at least I've never seen it remarked on.

<sup>42</sup> Snow, Edgar. *Journey To The Beginning*, page 134

was an Eastern Mussolini or Hitler, whatever he way have aspired to be. Neither man was really a possibility in China; Europe's problems were vastly different. China was a backward agrarian state in which the choice of profound change or perish was no longer postponable. In the context of its history China *had to have revolutionary leadership*, just as China had to have it to survive in the time of Shih Huang-ti [Qin Shi Huang, the First Emperor who unified the Warring States], two hundred years before Christ. And whatever else he was, Chiang Kai-shek was no revolutionary."<sup>43</sup>

I assume Madam Sun was Snow's main teacher in his growing understanding of China. But identifying the usually-reviled First Emperor as an admirable figure is more likely to have come from some unrecorded conversation with Mao, who held just that opinion. (Also found in the 2002 Chinese film *Ying xiong* available in the West as *Hero*.)

Snow accepted Madam Sun's view that something drastic had to be done to save China:

"Had there been no Japanese invasion Chiang might have succeeded in unifying the country under right-wing dictatorship. But the whole pace of change was far too slow to cope with the deep crisis inside Chinese society..."

"Chiang Kai-shek wanted absolute power, but he did not really want to change anything... In a time of utmost chaos he was often concerned with form, convention and propriety and inwardly concerned with the prevention of change. He was not a great tyrant, only a petty one; he failed not because he was Caesar or killed too many people but because he killed too few of the right people; he never understood that his worst enemies were inside his own camp."<sup>44</sup>

### **A Chinese "Game of Thrones"**

Chiang's worst enemy within China but outside of the Communist Party was definitely Madam Sun. She was allowed to operate because she was his sister-in-law, and because he may have hoped to lure her back into his government in the long run. He was a fool to allow her to stay in Shanghai – she was nominally beyond his power, living in the French Concession where the Chinese government had no real authority, but it is likely he could have persuaded them to expel her. It seems he did not try. There were death-threats, but these were pointless because she did not fear death.

Chang and Halliday – best known for their bizarre book about Mao, which I've discuss elsewhere<sup>45</sup> – also wrote a short biography of Madam Sun that appeared in 1986. Talking about the threats to her life when she returned to Shanghai and set herself up as an alternative to Chiang Kai-shek, they say:

"Powerful emissaries were sent to berate her – and threaten. Among them was the former secretary to Sun and ex-leftist, Tai Ch'i-tao [Cai Jitao]. The encounter ended with this exchange:

"Tai: 'I hope that you will not make any more statements, Mrs Sun'

"Soong: 'There is only one way to silence me, Mr Tai. Shoot me or imprison me. If you don't then it simply means that you admit you are not wrongly accused..."

"As Tai left, he said: 'if you were anyone but Madam Sun, we would cut your head off.'

"Ching-ling smiled. 'If you were the revolutionaries you pretend to be, you'd cut it off anyway.'"<sup>46</sup>

Chang and Halliday pay no attention to this last remark, which I'd view as a quite astonishing thing to say. Men and women brave in the face of credible threats from known killers are rare: very much rarer are those who sneer at the intimidators for being too weak to carry through their threats.

(It should also have been possible for the Kuomintang leadership to have put her under house arrest, or to have claimed she had suffered a mental breakdown and keep her confined. Why they did none of these things is uncertain. It was definitely not decency, since they did worse things to other brave dissidents.)

Madam Sun treated her Kuomintang relatives as a bunch of adventurers who were squatting on state power but had no very serious intention of using it for anything. And this was exactly what Chiang's branch of the Kuomintang had become. They would slaughter ordinary peasants and workers by the thousand and get their gangster friends to assassinate dissident intellectuals and politician to whom they had no strong personal or family ties. But family was another matter. The Soong family were at the core of Kuomintang politics, so a misbehaving sister had to be tolerated, in line with the Confucian tradition of putting family first. She herself had a much more modern attitude:

"When her brother objected to such blunt words [about the Kuomintang rejection of revolution], fearing the fury of the government and unpleasantness for the family, she reportedly said, 'The Soongs were made for China, not China for the Soongs.'"<sup>47</sup> [

This is from Israel Epstein's much longer biography of Madam Sun. It includes a lot more of the Soong – Dai dialogue quoted by Chang and Halliday, but stops before the 'cut your head off' remarks – the man comes across as a gentle fellow who maybe shied away from such harsh sentiments. He does at least give a definite

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> <http://gwydionwilliams.com/42-china/42-1-chinese-politics/a-review-of-mao-the-unknown-story/>

<sup>46</sup> Chang, Jung and Halliday, Jon, *Mme Sun Yat-sen (Soong Ching-ling)*, Penguin Books 1986, page 71. Note that 'Chang' is Jung Chang's family name: she has reversed the usual Chinese order of Family Name – Personal Name. As for Dai Jitao, most sources give the Wade-Giles version of his name as 'Chi' rather than 'Ch'i', but I have copied what the book uses.

<sup>47</sup> Epstein, Israel. *Life and Times of Soong Ching Ling (Mme. Sun Yatsen)*, in the series *Woman In World History*. New World Press, Beijing, China, Second Edition of 1995. Page 236.

source<sup>48</sup>, whereas Chang and Halliday leave it floating.<sup>49</sup>

(Incidentally, you will find no mention of the biography of Madam Sun in Chang and Halliday's book about Mao. I've also not seen anyone try to take them up on this bizarre omission.)

Madam Sun's beliefs were upper-class socialism from a member of the elite seeking to look after the masses. This would have been a big advance on the actual politics of the Blue Republic, where the elite was incompetent and each family looked after its own. If China had been controlled by some sort of elite socialism similar to Nehru's India. It would have been a recreation with many modernisation of the older system of the Yellow Empire, when ordinary people were looked after when an efficient dynasty was ruling.

Madam Sun's natural place was as part of the Left Kuomintang. She was born in Shanghai, a city built around foreign intrusions. People like her were a product to colonial rule, and were most commonly found in places that were fairly directly ruled by the West. Had the whole of China been taken over, as India was taken over, then such people might have been the main opposition and eventually the new anti-Imperialist government. This happened successfully in the Republic of India, though it has also happened abortively in other places. But in China, direct foreign rule applied only in a few 'concessions', sometimes with cities growing up around them that were nominally self-governing but inevitably dominated by the foreign-run core. Yet the strength of China lay elsewhere – basically in the rural areas, which is where the Communist Party went and got control. Mao worked this out in advance of it becoming a necessity: he maybe saw it as an advance into rural areas rather than retreating there.

I'd also reckon that Mao, seeing Western influence from a background in rural Hunan, somehow managed to understand the useful modern core of Western ideas extremely clearly – perhaps because he had a solid basis of existence that he had come from. Encountering part-Westernised Chinese intellectuals, he gained a much clearer idea of what could and should be discarded. An outsider who gets to understand an unfamiliar system occasionally understands it much better than 'insiders', not being bound by their notions of what is 'natural'.

(I say *occasionally*. A small number of the self-

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<sup>48</sup> Epstein's book gives the source as the October 20, 1929 edition of an English-language journal called *China Tomorrow*. It looks like something that would be worth publishing in its own right.

<sup>49</sup> Chang and Halliday are incredibly sloppy scholars, breaking most of the normal rules. Rules that evolved so that people could not make wild claims without some evidence for their notions. Rules that make it easy for a critic to check the source and see if it justifies what the author says. Rules that they broke much more dramatically in their famous Mao biography.

educated show startling insights. A much larger number show their limits and can't tell good ideas from bad. A regular education system may suppress originality but also reliably produces competence on a mass scale. This is relevant to Mao's later attempts to change education, but this is a matter for another article.)

Madam Sun was a product of China's failed attempt to Westernise itself by simple copying. As a Shanghai 'insider', she found herself between powerful rival forces that were far beyond her strength to contend with. She was part of a social stratum that never got a chance to grow: a moderate socialist path that would have been more respectful of China's ancient traditions. She also had the sense to realise her limited power and use it intelligently. Without her, it is likely that Edgar Snow would never have travelled to Paoan to meet Mao or write his famous book. And after 1949, she was there as part of a collection of weak non-Communist parties that had a small role in the Government of the People's Republic. There she remained quietly, existing as an alternative rather than an opposition, as Mao had been at times and as Deng Xiaoping was during his two falls from power under Mao. She died in 1981, and what she'd have thought of later developments is a matter of speculation. But in the 1930s, she played a key role, quietly doing what she could to help her country according to her own ideals.

Politics under Chiang Kai-shek was a senseless mix of brutality and weakness. He could massacre of peasants and workers by the thousands and hundreds of thousands, but he failed to do anything about his sister-in-law while she was organising highly effective treason against him. Treason if he were viewed as the legitimate ruler of China, and I'm not sure he ever did see things in such a modern light. There was no future in being a half-arsed dictator, but he'd have needed to be an entirely different man to have understood that.

## **The Other Deng**

I've said a lot about Madam Sun, and I'll explain later how she was able to deploy Edgar Snow as a reporter who could help transform Mao from mystery to legend. But Israel Epstein's biography of her gives brief details of another individual who is almost forgotten, but who might possibly have been a successful left-wing nationalist on a non-Communist basis. Might have if Chiang Kai-shek hadn't been there as an inhibitor of necessary changes. This was Deng Yanda, a major figure in the Left Kuomintang who had worked closely with Madam Sun in her exile in Moscow and later in pre-Hitler Berlin:

"An instance of the complicated political position of the Chinese group in Moscow was the experience of Deng Yanda.

"In talks with the Comintern and Soviet officials, he had insisted too hard on the independence of China's revolutionary process to be well regarded by the orthodox, despite his continued firm advocacy of a Chinese-Soviet

revolutionary alliance. Apparently, a great effort had been made to win him over to the ruling point of view in Moscow – where many, including Stalin, respected his political and military record and leadership potential.

"Stalin, as Zhang Ke recalled, talked with Deng Yanda from 8 p.m. to 2 a.m. one night in the Kremlin – and afterwards accompanied Deng Yanda as far as the outer door, a marked courtesy. (Zhang had been asked to wait in the ante-room.) Later Deng Yanda told Zhang Ke that Stalin had proposed setting him [Deng] up as head of the Chinese Communist Party. When Deng objected that, besides not agreeing with the Party on some points, he was not even a member, Stalin did not seem bothered at all but simply said that could be arranged by the Comintern. Though there was no agreement that night, there was no acrimony.

"But Stalin, as was usual when his suggestions were not taken, thereafter nursed a grudge against Deng Yanda. So the latter could not see much more he could do in Moscow."<sup>50</sup>

This sounds garbled – I can't believe that Stalin would have considered putting a non-Communist in charge of a Leninist party. He might have wanted some sort of left-wing United Front where Deng would lead and the Chinese Communists would be told to obey. In any case, it did not happen. Deng moved on to Berlin – this was a few years before Hitler came to power. Meantime the Chinese Communists set up on their own, and at that time they wanted no more to do with the Left Kuomintang. Deng Yanda tried to establish a 'Third Front', an independent force operating between the Communists and Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang. Soong Ching Ling decided not to be part of this. She first went to Berlin, then in 1929 returned home to preside when her husband's remains were moved from Beijing where he had died and placed in a tomb near Nanjing, Chiang Kai-shek's capital. She went via Moscow and to China and on the trans-Siberian railway, which meant she was briefly the guest of the 'Young Marshal' Zhang Xueliang, then ruler of Manchuria. Links made then might possibly have been relevant in the later 'Xian Incident', though no one else seems to have considered this possibility. Whatever about that, after the ceremony she went back to Europe, refusing to be part of the new Kuomintang government in which her family were playing a large role. But in 1931 she came back again to Shanghai, this time because her mother had just died. But she was once again involved in politics:

"Soong Ching Ling's second return to China was permanent... Her opening days there were spent in mourning for her mother. But soon, events called her to new political struggles against both domestic reaction and foreign aggression. Into these, she plunged promptly and bravely.

"The White Terror still raged.... Deng Yanda, her comrade-in-arms in Wuhan and in exile, was arrested in Shanghai where he had secretly returned. Like countless

other revolutionaries, he was seized by the British-commanded police of Shanghai's International settlement, then handed over to Chiang's regime...

"Soong Ching Ling's tooth-and-nail fight to save Deng Yanda failed – for Chiang had him secretly killed...

"Fingered by a renegade, he was seized at a meeting of the 'Third Party' (neither Guomindang [Kuomintang] nor Communist) which he was establishing.... As a former Hungpu Academy instructor [Whampoa Military Academy instructor] and chief of the Northern Expedition Army's political department, Deng was widely known and respected among Guomindang army officers, of whom hundreds had been his classmates, students or colleagues. So Chiang saw him as dangerous, not only politically but – potentially – militarily.

"Chiang had had a knife out for Deng Yanda, from as far back as 1927, for abandoning the rightist headquarters at Nanchang to join the Left-inclined government in Wuhan. After that Chiang had ordered his arrest. And in Wuhan, Dang had advocated military action against Chiang that might have prevented Chiang's takeover of Shanghai and subsequent betrayal.

"Now, with this bold challenger at last in his clutches, Chiang, a man of guile, began by trying to tame Deng into assuming a subordinate role... First, Chiang gambled on Deng Yanda's growing tendency to accompany opposition to the Guomindang with criticism of the Chinese Communists (for always obeying the Communist International). If Deng was indeed for the Chinese managing their own affairs, Chiang told him through an emissary, he should back the suppression of the Communists as necessary for the consolidation of national strength. Deng Yanda spurned this approach. Differences with Communists, he answered, were political and not to be settled with arms."<sup>51</sup>

After Deng's execution, Soong Ching Ling was asked to become the new leader of the Third Party, but declined.<sup>52</sup> I suppose she realised that it was hopeless to try to engage in power-politics in the gap between Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists. Deng Yanda's party was later involved in the Fujian Rebellion of 1933-34, along with the 19<sup>th</sup> Route Army that had distinguished itself fighting the Japanese in Shanghai in 1932. This failed, in part because the Communists in their nearby Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet failed to co-operate, something that was later condemned by them to have been a grave error. But most of the potential opposition also failed to work with the Fujian Rebellion, and it was easily crushed.

Madam Sun had worked closely with Deng Yanda, but must have decided that only the Chinese Communists offered any hope of a regeneration, unless some new Kuomintang-Communist United Front could be created. She also took some very feasible steps to bring it about, and perhaps changed history. Edgar Snow's trip to the Red areas and the writing of *Red Star Over China* would have been very unlikely without her to make the vital contacts. At the time, he

<sup>50</sup> Epstein, Israel. *Life and Times of Soong Ching Ling*, pages 217-8

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 256-7

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 258-9

documented her role without naming her, saying:

"Then, in June 1936, a close Chinese friend of mine brought me news of an amazing political situation in North-west China – a situation which was later to culminate in the sensation arrest of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and to change the current of Chinese history. More important to me then, however, I learned, with this news, of a possible method of entry to Red territory."<sup>53</sup>

He got a letter to introduce him to Mao and assure them he was no spy. When *Red Star Over China* was published in the late 1930s, he naturally could not say all he knew. Puzzlingly, he fails to clear up the details in his revised edition of 1972, beyond mentioning that he had since been told that the letter he got was authorised by Liu Shao-ch'i as chief of the Communist underground in North China.<sup>54</sup> 1972 was still the era of the Cultural Revolution, in which Madam Sun was an occasional target, so maybe it was best then to leave her out.

Back in 1958, writing about events in the 1930s, Snow made her role clear. And explained that in the 1930s, he was able to anticipate that the then-marginal Chinese Communists might eventually win power and make China strong again:

"Such expectations seem reasonable enough today, but Western policy-makers of the time ridiculed both notions. China, they said, would never go Communist. 'The Chinese,' was their explanation, 'are far too individualistic.' Second, 'The Chinese will never fight. They're basically pacifists. Nobody can make soldiers out of coolies.' They expected Japan to win a quick, complete victory in any major quarrel with China – and then turn on Russia.

"One of the few foreign military experts to question either of those pre-war platitudes was Joseph Stilwell, then a colonel and our military attaché in Peking [Beijing]. 'There's nothing wrong with China's human material,' he said repeatedly, 'but plenty wrong with the corrupt leadership. Under officers of high moral and technical qualifications the Chinese could become fighting me the equal of any on earth'

"Stilwell had been impressed by the performance of the Chinese Reds against Chiang Kai-shek, as an indication of what the nation might do on a vast scale against an alien invader... In major campaigns their small rural areas had been surrounded by numerically superior forces with ten to twenty times their fire power.

"'Those Reds may be bandits, as Chiang says they are,' Joe burst out to me one day, 'but bandits or nor, they're masters of guerrilla warfare. I don't know what they're preaching but to me it looks like they've got the kind of leaders who win. I mean officers who *don't* say, 'go on, boys!' but '*Come on, boys*'. If that's the case and they had enough of them, they could keep the Japs here busy till kingdom come.'

"But neither of us then knew what the so-called Reds were. We didn't even know for sure whether they were 'real'

Communists. After nine years of civil war, 'Red China' was more *terra incognita* than Arabia Felix. I had confidently proposed to both the *Sun* and the *Herald* [newspapers] that I go in and try to crack the blockade around the Communist-held area in Northwest China. Both endorsed my plan... With that support I went to Shanghai, where I again saw Mme. Sun Yat-sen. I sought her help, so that at least I should be received by the Reds as a neutral, not a spy. And shortly after I returned to Peking, in the spring of 1936, it was Ching-ling [Madam Sun, Soong Ching-ling] who made the arrangements. Through her I was put in touch with a professor in Peking who gave me a letter to Mao Tse-tung, together with other advice on how to contact the Red underground in Sianfu."<sup>55</sup>

Stilwell was a smart man. His attitudes were crude: he calls Japanese 'Japs' and seems not to care who he deals with in order to defeat them in the coming conflict with the USA. He was also a practical man, and rather contemptuous of authority. He believed in getting things done, and had found that little could be done with the Kuomintang forces. There were elements that might have formed a strong and efficient Chinese nationalism, but they were vastly outweighed by those who were content to remain warlords. Playing the traditional warlord game of fighting or controlling other Chinese and not risking a fight with efficient foreign forces. Stilwell hoped that the Red Chinese might be better – but what were they? No Westerner had managed to visit the Red areas in South China, the bases they lost and from which they set out on their Long March. Snow was the first to visit the base in the north.

### Interviewing Legends

Remarkably, Snow got an insider view of collusion between the Chinese Communists and the generals who were supposed to be fighting them:

"As plans to smuggle me into the Red areas involved the direct knowledge and help of the Manchurian army and its commander, Marshall Chang Hsueh-liang [Zhang Xueliang], I was now perforce made privy to a situation which six months later would erupt in the arrest of Chiang Kai-shek by his own subordinates in Sian [Xian]."<sup>56</sup>

Snow next met Zhou Enlai, (Chou En-lai). His entry to the Red Base had been adventurous, being first chased by anti-Communist bandits and then learning he had been mistaken for their leader. For a time he was worried about being believed:

"But presently a slender young officer appeared, ornamented with a heavy black beard. He came up and addressed me in a soft cultured voice. 'Hello,' he said, 'are you looking for somebody?'

"He had spoken in *English!*

"And in a moment I learned that he was Chou En-lai, the 'notorious' Red commander, who had once been an honour

<sup>53</sup> Snow, Edgar. *Red Star Over China*, part 1, chapter 1. Page 21, New Left Book Club edition of 1937

<sup>54</sup> Snow, Edgar. *Red Star Over China*, page 478 of the Revised Edition, Penguin Books 1972

<sup>55</sup> Snow, Edgar. *Journey To The Beginning*, pages 151-2

<sup>56</sup> *Journey To The Beginning*, page 153

student in a missionary school. Here at least my reception was decided...<sup>57</sup>

"Before the quarters of Chou En-lai, for whose head Chiang Kai-shek had offered \$80,000, there was but one sentry...<sup>58</sup>

"I have a report that you are a reliable journalist, friendly to the Chinese people, and that you can be trusted to tell the truth," said Chou. "That is all we want to know. It does not matter to us that you are not a Communist".<sup>59</sup>

"During my conversation I had been studying Chou with deep interest, for in China, like many Red leaders, he was as much a legend as a man...

"During 1925, 1926, and 1927, the Northern Expedition [to reunify China] was under way, with Chiang Kai-shek as Commander-in-Chief, selected jointly by the Kuomintang and the Communists. Chou En-lai was ordered to prepare an insurrection and help the Nationalist Army seize Shanghai. A youth of twenty-eight, with no formal military training... Chou arrived in Shanghai equipped only with a revolutionary determination and a strong theoretical knowledge of Marxism.

"Within three months the Communist Party had organised 600,000 workers, and was able to call a general strike, The response was unanimous, and a terrifying experience to the smug populace of this greatest stronghold of foreign imperialism in China...

"On March 21, 1927, the Communists called a general strike which closed all the industries in Shanghai, and put 600,000 workers, organised and militant for the first time in their lives, behind the barricades of revolution. They seized first the police stations, next the arsenal, then the garrison, and after that, victory...

"It was the most remarkable *coup d'etat* in modern Chinese history.

"Thus it happened that Chiang Kai-shek, arriving a few days later at the outskirts of Shanghai, found his battle already won, and was able to enter the Chinese city and accept power from a triumphant workers army. And thus it happened that when, about a month later, Chiang Kai-shek staged his own Right *coup d'etat*, and the killing of radicals began, first on his list of condemned was this dangerous youth who had given him his victory – but who, the Generalissimo realized, might also take it away from him. And thus also began Chou En-lai's life as a fugitive from the Kuomintang, and as a leader of the Third Revolution, the revolution that raised the Red banner in China...

"The toll of the 'Shanghai massacre' is estimated at 5,000 lives."<sup>60</sup>

But the Communists at that time had no intention of taking over, assuming that a 'bourgeois revolution' must come first. Marxist theory would have told them to go on supporting Chiang Kai-shek for as long as he seemed to be a radical anti-Imperialist. The reason for the rupture was that

Chiang had no wish to be any more radical than was necessary to make himself China's leader.

Though Snow doesn't say it, I'd say the 'strong theoretical knowledge of Marxism' proved its usefulness by allowing a sudden self-assertion by ordinary Chinese, something that hadn't really happened before. Unfortunately they were up against Chiang Kai-shek and his gangster allies, men with an excellent practical knowledge of treachery and betrayal. Given what the Chinese Communists went through from 1927 and 1949, it's surprising that they didn't emerge a great deal more ruthless than they actually proved to be. Nor is it surprising that a lot of Chinese Christians went along with Communist policies, after decades of seeing Western governments and individuals show not the least inclination to apply practical Christianity when it came to the welfare of ordinary Chinese.

In 1927, Chiang Kai-shek had either to massacre Chinese radicals or else confront global imperialism, the force that was crippling China and pumping it full of opium. He showed his quality, or rather his lack of it, by preferring to take a relatively safe path to power by suppressing the radicalism that the foreign powers had been scared by. A more normal nationalist leader would have accepted radicalism as part of the process and sought to command and control it. But that's a Western concept of normality, and it was just that sort of "normality" that was missing from most Chinese at that time, even those who were superficially Westernised. If Chiang had even been a proper fascist, he might have been able to mobilise the people on a right-wing basis. But for his entire period of rule on mainland China, Chiang had no serious ideas beyond repression.

As Snow says, Zhou Enlai and the other leaders had become legendary. Zhou was supposed at the time to be the model for the leading Chinese communist in Andre Malraux's 1933 novel *La Condition humaine*, translated in 1934 as *Man's Fate*. Zhou's comment was that 'things happened quite otherwise', which is entirely true. Among other things, Malraux has the Communists in Shanghai attempting to assassinate Chiang Kai-shek, which definitely never happened.

Sadly, Zhou in Snow's book did not give details of what he'd done in Shanghai. Either he didn't say all that much about himself, or it has not yet been published. Snow does say:

"Few Chinese were to make a more favourable impression on Westerners than Chou En-lai during his later career in Chungking as chief of the Communist delegation there during World War II. The grandson of a distinguished official of the Manchu Dynasty, and a former honours student at the American-supported Nankai University in Tientsin, he had also studied in Europe and knew some French and German... Beneath his outer urbanity he had a tough, supple mind, but he did not strike me then, nor later, as possessing quite the mental dexterity, vigor and self-confidence of Mao Tse-tung, nor his gift of the common

<sup>57</sup> *Red Star Over China*, part 2, chapter 1. Page 55, New Left Book Club edition of 1937

<sup>58</sup> 80,000 Chinese dollars in 1936 would be about 350,000 US dollars today

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, part 2, chapter 2, page 57

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, part 2, chapter 2, page 59-62

touch."<sup>61</sup>

Snow also gives the price on the heads of the various Communist leaders.<sup>62</sup> 80,000 Chinese dollars for Zhou, 100,000 for Lin Biao, a quarter of a million each for Mao and Zhu De, which would be more than a million in today's US dollars.<sup>63</sup><sup>64</sup>

From Snow's account, we can see that Chiang Kai-shek rated Mao as worth two-and-a-half of Zhou, who himself was an old enemy. It seems about right, at least from the viewpoint of someone criminal enough to offer rewards for murdering their political foes. Underneath his neat exterior, Chiang was thoroughly uncivilised. A jumped-up gangster, tolerated by the West because he only murdered his own people. But he understood that limited world very well, and he knew who was most dangerous to him. Zhou he would have seen as much less of a threat than Mao, even before the war with Japan changed everything.

People get puzzled by the way Zhou Enlai was close to the top of the Chinese Communist Party for many years but never sought the top job. I think it was a sensible self-restraint by a man who had become aware of his limitations. If one wanted to be nasty about him, one could say that each of his brilliant creations came crashing to disaster after a few years. First the First United Front, in which he let Chiang outwit him and massacre those Zhou was responsible for. Then the Nanchang Uprising, which basically failed – it is regarded as the birth of the Red Army, but the bulk of the Red Army survived by different methods and under other leaders while Zhou himself was an invalid in Hong Kong. He then played a major role in the Shanghai communist underground, which flourished for a while but was eventually driven out and took refuge in the Jiangxi Soviet created by Mao and Zhu De. His exact role in the policies that led to that base's destruction remain unclear: some writers suspect he was deeply involved in the errors, but that this has been played down in official Chinese Communist accounts because he chose to switch to supporting Mao during the Long March. What's not disputed is that he helped Mao replace the existing leadership and remained basically a

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<sup>61</sup> *Journey To The Beginning*, page 159

<sup>62</sup> It would be an interesting exercise for someone who reads Chinese to tabulate the Kuomintang rewards for the various Red leaders over the years, getting more details on who was rated as the most formidable foe at various times.

<sup>63</sup> Mao's price and Zhu's are given in the first chapter of *Red Star Over China*, Zhou's in part 2, chapter 2, Lin Biao's in part 3 chapter 4. Other warlords also offered rewards, one group seeking the life of 'Mr Soviet', 'Soviet' being rendered in Chinese as "Su Wei-ai Hsien-sheng" and sometimes mistaken for a personal name.

<sup>64</sup> Snow in his 1971 edition of *Red Star Over China* makes the Chinese dollar equal to 35 US cents, so Mao's price would be 87,500 US Dollars. Assuming that to be 1936 dollars, this would be more than a million today. 1,350,000 using the Consumer Price Index, according to <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare>].

follower of Mao for the rest of his life. His brilliant efforts in Chungking during the Second United Front maybe helped the mass defection of Kuomintang generals later on, but only because Mao's military-political methods had already succeeded. His final solo effort was in foreign policy, the Bandung Conference and attempts to create a centre-left block within the Third World. This too failed to lead to anything permanent, however hopeful it had seemed at times.

I've said most of what could be said against Zhou: that doesn't mean I would sum him up like that. It is just one half of a rather complex set of truths. He'd have been much more at home and much more effective if the various United Fronts had held. They didn't hold because the European empires in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s were not prepared to let China become a properly sovereign state. Zhou perhaps could see his limits, and also the possibilities of the politics in which he was playing a valuable but secondary role. In one of his 1937 interviews with Edgar Snow, while discussing the idea of a 'united front' against Japan, he said:

"We are advancing revolution, not giving it up. The revolution will probably come to power by way of anti-Japanese war'. As for Chiang Kai-shek? 'The first day of the anti-Japanese war', he prophesied, 'will mean the beginning of the end for Chiang Kai-shek'...

"Curiously, Chou's first remarks about Chiang Kai-shek were cancelled out by him before I could publish them in my book. Events had by then taken such an unexpected turn that Chou sent me a message asking me to withhold his frank and disparaging opinions because once more he had to acknowledge and work with Chiang as a national leader."<sup>65</sup>

Chiang and Chou both understood the basics: Chiang had based himself on the frozen chaos that had resulted from the 1911-12 overthrow of the dynasty and the doomed attempt to have a 'republic without a public'. In as far as China showed signs of developing a public – mostly as the middle ground or 'Third Force' that I described earlier – Chiang feared it and did his best to crush it. Yet he remained much more squeamish with 'top people' than with ordinary peasants and workers, who were slaughtered quite casually.

Some people are willing to credit Chiang Kai-shek with being a non-Communist progressive who was just unlucky to be caught between a strong Communist underground and the invading Japanese. But this doesn't explain why his very worst period was 1945-49, after the USA had beaten the Japanese and were doing everything they could to support him. Seeing Chiang as one product of a Blue Republic that was a sickly hybrid of old and new forces China, it all makes perfect sense. He was representative of a stratum that was well-placed to transform China but was inhibited by its own culture, a culture that prided itself on several thousand years of minimal change.

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<sup>65</sup> *Journey To The Beginning*, page 158

I think that there was something of this same spirit in Madam Sun, and to a lesser degree Zhou Enlai. But both of them had the wisdom to see that the future lay with people not very much like them. That China needed a resurgence from the peasantry, with Mao the prime embodiment of the new spirit that broke China out of its long stagnation.

### A Selection of Red Leaders

When Edgar Snow met him, Mao was very far from being the confirmed leader of Chinese Communism. Mao had been Head of State from 1931, but in Leninist systems this usually counts for little. The leader is usually the party's General Secretary. In 1938 this was Chang Wen-t'ien (Zhang Wentian), about whom Snow says remarkable little, even though the man spoke fluent

English. This omission interested me – as did the relatively small amount said about Zhou Enlai, who also spoke English fairly well. So I decided to do a detailed analysis of just who gets mentioned in *Red Star Over China*, and how much space they get. I used the 1972 Penguin Books edition, which includes the whole of the original text. My method was to count pages include part pages. Any method short of counting the number of words and letters will be imperfect: this seems a good approximation. I then found the percentage that each individual. But when a character gets less than half a page overall, this counts as zero.

It turned out that Zhou Enlai got more than I'd remembered, despite not having a chapter of his own. But it seems odd that he gets less than Peng Dehuai. The overall results were:

<u>Individual In Red China</u>	<u>Pinyin Name</u>	<u>Start</u>	<u>End</u>	<u>Pages</u>	<u>%</u>
Chang Wen-t'ien / Lo Fu	Zhang Wentian	114	114	0	-
Chou En-Lai	Zhou Enlai	84	91	8	4.60
Chu Teh	Zhu De	381	389	9	5.17
Fu Chin-kuei		92	93	2	1.15
Ho Lung	He Long	93	96	4	2.30
Hsu Hai-tung	Xu Haidong	335	347	13	7.47
Hzu T'eh	Xu Teli	269	273	5	2.87
Li Chiang-lin		92	93	2	1.15
Lin Piao	Lin Biao	134	138	5	2.87
Liu Chih-tan		241	245	5	2.87
Liu Hsiao		326	327	2	1.15
Liu Tsu-han		264	268	5	2.87
Peng Te-huai	Peng Dehuai	302	319	18	10.34
Teng Fa		65	66	2	1.15
Mao (Narrative 1 - Snow's Introduction)		151	152	2	1.15
Mao (Narrative 2 - personal)		152	197	46	26.44
Mao (Narrative 3 - CP history)		197	210	14	8.05
Mao (Separate Interview 1)		120	123	4	2.30
Mao (Separate Interview 2)		125	130	6	3.45
Mao (Separate Interview 3)		415	417	3	1.72
Mao (Snow's first impression)		95	113	19	10.92
<i>Total for Mao</i>				79	45.40
<b>Total Pages About Named Individuals</b>				<b>174</b>	

The 'separate interviews' with Mao are those that are part of the original text of *Red Star Over China*. I am not including other interviews given at the time but recorded elsewhere. But he gets 45%, which fits my hypothesis that Snow was primed by Madam Sun to build up Mao as a future national leader, overshadowing his party.

Other choices are surprising. Five pages for Hsu T'eh (Xu Haidong), Mao's teacher at the Changsha County Normal School (teacher training school). Thirteen for Hsu Hai-tung (Xu Haidong), viewed by most historians as a rather minor figure: one of many successful generals. He was not one of the ten men later given the top rank of 'Yuan shuai' or Marshal. It's also odd that Lin Biao gets only five

pages as against eighteen (two entire chapters for Peng Dehuai. This might mean something, especially since Peng's own background was in the Left Kuomintang, joining the Communists only in 1928. But it might also be just that Snow had less to tell from his incidental meetings with various leading figures of Red China.

What's much more interesting is Snow's almost complete omission of the man who was nominally the most senior Chinese communist in the Red Base. He just mentions him in passing, saying:

"In the following paragraphs [about party history] I have paraphrased, in part, the comments of Lo Fu (Chang Wen-t'ien), the English-speaking general secretary of the Communist Party Politburo, whom I interviewed in Pao An".<sup>66</sup>

Chang Wen-t'ien (Zhang Wentian) was the least powerful General Secretary in the party's history. Normally it is the top job in any Leninist party, at least following Stalin's emergence as top leader. It's also interesting that Snow gives his title in a form that is probably correct but whose significance would not be clear to most leaders. As I'll explain later, Zhang Wentian functioned as a place-holder between the deposition of the old leadership of the party at the Zunyi Conference and Mao's formal recognition as top leader in 1943.

Neither Liu Shaoqi (Liu Shao-Chi) nor Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-p'ing) are mentioned in the original text. Of course Liu was heading the Communist Underground outside the Red Base: he approved Snow's trip but Snow only learned of this in 1960. Deng was at that time a loyal follower of Mao, marginalised with him several years earlier and restored along with Mao was Zunyi. But perhaps he was then not very prominent. His rise maybe came later, when he played a major role in the People's Army crossing of the Yangtze, which effectively ended the danger of China being once again partitioned between North and South, as actually happened to Korea and Vietnam.<sup>67</sup>

What's much more interesting is the complete omission of Wang Ming, at that time the leading Chinese Communist. At that time in exile in Moscow, but Madam Sun was certainly familiar with him and knew his importance. I recall Snow in one of his other books giving indications that he was aware of the man's significance but preferred to boost Mao and Wang's expense. If he did, then it was an excellent decision, because Wang Ming wasn't much of a leader when it came to achieving practical results. But that's part of a topic that would merit a whole article in itself, so I'll say no more for now.

<sup>66</sup> Page 114, *Red Star Over China*, 1972 edition.

<sup>67</sup> The Wiki as of 29/09/2015 does not think this part of Deng's career worth mentioning, but Wiki entries for China are frequently low-quality. Given the Wiki's willingness to let determined fools erase good data, I have not so far tried to make many improvements.

## Zhou on Chiang Kai-shek

One item that was planned for inclusion in *Red Star Over China* but got left out was Zhou Enlai's remarks to Snow about Chiang Kai-shek. These have been oddly overlooked by Western writers on China, even though they were later published. Or perhaps they contain too many 'off-message facts' – reason to believe that Chiang was always incapable of being a successful national leader.

Chiang's rise owed a lot to his time as Commandant of the Republic of China Military Academy (commonly known as the Whampoa Military Academy). This happened when the Kuomintang and Communists were working together and Soviet aid to the Kuomintang was vital. Zhou had been director of the political department and must have got to know Chiang pretty well. His assessment includes a correct prediction that the anti-Japanese war would finish Chiang. It is also a detailed analysis of the man's weaknesses as a military commander:

"Q. 'Do you consider Chiang's position now stronger or weaker than it was several years ago?'

"A. 'Chiang Kai-shek reached the zenith of his power in 1934 and he is now rapidly going down. During his Fifth War in Kiangsi [Jiangxi] he was able to mobilize 500,000 troops for his attack and blockade: it was his period of greatest power. When he had destroyed the Nineteenth Route Army and forced us to withdraw, he was supreme in the Yangtze Valley. But all this was achieved at terrific cost, and since then his civil war slogans have lost all appeal. At the last Kuomintang congress he dared not use anti-Red slogans, because of fear of being criticised.'

"Chou argued that Chiang was more and more dividing his forces by attempting to spread to all the frontiers; he was everywhere weakening himself by this. 'His lack of ability to concentrate is now his weakness'....

"Q. 'What is your opinion of Chiang as a military man?'

"A. 'Not so much (high?). As a tactician he is a bungling amateur. As a strategist he is perhaps better.

"As a tactician Chiang follows the style of Napoleon. Napoleonic tactics depend tremendously on the high morale and fighting spirit of the troops, on the will to victory. It is there that Chiang always makes his mistakes; he likes too much to fancy himself the dashing hero leading fight-to-the-death troops. Whenever he leads a regiment or division he makes a mess of it. He always concentrates his men and attempts to take a position by storming it. In the Wuhan (1927) battle he led a division up to the city after others had failed, and threw its whole strength against the enemy's defence works. His division was smashed to pieces...

"During the recent Shansi [Shanxi] campaign Chiang ordered General Ch'en Ch'eng [Chen Cheng] to send two divisions against the Reds and annihilate them. Ch'en, a better tactician, declined to do so, fearing an ambush... We would indeed have welcomed such a concentration... Fortunately for Nanking, Chiang does not often take personal command at the front. Among other reasons he doesn't is that he cannot ride a horse.

"But Chiang is a better strategist than tactician. He had better political sense than military, and that is how he wins over other warlords. He often plans a campaign in its

entirety with considerable skill.<sup>68</sup>

By the time Snow came to write up his notes as a book, the Communists were part of a United Front led by Chiang, rather than the anti-Chiang anti-Japan alliance they had probably wished for. Zhou's low opinion of Chiang was suppressed for the duration of the anti-Japanese war. Snow makes it clear that apart from this one case, he was free to write what he liked:

"At no time did the Communists attempt to examine my notes or censor them. Chou En-lai's request that I not print his remarks about Chiang Kai-shek was the only case of the kind that I can recall. I was asked not to reveal information of military value 'to the enemy' and of course I was told a few things in confidence which I kept. Once or twice Mao Tse-tung asked me to write up his interviews while I was in their areas. I contended that my editors and the public would not believe anything coming to them in that way, and said that all my reporting would have to be done after I had returned to Peking. Mao conceded the logic of my point and did not press the matter."<sup>69</sup>

The interviews in which Mao spoke to the wider world had been carefully checked, of course:

"Mao asked me to write up everything he said in full, in English. The result was translated back into Chinese by Wu [a translator Snow had brought with him] and Mao then amended, amplified and edited it, as I sat with him and Wu and wrote the final version."<sup>70</sup>

Snow had no doubt about why he chose to play a pro-Communist role. He wasn't attracted by the Soviet Union, and when he was a reporter there during the war he came to distinctly dislike the place. But he was also clear about which side of the world struggle he should be on:

"At this time I also decided, as did Nehru, that whatever the ultimate truth about Russia might turn out to be, 'as between Nazi-Fascism and Communism my sympathies were with Communism', not of love for its friends but dislike of its enemies. One enemy at a time was enough for me; and it was Hitler, not Russia, who denied even the principle of human brotherhood and glorified barbarism and racial engorgement."<sup>71</sup>

Recent popular films in Britain and the USA give the impression that they were the main force that defeated Nazi Germany. It is worth reminding everyone – or perhaps telling them for the first time – that two-thirds of Nazi Germany's forces were on the Eastern Front down to the end of the war. Britain and the USA were hard-pushed to take on and eventually drive back the remaining third. Note also that Poland had defeated Soviet Russia in 1920, but collapsed after a few weeks in 1939. Hitler had some reason to expect an easy victory, but Stalin's ruthless industrialisation in the 1930s had made it a very different place from Poland.

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<sup>68</sup> Snow, Edgar. *Random Notes on Red China, 1936-1945*. Harvard East Asian Monographs 5. Harvard University press 1974, pages 58-60

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., page ix

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., page viii

<sup>71</sup> *Journey To The Beginning*

People with no ideological commitment but just an interest in weapons tend to accept the Soviet tanks as the best of their era, and the same was true of many of their other weapons.

Despite which, the Soviet Union only just survived. Japan with its base in Manchuria was well placed to attack Siberia. Since they chose to attack first China and then USA and the European empires in Asia, Stalin was able to bring across huge numbers of troops from the Soviet Far East. These pushed the Nazi armies back in the first critical winter. I'd assume that Stalin's view of the Xian Incident was conditioned by his anticipation of future needs. In the same spirit, the Soviet Union had even recognised the puppet state of Manchukuo. It was of course unfair to China: but if Stalin had been willing to openly debate the matter, he could reasonably have argued that he had the future of the entire world to worry about. A regional success in China would mean little if the rest of the world were won by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

Given that the West in the 1930s felt fairly friendly to Nazi Germany and much more hostile to the Soviet Union, it was remarkable that Stalin did manage to get them fighting each other rather than combining in an anti-Communist Crusade.

The West nowadays likes to hide what it felt at the time, but one undeniable fact is that all of the major Western countries were happy to attend the 1936 Berlin Olympics. By 1936, Hitler had abolished parliamentary democracy and introduced major discrimination against Jews. Meantime the West continued to abuse China's weakness and continued to do nothing significant about Japanese aggression.

Moscow forced the Chinese Communists to use their influence to get Chiang Kai-shek released and restored to power after the Xian Incident. Snow in *Random Notes on Red China* reports details that probably came from Soong Ching Ling, though she is identified here as 'X':

"Mao Tse-tung,' X said, 'flew into a rage when the order came from Moscow to release Chiang. Mao swore and stamped his feet. Until then they had planned to give Chiang a public trial and to organise a Northwest anti-Japanese defence government..."

"At this time or a little later I learned that X had forwarded the telegram from Stalin to Mao which stated that unless the Chinese Communists used their influence to release Chiang they would be denounced by Moscow as 'bandits' and repudiated before the world. It was apparently the first direct communication of the kind sent from Moscow for some time."<sup>72</sup>

He then quotes another Western commentator who says:

"There is little doubt that Stalin was interested in saving Chiang Kai-shek out of fear that the Kuomintang generals,

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<sup>72</sup> . *Random Notes on Red China*, page 2

without Chiang, would in rage turn and join the Japanese in an anti-Russian pact."<sup>73</sup>

This might also have derailed the whole process that led to the Japanese attack on the US at Pearl Harbour. A process which was followed by the discrediting of the British Empire with Japan's swift and easy capture of Singapore, which the British ruling class had viewed as almost impregnable. Japan later attacked the US because the US was imposing an economic blockade. And it was doing that because they sympathised with China under a United Front led by Chiang Kai-shek.

My assessment is that Stalin read the situation accurately, and correctly demanded that the Chinese Communists sacrifice their own immediate advantage for the global cause. Nor were they the only long-term beneficiaries: without the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor and then Hitler's decision to declare war on the USA, Roosevelt might have been unable to get the USA involved in the war against Nazi Germany. Had that prospect faded, it is entirely possible the Tory majority in Parliament would have toppled Churchill – not much liked by them during his first months as Prime Minister – and made some sort of peace with Hitler.

It's also likely that Moscow retained a belief in orthodox Marxism: that nothing better than Chiang Kai-shek and 'bourgeois nationalism' was possible until decades in the future, when capitalism would have produced a much larger working class. This was based on a belief that there was a Chinese Bourgeoisie that would eventually do the same job as equivalent people in Europe. I think this was a mistake: but most critics of Moscow's China policy make exactly the same mistake and have no coherent basis for their criticisms

### **Madam Sun and the 'Unknown Mao'**

I mentioned earlier that Madam Sun's life-story had been told by Chang and Halliday. It was their first joint effort and is a useful little book, one of only two available in English about this remarkable woman. Which makes it odd that they have totally reversed their position in their biography of Mao, and have done so without explanation. They say:

"The fact that she was a Russian agent remained a secret throughout her long life, and remains little-known to this day. But a secret letter she wrote on 26 January 1937 to Wang Ming, the head of the CCP delegation in Moscow, and her controller, show her role beyond any doubt. The letter opens: 'To Comrade Wang Ming: Dear Comrade: It is necessary for me to inform you the following facts since they may endanger my activities... in China in the near future. I place them before your consideration in the hope that you will advise me as to what course to pursue...' One of the points in her letter was complaints about the American Comintern agent Agnes Smedley, who, Mme Sun said, brought 'foreign sympathisers home, with the result that this special house which has been used for important purposes now has been ruined... I forwarded your instructions to

isolate her' to the CCP."<sup>74</sup>

The source for this something called VKP, listed on page 770 of the bibliography without any hint about what it is or what language it uses. Oddities like '*inform you the following facts*' are there in Chang and Halliday, seemingly not noticed.

Saying 'agent' is misleading. The word is normally taken to mean 'secret agent', but secret agents don't openly advertise their support for the cause they're actually working for. As I explained earlier—and as Chang and Halliday accepted in their biography of her—Madam Sun Yat-sen stuck to her late husband's policy of an alliance with the Soviet Union and cooperation with the Chinese Communists. She was outraged when Chiang Kai-shek switched to a compromise with the European powers and a general massacre of Communists and other leftists. And as I mentioned earlier, she won over Edgar Snow to a lot of her own views and also arranged for him to make the trip to Mao's stronghold. Chang and Halliday mention this in their 1986 biography of her,<sup>75</sup> but omit this and much else in their famous biography of Mao.

Note also the date, 26 January 1937. Chang and Halliday ignore this, dropping the footnote into an account of events in 1934-5. The 'Xian Incident' had occurred in December 1936, with Chiang Kai-shek being kidnapped by some of his generals and forced to agree to a coalition with the Chinese Communists. This suited Madam Sun very well: at last there was a government she felt she could join without betraying Sun Yat-sen's legacy. And of course Wang Ming was no petty spy-master but a major figure in Chinese Communism, one-time leader of a faction called the '28 Bolsheviks' that had for a time pushed aside home-grown leaders like Mao, and are blamed by most experts for the loss of the southern Red Base that Mao and Zhu De had built. By 1937, Wang Ming's power was reduced but still considerable, since he was the man Moscow maybe wished to have in charge of Chinese Communism. Moscow and Wang definitely wished for a Communist-Kuomintang United Front against Japan. It was far from a 'done deal' in January 1937. I take the letter to be part of the complex politics that two major Chinese leaders were engaging in.

Anyone who knows what "VKP" actually stands for could usefully follow this up. But it would be a lifetime's work tracking down the actual connections between what the 'Unknown Story' says and the sources obscurely cited for these views. There are many better uses for a lifetime than that.

If Madam Sun had wished to spy for the Soviet Union, then she would hardly have refused to join the government, where she would have had access to vastly more key information. What she was actually doing was openly maintaining a left-wing

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<sup>74</sup> Chang and Halliday, *Mao, the Unknown Story*, Jonathan Cape 2005, footnote to page 140

<sup>75</sup> Chang and Halliday, *Mme Sun Yat-sen*, page 78

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, page 4

but non-Communist position. As I explained earlier, a lot of her followers were murdered, and others ended up supporting the Communists, but that was largely because Chiang Kai-shek would allow no middle ground. She worked all her life to continue the original Kuomintang idea, a left-wing non-Communist movement that might have been able to use milder methods to modernised China.

Madam Sun might have been highly significant as the leader of the middle ground, if either of the two United Fronts between the main Kuomintang and the Communist had held, but that did not happen. Instead she became a respected but fairly powerless figure in the People's Republic, along with various other non-Communist politicians whose role remained small. When Liu Shaoqi was removed as President of China in 1968, she shared the office of Acting Chairman of the People's Republic of China with a Chinese Communist leader called Dong Biwu. I find it significant that she was removed from this position in 1972, just as China and the USA were ending their long hostility. I'd assume that Mao intended to keep control of the process and maybe felt that Madam Sun could become significant and dangerous in this new and much more open situation. In the event, Deng's take-over after Mao's death could be viewed as creating something like what Madam Sun had been working for all of her life, a moderate socialism respectful of many aspects of China's past. She was even made President of the People's Republic of China for the last two weeks of her life – an honorary position, because Deng too had no intention of losing control of China's 'opening up'.

As for Agnes Smedley, she was a left-wing writer and journalist. During World War One, she was involved in something called the Hindu–German Conspiracy, a plot for a revolt in India that was supported by both Germany and the Irish Republican Army, who brought off something similar in 1916 with the Easter Rising. The plot for a mutiny by Indian troops in British India was stopped at a much earlier stage, but could have been highly significant if it had come off and maybe ought to be better known. Smedley was later involved with global communism, particularly in China. The standard view is that she was an independent leftist, viewed as useful but unreliable, which would account for Madam Sun's concern. That Smedley was an actual Comintern agent is much more doubtful. A recent book claims to have proved it, but there have been a lot of books like that since the fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>76</sup> Most of them are unreliable, jumping to conclusions from weak evidence and ignoring facts that don't suit their case.

Remarkably, Chang and Halliday exclude their own book about Madam Sun from their intimidatingly-long list of sources. Also missing is Jon Halliday's 1990 book *Korea: The Unknown War*, which takes a very admiring view of North Korea's Kim Il-Sung. It also fails to deal with the

general belief that his rise was wholly due to Stalin appointing him after Russia occupied the northern part of what had been a single Japanese colony.

That's not the only oddity. Though the list of sources is huge, it has some odd omissions. Not present is the original *Left Book Club* edition of Snow's *Red Star Over China*. They rely on a later edition that has some small changes, one of which I detail later. They also ignore Dick Wilson's *The Long March 1935: the Epic of Chinese Communism's Survival* and Philip Short's *Mao: A Life*. Quan Yanchi's highly interesting *Mao Zedong: Man, Not God* is listed in the English-language bibliography: but if it is referenced anywhere, I must have missed it.

Chang and Halliday claim to have the True Story of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, quite different from the standard story:

"But it was on his way back via Shanghai that Mao had the crucial encounter that was to change his life. In June 1920 he called on a Professor Chen Tu-hsiu [Chen Duxiu], at the time China's foremost Marxist intellectual, who was in the midst of forming a Chinese Communist Party...

"The idea of forming this Communist Party did not stem from the professor, nor from any other Chinese. It originated in Moscow. In 1919 the new Soviet government set up the Communist International, the Comintern, to foment [sic] revolution and influence policy in Moscow's interest around the world. In August, Moscow launched a huge secret programme of action and subversion for China, starting a commitment of money, men and arms three decades long, which culminated in bringing the Communists under Mao to power in 1949 – Soviet Russia's most lasting triumph in foreign policy...

"In January 1920 the Bolsheviks took Central Siberia and established an overland link with China. The Comintern sent a representative, Grigori Voitinsky, to China in April. In May it established a centre in Shanghai, with a view, as another agent reported to Moscow, to 'constructing a Chinese Party'.

"This was exactly when Mao showed up on Chen's doorstep. He had chanced upon the emergence of the CCP. Mao was not invited to be one of the founders. Nor, it seems, was he told it was about to be formed. The eight or so founding members were all eminent Marxists and Mao had not even said that he believed in Marxism. The Party was founded in August, after Mao had left Shanghai.

"[Note] This has been a delicate point for Mao and his successors, and as a result official history dates the founding of the Party to 1921, as that was the first time Mao could verifiably be located at a Party conclave, the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress. This is duly commemorated with a museum in Shanghai which enshrines the myth that Mao was a founding member of the Party. That the Party was founded in 1920, not 1921, is confirmed both by the official magazine of the Comintern and by one of Moscow's emissaries who organised the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress."<sup>77</sup>

Most readers would suppose that 'official history' meant 'Chinese Communist history'. In fact Chang

<sup>76</sup> [<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20010716/navasky>]

<sup>77</sup> Chang and Halliday, *Mao, the Unknown Story*, Jonathan Cape 2005. Page 19

and Halliday are going against what pretty well all Western experts believe to have happened. You find the standard account in Philip Short's *Mao, a Life*, for instance, and he also mentions an initial contact three months before Voitinsky. Chen Duxiu was accepted as leader by the First Congress, which Mao attended as one of two delegates from a Communist group in Hunan. It so happened that Chen Duxiu could be not there,<sup>78</sup> but he was accepted as co-founder along with Li Dazhao.

The reverential attitude to Chen Duxiu, 'China's foremost Marxist intellectual', is perhaps explained by Chen later breaking with the mainstream party and becoming for a time the leader of China's insignificant Trotskyist movement. I'm not sure if Jon Halliday was ever exactly a Trotskyist, but he is the brother of the late Professor Fred Halliday. Fred Halliday was once a prominent hard-leftist Trotskyist, though I'm not sure quite what he was in his last days. He had at one time considerable influence on various Middle-Eastern leftists: I don't suppose he did much to contribute to the abysmal failure of left-wing politics in most of the Islamic world, but it is not an encouraging connection.

Trotskyists in general have proved useless when it comes to real politics. Worse than useless: they give the appearance of understanding, yet never create anything solid. They divert resources from movements that might have achieved something.

Chinese Communists avoided Trotskyism, but would never have had the option to spread a false tale of their origins, even had they so wished. Many of those involved in the party's early days were still around when the party's history was written up. Some of them had become hostile to Communism and several more were hostile to Mao's leadership. A fraud about the date of foundation would have been immediately challenged, not passed over in silence for Chang and Halliday to discover years later.

No one disputes that party-building begun in 1920, but the mainstream view is that it took time to create something that could be called a party. The 'eight eminent Marxists' of the Chang and Halliday version would have been totally unimportant without links to activists, and we're also not told who they were. They downplay the role of Li Dazhao, whom they list as Li Ta-Chao and generally belittle. Most writers on the matter consider that he was the biggest single influence on Mao's thinking, especially the possibly role of the peasantry. He was one of many killed in the anti-Communist campaign of 1927.

Robert Payne's 1950 book, *Mao Tse-tung: Ruler of Red China* was in its time considered one of the best sources. It says:

"The First Congress of the Communist Party of China was held in Shanghai at some time towards the end of June or the beginning of July 1921. No one now remembers the exact date, but Mao has recently selected the date June 30, rather arbitrarily, so that the founding of the party can be celebrated annually. This was not the first attempt to inaugurate the party, for in the Petrograd edition of *Pravda* for July 30, 1920, there appears a short paragraph saying that an organisation of the Chinese Communist party then existed in Shanghai, but giving no further details. Pavel Miff, a delegate of the Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern, who was on the scene shortly afterwards, made inquiries and says that about thirteen delegates were present at the original conference, but they included 'anarchists, biblical socialists, legal Marxists and camp-followers', and that the anarchists broke away and the conference

ended in fiasco."<sup>79</sup>

That sounds very much like the story Chang and Halliday pick up – a garbled report at a time when communication between Moscow and its contacts in China was very incomplete. And it seems typical of them that a single source from Moscow is allowed to override many more sources that are merely Chinese. The main theme of their later books seem to be that everything done by Chinese is hopeless and that complete dependence on the West is the only sensible option.

Chang and Halliday later say the Congress that Mao consisted of thirteen people and occurred on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. The real number remains uncertain, and this muddle indicates how far Chinese at that time were from thinking in the systematic analytical manner that the West had developed and spread over several centuries. According to Payne:

"The meeting which followed a year later was carefully arranged by Chen Tu-hsiu and Li Ta-chao [Li Dazhao], both of whom had by now resigned their posts at Peking University...

"A complete list of the members of the original congress is difficult to put together. Mao says there were twelve members, while others have spoken of seven, eleven and fifteen. Among them certainly were the original twelve."

He then gives a list including the two founders, who were not actually there according to Short. It may well have been rather informal, with only some of them representing existing groups of would-be Communists. Payne seems to think that the meeting was of the entire membership, which is almost certainly wrong, they were just the core. And not all of the original twelve (or whatever) lasted the course

"Of the original members only three survived to become members of the Presidium, which assumed the governing powers of China in September, 1949. Three were executed, six went over to the Kuomintang, and two were expelled from the party."

Three and three and 6 and 2 make 14 rather than 12, never mind. Payne isn't a very systematic thinker, but he does have a grasp of the dynamics of real politics that makes him well worth reading. And that's just what Chang and Halliday lack. They present Chinese Communism as being a foreign franchise that Chinese got drawn into, much as McDonald Hamburger or Kentucky Fried Chicken have been allowed to extend themselves into post-Mao China. Such a view is ridiculous: a successful political party is a very hard thing to construct even if the correct elements exist within the society.

Mao in 1920-21 was already a noted activist among radical young Chinese in Hunan, the sort of people that Chinese Communism needed to win over if it was to amount to anything. Chang and Halliday ignore this and suppose the process began with a few scholars deciding to study Marxist theory.

There's a lot in their book that's not just anti-Mao but anti-China. And anti-Communist, of course, which is a peculiar end-point for Jon Halliday, once important in Britain's New Left. It's hard to believe that the man doesn't know the exact history of the Comintern or Third International, created in Moscow as a broad alliance of hard-left parties previously known as the Zimmerwald Left. It included various branches of the Industrial Workers of the World, 'Wobblies', a major independent force in the USA. Also the Norwegian Labour Party, which soon left again and survives to this day as a social-democratic party of government. And the Italian Socialist Party, which soon split with a minority becoming

<sup>78</sup> Short, Philip. *Mao, a Life*. Hodder and Stoughton 1999. Pages 118-119

<sup>79</sup> Page 71 of the first edition

the Italian Communist Party and the others continuing down to the 1990s, when they were discredited by the same scandals that finished the Italian Christian Democrats. The people who created the Third International was not a bunch of people taking orders from Moscow, at least not till much later. Lenin had the prestige of a successful revolution, but in 1919 it was far from certain that it would survive or that there would not be successful hard-left revolutions elsewhere in the world.

As for China being 'Soviet Russia's most lasting triumph in foreign policy' – most Western experts consider that the Chinese Communists succeeded despite Moscow rather than because of Moscow. And when it comes to Soviet triumphs, I would point to four even larger events that the Soviet Union and International Communism should definitely be credited with – the defeat of the major Fascist powers, the winding-up of various Colonial empires, the establishment of racial equality as a global norm and the establishment of women's equality as a global norm. But Chiang and Halliday have become part of the New Right, who like to ignore these off-message facts.

### **Luding Bridge**

*Red Star Over China* tells of the heroic crossing of the Luding Bridge by the Red Army, escaping from the south on a path that would lead eventually to glory in the anti-Japanese war and the re-unification in 1949. Chang and Halliday say:

"This bridge is the centre of the Long March myth created by Mao, who fed it to the journalist Edgar Snow in 1936. Crossing the bridge, Snow wrote, 'was the most critical single incident of the Long March'...

"There was no battle at the Dadu Bridge... There were no Nationalist troops at the bridge when the Reds arrived on 29<sup>th</sup> May...

"The Red Army crossed the bridge without incurring a single death. The vanguard consisted of twenty-two men, who, according to the myth, stormed the bridge in a suicide attack. But at a celebration immediately afterwards, on 2 June, all twenty-two were not only alive and well, they each received a Lenin suit, a fountain pen, a bowl and a pair of chopsticks. Not one was even wounded."<sup>80</sup>

*Red Star Over China* says that *thirty* men attempted the crossing, with at least three killed crossing the bare chains. And Edgar Snow does not call it a battle. It was too small, just a skirmish, though of immense strategic significance.

Not that it's impossible to have a major attack without casualties. When Fort Sumter was shelled at the start of the US Civil War, no one died from enemy action, though two of the defenders were killed in an accident during the surrender ceremony. In World War Two, no one died in the famous Gran Sasso raid, in which Otto Skorzeny freed Mussolini and became famous for his skill and valour. In fact no shots were fired: yet it was recognised as a magnificent military achievement.<sup>81</sup>

Snow gives a very coherent account:

"The Bridge Fixed by Liu was built centuries ago, and in the manner of all bridges of the deep rivers of western China. Sixteen heavy iron chains, with a span of some 100 yards or more, were stretched across the river, their ends imbedded on each side under great piles of cemented rock, beneath the stone bridgeheads. Thick boards lashed over the chains made the road of the bridge,

but upon their arrival the Reds found that half this wooden flooring had been removed, and before them only the bare iron chains swung to a point midway in the stream. At the northern bridgehead an enemy machine-gun nest faced them, and behind it were positions held by a regiment of White troops. The bridge should, of course, have been destroyed, but the Szechuanese were sentimental about their few bridges; it was not easy to rebuild them, and they were costly. Of Liu Ting it was said that "the wealth of the eighteen provinces contributed to build it." And who would have thought the Reds would insensibly try to cross on the chains alone? But that was what they did.

"No time was to be lost. The bridge must be captured before enemy reinforcements arrived. Once more volunteers were called for. One by one Red soldiers stepped forward to risk their lives, and, of those who offered themselves, thirty were chosen. Hand grenades and Mausers were strapped to their backs, and soon they were swinging out above the boiling river, moving hand over hand, clinging to the iron chains. Red machine guns barked at enemy redoubts and spattered the bridgehead with bullets. The enemy replied with machine-gunning of his own, and snipers shot at the Reds tossing high above the water, working slowly toward them. The first warrior was hit, and dropped into the current below; a second fell, and then a third. But as others drew nearer the center, the bridge flooring somewhat protected these dare-to-dies, and most of the enemy bullets glanced off, or ended in the cliffs on the opposite bank.

"Probably never before had the Szechuanese seen fighters like these — men for whom soldiering was not just a rice bowl, and youths ready to commit suicide to win. Were they human beings or madmen or gods? Was their own morale affected? Did they perhaps not shoot to kill? Did some of them secretly pray that these men would succeed in their attempt? At last one Red crawled up over the bridge flooring, uncapped a grenade, and tossed it with perfect aim into the enemy redoubt. Nationalist officers ordered the rest of the planking torn up. It was already too late. More Reds were crawling into sight. Paraffin was thrown on the planking, and it began to burn. By then about twenty Reds were moving forward on their hands and knees, tossing grenade after grenade into the enemy machine-gun nest.

"Suddenly, on the southern shore, their comrades began to shout with joy. "Long live the Red Army! Long live the Revolution! Long live the heroes of Tatu Ho!" For the enemy was withdrawing in pell-mell flight. Running full speed over the remaining planks of the bridge, through the flames licking toward them, the assailants nimbly hopped into the enemy's redoubt and turned the abandoned machine gun against the shore.

"More Reds now swarmed over the chains, and arrived to help put out the fire and replace the boards. And soon afterwards the Red division that had crossed at An Jen Ch'ang came into sight, opening a flank attack on the remaining enemy positions, so that in a little while the White troops were wholly in flight — either in flight, that is, or with the Reds, for about a hundred Szechuan soldiers here threw down their rifles and turned to join their pursuers. In an hour or two the whole army was joyously tramping and singing its way across the River Tatu into Szechuan. Far overhead angrily and impotently roared the planes of Chiang Kai-shek, and the Reds cried out in delirious challenge to them.

"For their distinguished bravery the heroes of An fen Ch'ang and Liu Ting Chiao were awarded the Gold Star, highest decoration in the Red Army of China."<sup>82</sup>

This is from the 1960s revised edition, which differs in some small details from the 1930s Left Book Club edition. Nothing very important, but the original said 'Never before' rather than 'Probably never before'. As I said earlier, Chang and Halliday don't seem to have

<sup>80</sup> *Mao, the unknown story*, pages 158-160

<sup>81</sup> Gran Sasso raid, Wikipedia as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010

<sup>82</sup> *Red Star Over China*, part 5, chapter 3. Page 198-9, New Left Book Club edition of 1937. Available on-line at [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china\\_1900\\_mao\\_march.htm](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1900_mao_march.htm)

bothered to check for possible changes. Their bibliography lists a 1973 edition.

If you check their sources, Chang and Halliday misreport the standard story, saying:

"Central to the myth is the claim that part of the bridge was set on fire and soldiers had to crawl across on incandescent chains. This claim was explicitly denied by the curator of the museum at the bridge in 1983. The bridge did not burn."<sup>83</sup>

Snow's account is entirely clear: the bridge was 100 yards long and the first 50 yards of it was bare chains. The defenders were at the far end, and so would have needed rather long arms to set the chains on fire. Snow actually says 'paraffin was thrown on the planking'. To run through a small fire while also being shot at needs courage, but is not beyond the routine achievements of brave soldiers in key battles. It would obviously be impossible to grasp chains that were burning or incandescent, but Snow does not claim this. Nor does any other account I am aware of.

I mentioned earlier that Snow made some small revisions when he republished *Red Star Over China*, as well as adding a lot of notes and extra sections to bring matters up to date. One mildly significant difference between the 1938 and 1971 edition is that the latter has the following in the run-up to the river crossing:

"Victory was life' said P'eng Teh-huai; 'defeat was certain death."<sup>84</sup>

The original edition has the same remark without mentioning Peng, though he is listed among the leaders who met to discuss the crossing earlier on. (Both use the Wade-Giles version rather than the modern Peng Dehuai.) At the time, it was known that Peng had been a target of the Cultural Revolution and Snow had been unable to get to see him or learn where he was.<sup>85</sup> It is reasonable to assume that this concerned him: I mentioned earlier that Peng gets two whole chapters in *Red Star Over China*, more than any leader apart from Mao. Snow was always a socialist rather than a Communist, recognising Mao's achievements but preferring more moderate policies of the sort Peng was associated with. He places Peng there even though the men who made the crossing were part of Lin Biao's army rather than Peng's.

Chang and Halliday seem to have missed all of this in their supposedly exhaustive work over 10 years. Instead they cite Peng in a footnote, using a hybrid version of his name that is neither Wade-Giles nor standard Pinyin:

"When Peng De-huai, the most honest of all the Communist leaders, was asked about the Dadu crossing by a British writer in 1946, he gently, but very clearly, refused to endorse the myth. 'It's a long time ago, and I cannot remember all of it. There were so many rivers – the Gold Sands river, the Hsiang river, the Wu and the Yangtse... I cannot remember very much, but I remember people falling into the water...' He did not say one word about fighting, or a burning bridge. It seems that two or three people did die at the bridge, but only when they fell off while repairing it, when one old plank suddenly snapped."<sup>86</sup>

The source is Robert Payne's 1947 book *China Awake*, cited by Chang and Halliday on page 695 and with an actual page-number, unlike most of their very-hazy quotations.<sup>87</sup> But what Peng is actually recorded as

<sup>83</sup> *Mao, the unknown story*, pages, page 160

<sup>84</sup> *Red Star Over China*, Penguin Books edition of 1971, page 228

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, page 567

<sup>86</sup> *Mao, the unknown story*, footnote to page 160

<sup>87</sup> I got this book confused with Payne's later biography *Mao Tse-tung: Ruler of Red China* in my article *Post-Truthfulness: Chang & Halliday's biography of Mao*. Both have Peng saying

saying is:

"He could not remember all the details which had taken place in the famous crossing of the Tatu Bridge:

"It's a long time ago, and I cannot remember all of it. There were so many rivers – the Gold Sands river, the Hsiang river, the Wu and the Yangtse. I remember the bridge was about 140 metres wide, with six or seven iron chains placed about thirty centimetres apart. It was a shaky bridge at all times, and the current was too strong for us to cross by rafts or pontoons. So the soldiers crossed one by one, hanging down from the bridge, hand over hand, their only weapons hand-grenades and pistols, for a rifle would be useless. The current was terribly fast. The bridge was a hundred metres about the level of the water. I cannot remember very much, but I remember people falling into the water, and there was nothing we could do to help them."<sup>88</sup>

Peng says that soldiers crossed the bridge hanging from the chains – a bizarre thing to do if the bridge were not defended. Of course it's unlikely he actually witnessed the events: the men who crossed the bridge had also done a very fast forced march, fearing that the bridge might be reinforced or blown up at any time. Peng and the others would probably have been miles behind with the main army.

There are several contradictory accounts of the physical construction of the bridge: Snow says 100 yards and 16 chains, but Peng says 140 metres and 6 or 7 chains. The Wikipedia says 13 chains. The Luding Travel Guide says 9 chains and 100 metres long. The proper answer seems to be thirteen chains, nine forming the floor, covered with planking, with two chains on either side serving as rails.<sup>89</sup> The length of the bridge is maybe 104 metres (114 yards).<sup>90</sup> So when Peng said his memory was imperfect, I assume he meant just that and was not suggesting any falsification. He did also say:

"We have never had any time to collect a history of our wars. I am giving you what I remember, and I cannot recollect all the details."<sup>91</sup>

After victory some of these were written up, and some of those are available in English. Dick Wilson's *The Long March* gives a detailed account of the crossing of the Dadu, mentioning an attacking force of 22 men followed by others on both banks of the river, with casualties of maybe 17, maybe 50. Wilson is missing from Chang and Halliday's 100-page bibliography, as are his main sources, Yang Teh-chih's *Heroes of the Tatu River* and Yang Cheng-wu's *Lightning Attack on Luting Bridge*,<sup>92</sup> both works being part of *Stories of the Long March*, which isn't currently in print, but should be available from major libraries. If they believe the two Yangs to have been a bare-faced liars, then they should say so. But they act like magpies, collecting anything to throw at Mao and showing no interest in a coherent account.

The daring crossing of Luding Bridge was widely publicised in *Red Star Over China*, which was quickly translated into Chinese and circulated illegally and widely. So if it was a myth, why didn't the Kuomintang

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there were many battles and that his memory was imperfect. But only *China Awake* has his actual words, though the other has an account of the Dadu crossing in the same paragraph

<sup>88</sup> Payne, Robert. *China Awake*, William Heinemann Ltd 1947, page 323

<sup>89</sup> <http://chineseposters.net/themes/luding-bridge.php> & <http://www.chinatrekking.com/destinations/sichuan/luding>

<sup>90</sup>

[<http://en.structurae.de/structures/data/index.cfm?id=s0005665>]

<sup>91</sup> *China Awake*, page 322.

<sup>92</sup> It does say "Luting" not "Luding"

propagandists step up and say 'no, nothing like that ever happened'? Although Chang and Halliday speak of 'Nationalist troops', the defenders were actually warlord forces and could have been sensibly accused of cowardice or treachery. Some Red Army's successes were undoubtedly helped by warlord inefficiency and corruption, but no one besides Chang and Halliday has seen the Dadu Bridge crossing in this light.

Chang and Halliday also make a lot of the failure of Chiang Kai-shek's aircraft to do much damage to the Red Army throughout the Long March. They take this as evidence that Chiang wasn't actually trying to destroy the Red Army. But the Chinese Air Force during the Blue Republic never achieved very much. In the defence of Shanghai in 1932, they missed Japanese warships that should have been sitting ducks in the middle of a river, and instead hit their own people. During the later full-scale war, they seldom dared challenge the Japanese, who had become very good pilots. Then when the USA joined the war, the USA preferred to use their own pilots for missions from the unconquered parts of China, and also put their own mechanics in charge.

### **Mao's Rise To Power**

The Long March was an epic, but it left the Red Army numerically weaker than it had been in the south. It had been pushed it well away from China's centres of power. What changed everything was Japanese aggression, and Chiang Kai-shek's feeble response to it.

In this complex situation, it was unclear who was boss. Mao had been a founder member, but for several years he was a local leader, and not always the most senior man in Hunan. He received an apparent promotion in 1931, when he was elected Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Chinese Soviet Republic: effectively Head of State. But the true authority lay with the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

Mao and Zhu De had established the biggest of several Liberated Areas in south China. At that time Zhu held the higher rank, though a lot of the military tactics were Mao. Mao also had a major political role, which Zhu never had.

Mao lost a lot of his importance when the Central Committee was driven out of Shanghai and moved to the base established by Zhu and Mao. Against Mao's advice, they made a premature attempt to switch to Positional Warfare. (What Mao had practiced was not guerrilla warfare but Mobile Warfare: there is a regular army that functions as a single body, but it does not attempt to defend fixed positions.)

The new leadership had some success, but then faced total defeat in the face of a systematic blockade, a strategy devised by the Kuomintang's German military advisors. They decided to pull out most of the mobile forces and begin the Long March, looking for a new base – no one was initially sure where. At first they went in a very predictable straight line, and losses were serious. At the Zunyi Conference, the main leaders overthrew the exiting leadership, Bo Gu and Otto Braun. These had been Moscow's choices and linked to Wang Ming, who was in Moscow and had a senior position in the Comintern. But the post of General Secretary was given to Zhang Wentian, also associated with Wang Ming. Meantime Mao was given a senior military position, but was not definitely in charge even of military matters. He was given a chance to see if he could repeat his earlier successes by unconventional snake-like manoeuvring: what has been called 'dancing round the enemy'. And it did indeed work, leading to a gradual rise in Mao's power and authority.

Since Mao had never technically ceased to be Head of State of Communist China, he had justification for speaking for that state as reconstituted around Paoan, and later at Yen-an during the United Front. But there was still some uncertainty as to who was actually in charge of the Chinese Communist Party.

During the Long March there had been a serious challenge by Zhang Guotao, who had a larger army than those Mao led. There was an attempt at cooperation and then a split. Zhang later set up his own 'Central Committee' to replace the authentic Central Committee that stayed with Mao's forces. Having broken the basic rules of Leninism, the man later declined into insignificance.

During the United Front, Wang Ming returned to China but failed to exercise much power. He lost his most significant supporter, intelligence chief Kang Sheng, who switched to Mao and may have helped persuade Moscow that Mao was the man who could get things done.

In 1943, with the Comintern officially abolished, Mao was elected Chairman of the Party. The post of General Secretary was abolished, with Zhang Wentian continuing in more minor roles. From then until his death, Mao was unchallenged leader of Chinese Communism, though his actual power was curbed between the failure of the Great Leap and the start of the Cultural Revolution.

*Red Star Over China* played a role in Mao's rise. But so did his accurate grasp of what was and was not possible in China. Also his excellent essays on why particular choices were made. Note also that at that time, he might have seemed one of the most moderate leaders of Chinese Communist. He certainly opposed radical policies when he thought they'd cause political defeat. His radical *intentions* remained obscure until later, when it became clear that he had never entirely abandoned the anarchist ideas he had originally followed. And was partly correct in this, since 'sensible' Moscow Leninism crashed and Communist China continues to rise.<sup>93</sup>

Issue 23, 3rd Quarter 2015.  
September 2015

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<sup>93</sup> I've detailed his successes at <http://gwydionwilliams.com/42-china/mao-and-china/>