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Smedley: an American Woman Who Loved China's Red Army

by Gwydion M Williams

How Agnes Smedley found a life's purpose in China

Her connection with super-spy Richard Sorge

Her account of the little-known Red Areas in South China

The surprising neglect of her work by later writers

How she told a genuinely unknown and potentially damaging story about Mao

The cowboy scholarship of 'Wild Swan' Chang and 'Doc' Halliday.

Her account of the 'A.B. Group', an early split within the Red Army

The Chinese Social Democrats' efforts to create a functional Third Force

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An Adventurous Midwestern Lady

Agnes Smedley was a pioneering US feminist. She's best known for a semi-autobiographical novel *Daughter of Earth*. This made her famous, became obscure for a time but was revived by modern Feminists. But her writings on China are unjustly neglected. Ignored even when she has detailed accounts of Chinese Communism not available from any other source. When Smedley is mentioned at all, it is only in connection to her visit to the Red Capital of Yenan, where she was one of many visitors.

Smedley wrote *Daughter of Earth* in the late 1920s, while part of the Broad Left in pre-Hitler Germany. She wanted to move on to India, but was not allowed in by the British – they knew of her earlier involvement with Indian Nationalists who had sought German support during World War One. Instead she got Comintern help to go to China, where she would have some safety as a US citizen. The Comintern also must have vouched for her with the underground Chinese Communist Party, then centred on Shanghai.

Working in Shanghai as a journalists, she

wrote some fascinating accounts of the early Red Areas established by Mao and Zhu De. She was never able to visit them, but knew more about them than anyone other foreigner who could speak freely. (Some of the Comintern agents did write books, but were obviously obliged to keep the Soviet line.)

Smedley is also notable as a major source on China who had a large reputation for writing about something other than China: *Daughter of Earth* is still her main claim for fame.

(Bertrand Russell wrote a bit about China, but nothing I found useful. Andre Malraux's *La Condition humaine* supposedly gives an account of the 1927 Communist take-over of Shanghai: it has the Chinese Communists attempting assassinations, which in the real world they very seldom did.)

Weirdly, Smedley's work is given very little weight by Western writers about China. She gives detailed information about Mao's suppression of some early rivals labelled the 'AB Group'. All the experts I've seen completely ignore this, not even bothering to say why they think she's wrong. It seems to be a classic case of a woman's work being

discounted because of her gender.

This has also meant a missed opportunity for Mao's foes. Chang and Halliday in *Mao: the Unknown Story* virtually ignore her. She gets three mentions, two of them in footnotes.¹ The only substantial mention of Smedley is in connection with the scandal that caused Mao to divorce his second wife. Nothing more apart from quoting just the negative bits from her extensive descriptions of Mao. Could they be thinking 'only a woman – can't matter'. You never find male eye-witness writers treated with such casualness, even if they are assessed as unreliable or dishonest.

Chang and Halliday haven't bothered to read Smedley's book *Chinese Destinies*, which includes a lot about the Chinese Communists not found anywhere else. It's not in their bibliography. So they don't know about a story that would be very damaging to Mao, if it were true. I'll explain later why it probably isn't true and may have been fed to Smedley by an anti-Mao faction among the Chinese Communists. But had they read it, they'd have found much better anti-Mao material than anything they actually came up with.

Let's begin at the beginning. Who was this remarkable lady?

From Missouri to Shanghai

Agnes Smedley was born in Missouri in 1892: a product to the USA's Midwest. And was typically screwed up by the bizarre attitudes of this outlier of broader Anglo culture.

Smedley needed deep involvement with far-left radicalism to get to what we'd now count as a normal viewpoint. (Similar to what the entire USA has since done, though still incompletely.) She explained it in a letter to a close female friend:

"I had often been tortured by a vague dissatisfaction, physically, but when men had approached me in a sexual manner, as many had done in my wanderings, my terror of the sex act, my ignorance regarding it, forced me into an attitude of horror at everything concerned with sexual relations. And even after I was married, I had relations with my husband only after we had been married eight months. I considered the sex act a horrible, degrading act, particularly degrading for the woman."²

She later adjusted, but had trouble finding a balance when she arrived in Shanghai:

"Smedley, still sexually defiant after her experiences in Berlin, told Binder that she intended to 'take sex like a man.' For several weeks she seemed to bring home 'anything in pants she found around town.' Binder remembers that one night a young Marine suddenly bolted from the house, frightened by Smedley's aggressive advances. As in New York in 1919-20, however, Smedley soon became satiated and disgusted with herself, and by midsummer her liaisons became longer and more meaningful."³

"Buoyed by her celebrity status, Agnes entered into a period of sexual promiscuity about which she was not at all secretive. 'Out here,' she wrote Florence, 'I've had chances to sleep with all colours and shapes. One French gun-runner, short and round and bumpy; one fifty year old monarchist German who believes in the dominating role of the penis in influencing women; one high Chinese official whose actions I'm ashamed to describe, one round left-wing Kuomintang man who was soft and slobbery'".⁴

For a white woman to sleep with Chinese was very unusual at the time. But Smedley had previously had a Hindu lover: she was a pioneer of attitudes that had since become normal. (Or rather, attitudes that have overthrow the previous norm, thanks to hard struggle and some luck in the way World War Two turned out.)

Smedley rejected racism and saw everyone as a fellow-human. Most Westerners in Shanghai were happy to find themselves part of a privileged group and accepted the values of the this small but dominant intrusion into China. Smedley thought otherwise:

"By summer's end, Agnes wrote that she had observed rickshaw coolies fall dead in their shafts. She had seen poverty, disease, starvation, and physical and spiritual exhaustion of a depth she had previously thought unimaginable; she had learned of hundreds who were weekly being arrested, imprisoned, shot, and beheaded, their skulls paraded on poles in the street under the KMT's reign of anti-Communist terror. Agnes claimed she had now grown accustomed to reading of young Communist students and workers caught by foreign authorities in Shanghai and turned over to Chinese officials who killed them 'like dogs'. The dividing line between life and death was very thin in China, she remarked to Sanger, 'and you are always observing it'.

"Her initial shock was fading. She was beginning to come through it, she said, 'as one passes through a dark night of horror. Perhaps one loses much on the way and becomes hardened: I seem to have. But

¹ 102n, 140n, and 201-2 in the hardback edition

² MacKinnon, Janice R and MacKinnon, Stephen R. *Agnes Smedley: the life and times of an American radical*. University of California Press, 1988. Page 96

³ *Ibid.*, page 141

⁴ Price, Ruth. *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*. Oxford University Press 2005. Page 191

... I can look at all the beggars of China now and see beyond them to the think that has made them like this. As such, I will waste no time on them. So many must die out here, you have only to choose which. There is no choice between life and death; there is only the choice between death and death'. By accepting the possibility of death – her own or others – as the reality of life in China, she said, she hoped to accomplish a great deal more than she had in her first few months...

"She had already come to love China and the Chinese people, she wrote, and felt more at home here than she ever had elsewhere. And at some point in the not too distant future, she was certain another revolution was coming."⁵

Smedley came from a poor background, but her father had worked for the coal-mine owners and against the ordinary workers when her family moved to Colorado in 1901. Most of them were foreign-born, which made a difference. Smedley overcame this, but was evidently embarrassed by it:

"She recast her childhood years as the mythic tale of a coal miner's daughter who escaped direst poverty... her father had never been a miner but rather had been one of the detested deputy sheriffs who brutalized them."⁶

Smedley somehow became a radical. She qualified as a school teacher, and then worked as a traveling saleswoman before falling ill. Recovering, she got further education and made friends who introduced her to socialist ideas. She showed a talent for journalism, but very early became politicised. But she remained separate from the American Communist Party:

"When the revolutionary wing of the Socialist Party birthed America's first two Communist parties, Agnes sympathized 'as a matter of course' with their decision. Only a fool would do otherwise after living her life, she tartly observed. Still, she joined neither, preferring to sign on instead with what she called the 'American Bolsheviks' of the IWW. [Industrial Workers of the World, also known as the Wobblies.] Agnes never took much part in the by then moribund organisation, but her membership was a tacit acknowledgement of the western radical tradition out of which she had sprung, and which would always distinguish her from her more theoretical East Coast peers." (Ibid., page 81.)

Smedley did become deeply involved in a little-known event plot by Hindus in the USA:

"The Hindu–German Conspiracy was a series of

plans between 1914 and 1917 by Indian nationalist groups to attempt Pan-Indian rebellion against the British Raj during World War I, formulated between the Indian revolutionary underground and exiled or self-exiled nationalists who formed, in the United States, the Ghadar Party, and in Germany, the Indian independence committee, in the decade preceding the Great War. The conspiracy was drawn up at the beginning of the war, with extensive support from the German Foreign Office, the German consulate in San Francisco, as well as some support from Ottoman Turkey and the Irish republican movement. The most prominent plan attempted to foment unrest and trigger a Pan-Indian mutiny in the British Indian Army from Punjab to Singapore. This plot was planned to be executed in February 1915 with the aim of overthrowing British rule over the Indian subcontinent. The February mutiny was ultimately thwarted when British intelligence infiltrated the Ghadarite movement and arrested key figures. Mutinies in smaller units and garrisons within India were also crushed."⁷

"In March 1918, Smedley was finally arrested by the U.S. Naval Intelligence Bureau. She was indicted for violations of the Espionage Act, first in New York and later in San Francisco, and imprisoned for two months, when she was released on bail through the efforts of friends such as Rodman. Smedley spent the next year and a half fighting the indictments; the New York indictment was dismissed in late 1918, and the government dropped the San Francisco charges in November 1919. Smedley continued working for the next year on behalf of the Indians who had been indicted in the Hindu–German Conspiracy Trial. She then moved to Germany, where she met an Indian communist, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, whom she lived with for the next several years in Germany, involved with various left-wing causes."⁸

Smedley definitely lied about the extent of her involvement, when faced with the prospect of a long jail sentence. But this is one of only two cases I know of in which she told less than the truth as she knew it. (The other was concealing her father's shameful role working for coalmine-owners against the mostly foreign-born miners.)

In Germany, she managed to make an interesting narrative out of her growing-up and development back in the USA:

"In 1928, she finished her autobiographical novel *Daughter of Earth*. She then left Chattopadhyaya and moved to Shanghai, initially as a correspondent for a liberal German newspaper. *Daughter of Earth* was

⁵ Ibid., page 192

⁶ Ibid., page 54.

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu%E2%80%93German_Conspiracy as at 8th July 2016.

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agnes_Smedley as at 8th July 2016.

published in 1929 to general acclaim." (ibid.)

China, having become totally disordered after the Republican revolution of 1911-12, had suddenly emerged as a new hope for global anti-Imperialism:

"The launching of the Northern Expedition in 1926 had inaugurated an extraordinary phase of the Chinese Revolution... Millions of discontented peasants, incited by Communist political agents inside the KMT, hailed the soldiers as liberators and heroes... By the last quarter of 1926, to the astonishment of Chinese and foreign observers, the troops had taken half China."⁹

Smedley kept an enthusiasm for China despite the rapid reversal that happened there: Chiang Kai-shek's rejection of radicalism and massacre of his Communists allies:

"She still shared the revolutionary syndicalists' commitment to economic action and remained 'non-political in so far as the Communist Party is concerned and could never join it' she wrote, but her exhilaration over China's revolution and her confidence that it would extend to India gave her fresh appreciation of the Russian leaders seeming willingness to defend Asia against the long arm of British imperialism. Convinced that such actions exemplified the Comintern's international vision and its commitment to world revolution, Agnes entered the organisation's Chinese work at this time on the basis of Chatto's recommendation..."

"She began simply enough as an advocacy journalist / propagandist for the Chinese Information Bureau, a Comintern front organisation based in London, which established a Berlin branch around this time." (Ibid., page 156)

'Chatto' was Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, a veteran Indian Communist who was executed in Moscow in 1937 during the Great Purge. He had lived with Smedley for several years, but they had broken up.

In Germany, Smedley was part of the non-Communist Far Left. In China, this was not a serious option. Even moderate socialists and non-socialists genuine about anti-Imperialists were liable to be either arrested or else murdered by 'unknown persons' who were obviously gangsters hired by Chiang Kai-shek's ruling branch of the once-radical Kuomintang. I explained in an earlier issue of this magazine¹⁰ how Chiang had lacked the courage to take on global imperialism. He wanted to be China's Ataturk: but he was not prepared to defy enormously powerful foes in

the way Ataturk had been. Chiang was often very brave when it came to personal danger: in politics and as a leader he was a coward. He let Japan take huge chunks of China before he'd fight. He'd trained for the military but never served and had instead got involved in Shanghai gangsterism. His outlook must have been formed by his gangster associates – extremely brave at a personal level, but likely to cringe in the face of anyone who had more guns than they did. Likely to make squalid deals to ensure their personal survival.

With Chiang in charge of the nearest approximation to a government that China then had, there was little room for a middle ground. I have previously explained how the Comintern's intervention in China raised the Kuomintang from a marginal and ineffective party to being something like a national government.¹¹ And how the Kuomintang alliance also raised Chinese Communism from its origins as one of many Westernising notions among Chinese intellectuals. How its role in what Chinese call the Great Revolution made it the main challenger for Chiang's dominant branch of the Kuomintang. Groups that had once counted for much more than the Communists were never again able to aspire to be more than a Third Force. They remained marginal.

People call the Comintern intervention a failure, because it ended with Chiang breaking with the Soviet Union and the deaths of many Chinese Communists. This view is best expressed by Trotskyism, and does not deserve the influence it has. Trotskyism is notable for talking violent revolution but never ever achieving anything of substance.¹²

Versions of Leninism that make compromises with awkward realities are nowadays denounced as Stalinism. But if 'Stalinism' wasn't a great boost to global leftism, then Lenin's 1917 revolution was indeed the act of criminal folly that it was denounced as by Kautsky as the upholder of Orthodox Marxism. Because only those who accepted Stalin as Lenin's legitimate heir have achieved anything solid.

Effective left-wing politics has always depended on treating Lenin and Stalin as part of a single entity, which you could reject completely, pledge loyalty to as a Communist or could work with conditionally as the best

⁹ *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, page 152.

¹⁰ Problems 22: *China's Blue Republic (1912-49)*

¹¹ Problems 23: *China: Nurturing Red Stars*

¹² See <https://gwydionwilliams.com/history-and-philosophy/why-trotsky-politics-achieved-nothing-solid/>

hope for the left in a darkening world. This last was Smedley's choice, and I'm certain she was correct.

In 1928, China was still very fluid. One constant was that Chiang had not challenged the foreign-owned enclaves that dominated many large Chinese cities, including Shanghai. Still respected the privileged status of selected foreign nationals.

Germans and Austrians had lost this Extraterritorial status as part of their punishment after World War One. Soviet Russians had not inherited the rights of Tsarist Russia. Czechs, Poles etc. from newly created sovereign states were never given such rights.¹³ So the Comintern had a preference for sending agents who had a citizenship that would make them almost untouchable under Chinese law, and unlikely to be murdered by Chinese gangsters. US citizenship was one such. Smedley had left the USA without a passport, but she was able to secure recognition as the US citizen she actually was:

"The [Comintern] OMS needed an American citizen like herself who, protected by the extraterritorial privileges of a U.S. passport, could help the Comintern establish new lines and methods and explore 'conditions on such territories where Russian agents would be in danger'. Other requests would follow.

"The question of whether such activities constituted espionage probably never arose. Certainly Agnes would be a spy in the sense that, in China, she would be keeping clandestine watch on various people and situations in order to obtain information...

"Since Agnes would have more credibility as an independent, no one asked her to join a Communist party, in Germany or the United States, and there was no belonging to the Comintern, as it was not a membership organization."¹⁴

Since the Chinese Communists were an underground from 1927 until the Second United Front in 1937, she had to be clandestine. But her articles made it clear which side she was on. And Smedley could write skilfully in ordinary English without the jargon that most Marxists used.

I suspect that the Comintern always intended that her main role would be as a propagandist. She managed it outstandingly.

Comintern Free-Lancer

"Those who knew Smedley best accepted her self-assessment: she was a freelance revolutionary operating on a global scale. She shared the anti-imperialist goals of the Comintern and consciously cultivated friendship with leftists like the Eislers and Ewerts, whom she undoubtedly knew were Comintern representatives, but a Comintern or Communist Party member she was not."¹⁵

Unlike most political parties, joining any of the national Communist Parties of the global Communist Movement was more equivalent to joining a military force or a religious order. Members were supposed to be deeply committed and also obedient. If you disagreed with the current official line, you were expected to keep quiet until it once again became a matter for legitimate debate. Mao did this when the Shanghai leadership moved in on his Jiangxi Soviet and followed policies that led to defeat. Because he'd played by the rules, he was able to make a dramatic come-back at the Zunyi Conference and eventually become undisputed leader. Leader of a political machine that had the toughness and discipline to transform a society mired in corruption, ignorance and despair. When he broke the rules of Leninism with the Cultural Revolution, the results were negative for everyone.

Back in the 1920s, committed Communists must have known that Smedley would not play by those rules. It would have made no sense to let her be a member of an organisation that depended on strict discipline for its success.

Communist Parties also normally had a range of associated organisations that sympathisers could join, if they wanted to join anything. Or they might cooperate as individuals, in as far as they shared Communist aims. That's how Smedley found a place:

"According to everything known about the workings of the Comintern, Smedley could not have been a member unless she had also been a member of a national Communist Party or at least acceptable for membership. And no evidence of such a relationship to the American, German, or Indian Communist Party has ever been found. Even British intelligence would often categorize her as an anarchist-syndicalist and not a Communist."¹⁶

If she was an anarchist-syndicalist, she also accepted global Communism as the best immediate prospect. Unlike Emma Goldman (whom she knew), Smedley made the practical

¹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extraterritoriality#China> as at 08/07/16.

¹⁴ *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, pages 160-1

¹⁵ *Agnes Smedley: the life and times of an American radical*, page 142

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, page 143 (extended note to page 142)

judgement that only the Communists could achieve anything useful, at least in China. This made her valuable to the Comintern and to the left in general – and useful also today if her books about China were put back into general circulation. Whereas Goldman ended up useful for nothing, or perhaps marginally useful to the right.

"Smedley's break with another old friend, Emma Goldman, was more dramatic and emotional. The issue was Goldman's persistent and sweeping denunciations of Moscow and all Communist movements. In her last note to Goldman – the woman who had once been her model, and from whom she had learned so much about politics and love – Smedley argued that in China the Communists were worth supporting because they were 'the only ones who offer any hope for the peasants'. She said she did not want to see Goldman again, because 'I do not want to think of you with bitterness.'"¹⁷

Working With Sorge

Richard Sorge was born in 1895 in the Tsarist Empire, in Baku, which is now the capital of Azerbaijan. His father was a German mining engineer employed by the Caucasian Oil Company: his mother was Russian. His father returned to Germany before World War One, which meant that young Richard Sorge joined the German army for the World War. And gained moderate distinction, being wounded and getting the Iron Cross.

Getting a medical discharge, he began studying and was converted to Communism. His family already had a Communist connection: his great-uncle Friedrich Sorge had been a noted Communist who had emigrated to the USA and had corresponded with Karl Marx.¹⁸ Since he died in 1906, the two of them almost certainly never met.

Sorge was briefly active in German communism, then in 1924 moved to Moscow. He joined the International Liaison Department of the Comintern.¹⁹ But in 1929 he transferred to Red Army Military Intelligence – presumably this was possibly because he was born in the Russian Empire and had a Russian mother. He was sent to the United Kingdom where he worked undercover. He was then sent to Germany and instructed to join the Nazi party and to pose as a right-wing German, though not a great enthusiast for Nazism. In this guise he was then sent to Shanghai, working

as a journalist with an interest in agricultural matters.

In Shanghai he had two identities. Among Germans he was known under his real name: a man with a good war record and apparently a right-winger with no strong ideology. In this guise he was able to get secret information from the German officers who helped and in fact largely organised the Kuomintang's drive to destroy the Chinese Communist Party's Red Areas in South China. Separately he posed as a US journalist called Johnson and made some selected contacts among left-wingers who could collect information of interest to Russian Military Intelligence.

"When Sorge arrived in Shanghai, he immediately sought out Smedley. Sharing literary and intellectual interests, he and his wife had been friendly in the late 1920s with the Eislers... (But Smedley had not met Sorge in Germany or the Soviet Union, as some have claimed.) Except for Smedley and one or two others, Sorge avoided contact with the Shanghai radical community. As 'Johnson' he was gathering military intelligence and cultivating German officers like Colonel Hermann von Kriebel, who was advising Chiang Kai-shek's armies, by exchanging information. According to Chen Hansheng, Sorge and Smedley became romantically involved soon after they met in 1930, and they spent the late spring and summer together in south China around Guangzhou."²⁰

This is slightly muddled. It was as Richard Sorge, ex-soldier and recipient of the Iron Cross, that he was collecting military intelligence from German officers who thought he was on their side. As Johnson, he was collecting useful but probably non-secret data that Russia wanted to know. His most valuable contact, Hotsumi Ozaki, knew him only as Johnson until after they were both in Japan. There, Ozaki was 'introduced' to Sorge under his real name by someone who had no idea they were a pair of spies in a single secretive spy-ring.

The Smedley biography says that "she knew about his life in German and his war experiences",²¹ but I wonder how much she actually knew. Though she'd obviously have approved of his spying on pro-Kuomintang German officers, a professional spy ought not to have let her know about it. Her main role was to make contacts for him in his role as Johnson. She'd probably not have been fooled by his guise as a US citizen, and his

¹⁷ Ibid., page 146.

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Sorge as at 9th July 2016

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Sorge as at 9th July 2016

²⁰ Agnes Smedley: *the life and times of an American radical*, p147

²¹ Ibid., page 147

status must have been vouched for by the Eislers.²² They knew Sorge's real identity and at least some of his work, but did they pass this on to Smedley? This question seems not to have been asked by biographers of either Sorge or Smedley. He could perfectly well have given a false German name while giving accurate details of his war record. So it's far from certain how much Smedley was ever involved in the strictly espionage side of Sorge's work in Shanghai.

The point is important, because the Sorge connection was later used to smear Smedley as a spy. I'd assume she'd not have been against spying as such, working in a world where secrecy was a necessity for survival. But *approval* is very different from *involvement* and I doubt she was involved.

Sorge's work as a spy among German officers helping the Kuomintang gets mentioned in his biographies but is largely overlooked in histories of China. It is of course hard to assess how much it mattered. But Sorge arrived in Shanghai in January 1930 and was recalled to Moscow in December 1932: he was there for the first three Encirclement Campaigns, which failed. No longer there for the Fourth Encirclement, which did damage to the Red Areas. Nor for the Fifth, which destroyed the Red Areas in South China and led to the Long March.

Someone wanting to make an intelligent anti-Mao argument could credit Sorge's spying with the Red Army's early military success. Actually I don't believe this: I'd say it was Mao's removal from military authority that was the key, though there was also some improvement in methods. We know the Red Army achieved many remarkable successes later on, with Mao back in overall command. We also don't know how much Sorge passed on – though with luck there would be records somewhere in Moscow. Even the number of Encirclement Campaigns is disputed. Still, I thought the matter worth noting.

It is also puzzling that Russian Intelligence should have withdrawn Sorge when he had such a useful position. But it might be that they didn't much care what happened to China's Red Areas and preferred to send him to Japan, where he became much the most useful of their agents. (Assuming there were not others still undetected.)

Regardless, Sorge left Shanghai, returned to Moscow and was later sent to Japan in the

guise of a reporter loyal to the Nazi regime. That's another story, not much connected with Smedley, but I will tell it in the next article.

Publicist For Chinese Communism

The Chinese Communist leadership must have valued Smedley as a Comintern-sent gift. A voice for them to speak to the outside world:

"The CCP wanted Agnes to write a book, to be published abroad, that would inform readers about the new soviet districts and describe Red Army resistance to Chiang's encirclement campaigns. Towards that end, the Party underground began sending Red Army men, fresh from battle in the central soviet area, to speak with Agnes, accompanied by CCP representatives armed with maps."

"By the spring of 1932, Agnes had nearly completed *Chinese Destinies: Sketches of Present-Day China*, her volume of fictionalised Chinese tales... The book described a world unknown to Western readers... her colorful mosaic of daily life, which illustrated more vividly than any Marxist tract the debasement and oppression of millions of ordinary Chinese in a rapidly changing country...

"Agnes's current project was the greater journalistic coup, however, for its publication would make her the first foreigner since the debacle in 1927 to report the inside scoop [sic] on the Chinese Communists. The story would benefit from a visit to the soviet areas, which would be a perilous feat, but by April she was already speaking of her desire to make the journey."²³

She was always brave and would have willingly accepted risks to visit the Red Areas. But neither she nor any other Western reporter was able to do so. But note that at that time, the Communist Party Central Committee was still based in Shanghai and still very Moscow-orientated. The Red Areas were their best asset, but they were also suspicious of people who succeeded by methods that didn't match what Moscow had taught them. Quite possibly the Central Committee didn't want these irregular Communists getting to speak directly to the outside world.

While Smedley was working as the ally of Chinese Communism, there were strong factional disputes that she seems to have known nothing of. The hand of the Central Committee was stretching towards the Jiangxi Red Area that Mao had been dominating politically. And within the Central Committee, there was a struggle between the followers of Li Lisan and the faction known (probably

²² Gerhard and Elli Eisler, Comintern representatives in Shanghai.

²³ *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, page 225

inaccurately) as the 28 Bolsheviks. The latter won control, and moved to the Jiangxi Red Area when their underground existence in Shanghai became unsafe. They managed to greatly reduce Mao's power, though I'd suppose that they were happy for him to continue in a reduced role. (They in turn sometimes got the same treatment when the wheel turned and Mao became leader of the whole movement.)

Mao in 1937 was to gain enormous publicity and prestige by being able to speak to China and the world via Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*. And Snow was able to get through to a Red Area much more remote than Jiangxi. True, at that time the armies supposed to be blockading the Red Area were in secret alliance and preparing for the Xian Incident. But the Red Areas in the south were also much less remote. It may matter more that by the time Edgar Snow was due to visit, the Communist underground was wholly under the control of Liu Shaoqi, at that time and for many years afterwards the close ally of Mao. So I suspect that in the early 1930s, what Smedley got to hear about and who she met was under the control of a Central Committee suspicious of Mao.

"Agnes spent the summer of 1932 in Kuling, a partisan area just outside the central soviet district in Kiangsi [Jiangxi] province, where the CPC central committee had arranged bungalow for her...

"Agnes conducted interviews on the Chinese soviets and their defender, the Chinese Red Army."²⁴

The Smedley biographer sees nothing odd in her getting so close but not getting through. I suspect she fails to appreciate how much jealousy and how much genuine concern over strategy there would have been within a Communist Party that had become the main opponent of the weak Kuomintang government. Instead she says a lot about the small domestic disputes between Smedley and her friends: Smedley was bad at keeping friends. Her style did tend to antagonised:

"Her detractors on the left would maintain that her flamboyant style attracted undue notice and accuse her of indiscretion. The most revealing comment Agnes herself made about her illicit activities at the time was the throwaway remark to Florence. 'I may not be innocent,' she wrote, 'but I'm right.'"²⁵

Which remains true. But now that we have many other accounts of the rise of Mao and

Chinese Communism, her works have been hushed into oblivion. She deserves better.

But what did she actually say?

After the disaster of 1927, when a majority of the Chinese Communists were massacred by Chiang's branch of the Kuomintang, their work took two forms. Part of it was an extensive Communist underground in the cities, most notably Shanghai, where the Central Committee was based. But in backward rural China, Red Areas were established, with the largest and most notable being that led by Mao and Zhu De.

Smedley was an early reporter of this new form of warfare. As far as I can tell, she was the first outsider to see its importance.

One of her biographers says:

"The Nationalist government viewed the Red Army and its followers as criminals; even the CCP central committee was dubious. But for Agnes their stories, like the outlaw myths of Jesse James on which she had fed as a youth, suggested they were good badmen – men motivated by idealism rather than selfishness, men who preferred to die on their feet than live on their knees. From her perspective, these Chinese Robin Hoods broke the law in service to a higher cause." (*The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, p189)

I can't entirely agree: the Red Areas were highly organised and there was nothing bandit-like about them. The Communist Party leadership was still thinking in terms of cities, but the Red Army led by Mao and Zhu De had direct continuity with the units of the Kuomintang army that had triumphed in the Northern Expedition. Units that rebelled in the final stages of the collapse of the Communist / Kuomintang alliance. But myths of heroic outlaws – found in many places besides the USA – may have fed into their growing reputation.

Smedley may have been influenced by stories of heroic bandits, but she also recognised a new social reality way ahead of any other Westerner. Sadly, she had only indirect contact. As I said, probably the then-leaders of Chinese Communism didn't want Mao in particular to get an independent voice to the outside world. In a previous article, I detailed how it may have been planned and intended as the role of Edgar Snow, at a time when Mao was effectively party leader.²⁶

Despite not being able to be an eye witness, Smedley gave much the best accounts that were publicly available at the

²⁴ Ibid, page 227

²⁵ Ibid., pages 226-7

²⁶ Problems 23: *China: Nurturing Red Stars*

time. I found her descriptions vivid and believable. Other accounts if you can find them are much less well-informed and sometimes report gross falsehoods, sincerely or otherwise. It would indeed be worthwhile for the Chinese to trawl through various respectable Western sources to illustrate how much rubbish has been talked about their past by Western sources. Their sympathisers may have been wrong on some matters, but hostile or neutral commentators were mostly far less accurate.

Smedley, who had to depend on what she was told by Chinese Communists in Shanghai, managed to give a clear and largely accurate account of the Chinese Communist red bases and armies in South China, the places they held before the Long March. In *China's Red Army Marches*, she tells of how some of the peasants are confused and think of them as Red Bandits, which is what the Kuomintang repeatedly claimed they were.²⁷ And it seems others had an exaggerated notions of their power, based on Chinese traditions about virtuous rebels:

"Chu Teh [Zhu De] can do more, it is said. He can summon the wind and command the storm! He takes the stride of ten men and can lift a horse with one hand. I have heard he can see before and behind him at the same time without turning his head." (*China's Red Army Marches*, page 35.)²⁸

Zhu De was the main military leader in the Jiangxi Soviet, the biggest of the Red Areas. He had earlier joined forces with Mao in the Jinggang Mountains. Having arrived with the bigger army, he became Commander and Mao his Political Commissar. Though most experts later attributed the big military successes to Mao, Zhu De was viewed as more important at the time.

Probably the Shanghai Communists were biased against Mao, who had been a significant youth leader in his native Hunan before helping create a small but high-quality Communist grouping in Hunan and attending the First Congress in Shanghai in 1921 as one of two delegates from Hunan. (Not necessarily a Congress of 12 men,²⁹ but between them representing some 50 to 60 members.) Mao was a significant alternative to the Shanghai-based and mostly Moscow-

trained leadership of Chinese Communism.

Smedley accepted Zhu as the Main Man, which perhaps he was at the time. Regardless, she publicised the movement:

"By the fall of 1930, Agnes's reportage on China's peasant Red Armies had begun appearing in the United State in the *New Masses* and *New Republic*, as well the [sic] in the *Moscow News*, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and the *Modern Review*. Her good fortune attracted the attention of the Shanghai authorities, but her position as the only foreign journalist with direct access to the Chinese Communist sources appeared to be paying off."³⁰

Smedley was based in the French Concession in Shanghai. That she remained there shows the lack of modern thinking by Kuomintang. Though there were attempts to expel her, they were feeble. A sovereign government in those days had an unlimited right under International Law to expel any foreign citizen without the need for proof or even specific accusations. In Smedley's case, she had openly expressed her support for an armed rebellion against the Kuomintang, recognised by France as the lawful government of China. She was obviously in contact with the underground Communist movement. The French could have declared her *persona non grata*, a 'person of no status', also known as 'undesirable alien'. But this didn't happen.

China's Red Army Marches tells the story only up until 1931, when Mao was elected Chairman of the Chinese Soviet Republic, which theoretically united all of the Red Areas. Mao actually had few links with the other bases, and the real power remained with the Politburo in Shanghai, who later moved in and largely removed Mao's authority in the Jiangxi Soviet. And then got blockaded and had to flee in the Long March, during which Mao staged a come-back in October 1934 at the Zunyi Conference. Zunyi was a rather irregular gathering – the sort of thing that happens when sheer survival is the issue. It made the right choices, giving back military leadership to Mao, subject to oversight. He wasn't technically Party Leader until 1943, and it's tricky to say at just what point he became functionally the top man. Even the significance of the Zunyi Conference was little-known outside of the party leadership. It was not officially acknowledged until the 1950s.³¹

I mentioned earlier how Zhu De (Chu Teh)

²⁷ *Problems 23* has more on this, quoting what Edgar Snow reported later in *Red Star Over China*.

²⁸ Smedley, Agnes. *China's Red Army Marches*. International Publishers, New York, 1934.

²⁹ See *Problems 23*, page 29 for the complexities

³⁰ *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, page 211

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zunyi_Conference

was reported by Smedley as being seen in the mould of traditional Chinese outlaw-heroes, a man who could summon the wind, command the storm and lift a horse with one hand. Maybe those who briefed her exaggerated peasant foolishness. Yet she shows it as not applying to everyone:

"The young peasant protested: 'That I do not believe!... Chu Teh cannot see before and behind at the same time, but he has glasses hanging about his neck and when he looks through them he can see the enemy from a hundred *li* [about 50 kilometres³²]... Now, tell me why should he lift a horse with one hand? Of what value is that? He cannot take the stride of ten men, but he had the bravery and endurance of a thousand Generals. So has Mau Tse-tung [sic]³³. I have heard that Mau Tse-tung can defeat the gentry in writing verses and compositions – yet he fights for us peasants. He is a Changsha man and once became a ricksha coolie [sic] to organize the ricksha coolies of Changsha. Mau Tse-tung and Chu Teh both travelled and studied in foreign lands and they speak two different foreign languages. They are big men and intellectuals, yet they fight for the poor.'" (Ibid., p35.)

A rickshaw is a human-pulled cart used by the rich and pulled by the poor. The romantic story about Mao working as such is total nonsense. Or possibly a malicious story by someone who hadn't shaken off the snobbery of Chinese intellectuals. Mao was born in a village and had to fight hard against his father to escape peasant life and get an education. Once educated, his only regular jobs were first as an Assistant Librarian in Beijing and then as a teacher at a Primary School in Changsha, capital of Hunan. It was also there that he formed his first Communist Party group, under the inspiration of the party's two founders.

Mao also never left China until much later, when he made two trips to the Soviet Union. He never mastered any foreign language. But he was a superior essayists, and his poetry is rated as good enough for him to have been noted for it even if he had done nothing else. He was indeed an intellectual and a big man by Chinese standards, 1.8 metres or 5ft 11

inches tall.³⁴

Smedley is also wrong about Zhu De: he was unusually tough but of average size. Zhu was a former warlord who had travelled to Europe and converted to Communism. He was no intellectual, but evidently decided to trust Mao on political matters. There may have been one breakdown in this relationship during the Long March: the official story is that Zhu was abducted by Zhang Guotao but it's been suggested he agreed with the attempt to form a new Communist base in Zhu's home province of Sichuan, which failed disastrously. What's certain is that Zhu and Zhang joined Mao's new base with a much reduced army. Zhang later defected, hailed Chiang Kai-shek as China's best leader and later ended up in exile in Canada. Zhu by contrast accepted Mao's leadership until his death a few months before Mao, which may well have been a stabilising factor in his rule. He was accepted as Senior by the important military leaders.

She's also mistaken on one other matter. On page 203 she reports an incident that is also in Snow's *Red Star Over China*, in which Zhu saves his life when briefly captured by Kuomintang soldiers by saying was a cook. As she tells it, he was associated with cooking just because of this incident. But in fact Zhu had somehow learned to cook, and was good at it. In command of the Red Army, he would still occasionally cook a special meal as a treat for his generals before an important battle. She's got a garbled story – or perhaps a story adjusted by someone who thought that such lowly work was improper for a leader.

Whatever she got wrong, Smedley seems to have understood the spirit of the movement better than any other Western writer, including Edgar Snow. Snow is always a sympathetic outsider. Smedley tends to 'lose her boundaries' and become virtually part of the movement. This she gives a dramatic and romantic description of the union of the armies of Zhu and Mao:

"Then, into this bandit territory around Chingkangshan, the Red Army marched in the second week of April, 1928. It was growing dusk when it rounded a mountain spur and came within view of the great mountain. Chu Teh halted and focussed his field glasses on a dark place which a scout pointed out to him. The blurred images across the lenses of his glasses cleared and became men in uniform. Some lay stretched on the earth, others sat about. There were stacked guns with a dark banner

³² A 'li' is a Chinese unit of measurement that was always a bit vague, sometimes counting effort to make the journey rather than abstract distance. 'Mountain Li' were therefore shorted. The CPC standardised it at 500 metres: it had previously varied from as little as 323 metres to as much as 645.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_%28unit%29

³³ Mao's name was Mao Tse-tung in the Wade-Giles system and is Mao Zedong in the new standard system. Smedley consistently says Mau in her early books: I have no idea why.

³⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mausoleum_of_Mao_Zedong

at rest.

"There, camped at the base of Ching kangshan, before one of its five passes, was the armed force that called itself the "First Division of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Army." It had come down from the north. Its commander was Mau Tse-tung. Its banner was red with a white star crossed by a black hammer and sickle.

"The Red Army led by Chu Teh marched forward eagerly. Mau Tse-tung came out to meet them.

"In late July of the year before Mau Tse-tung had led a model Hankow garrison regiment in revolt and marched southward along the northern borders of Hunan and Kiangsi [Jiangxi] Provinces. There they united with Peasant Partisans, railway workers and miners who were fighting the landlords' and militarists' armies with spears, picks, crow-bars, and with stones ripped from the earth. Many of the miners were deaf from explosions in the mines. Mau's armed troops remained with the Partisans, a small beleaguered army fighting for the Revolution.

"Nearly a thousand of Mau's forces had fallen in this Partisan warfare. The militarist troops reconquered many villages and towns and the Partisans retreated.

"Bloody, scarred, covered with lice, their hair grown long and matted, helping, along their sick and wounded, Mau's Partisan force had marched and fought in their bare feet over the valleys and hills of northern Hunan and Kiangsi.

"They met the Red Army of Chu Teh at the base of Ching kangshan. The miners of Chu Teh's troops, the peasants, the White soldiers who had deserted to the Red Army, strained to get a look at Mau Tse-tung, the Communist intellectual and peasant leader called by the Kuomintang and the imperialists 'bandit, robber and thief.' They saw a tall, haggard man with thin shoulders and bloodshot, hollow eyes, with a stern mouth and broad forehead. A man with bare, swollen feet, in a gray tattered uniform, his hair grown long and matted. This was a Red Army leader, the man known in China for his powerful speech and writing, the man who had studied in foreign lands and who had become a Communist, offering his life at the altar of the Revolution. This was the man who was later to become the first chairman of the Chinese Soviet Government.

"Then the men saw the bandit chieftains of Ching kangshan, Wang and Yuan, standing apart from them all with a small body of armed men. Wang the elder with a hard, ruthless face, and Yuan the younger, squat, rugged, cunning.

"Wang and Yuan looked over this body of seven thousand Red fighters whom they dreamed to claim one day their own." (Ibid., pages 68-9).

Wang and Yuan were bandits with some

revolutionary connections, who were later executed as traitors. Smedley has more to say of them elsewhere. Oddly, though the two bandits are often mentioned in biographies of Mao, what Smedley says about them gets totally ignored. Likewise with the 'AB Incident', which I discuss in detail alter on.

Perhaps also Western experts prefer not to mention that the Red Army had an entirely plausible explanation for its various ruthless action. According to Smedley, Wang and Yuan's men would loot from ordinary people, and Mao had to stamp this out. In a chapter called *Ballad Of The Seven Bridges*, she describes how some Red Army soldiers of bandit origin had looted. How the looters had been arrested by other Red Army men:

"The General Staff and Political leaders of the Army and the Committee of Welcome of Yungsin looked over the prisoners. The Red Army knew well who they were. They were the former bandit soldiers of the brigands Wang and Yuan. They had marched in the rear, and in the darkness had begun looting the city. Even their company commanders had been taken prisoner and disarmed.

"The Red Army knew that this night would mean the loss or the support of the people of Yungsin. They decided that the sun should not arise on this unsettled question. So they announced that the prisoners who had been caught looting the homes of the people would at once be put on trial, and the people of Yungsin should be judge and jury.

"Mau Tse-tung spoke: 'One of the major rules of the Red Army is this: No looting! This rule was adopted on Ching kangshan and every man raised his hand. The penalty for the violation of this rule was accepted as death.'

"Turning to the prisoners, he ordered:

"'Line up . . . bring forward all you have stolen!'

"The one-time bandit, Wang, stood with the Red Army commanders. His eyes were narrowed and frowning, but whether from anger or terror no one could tell.

"The prisoners marched by the temple steps, laying money and goods upon the earth. Some moved by, saying they had nothing.

"Chu Teh called out a special company of Red Army men. To them he gave the order:

"'Search all the prisoners! Search their commanders!'

"The troops searched the prisoners, then lay bank notes, silver rings, hair ornaments, before the Red Army command. From the company commanders they took money and gold "rings.

"The search finished, Mau Tse-tung spoke to the

prisoners: 'If you wish to explain why you have done this, you may come forward.'

"There was silence. Then slowly a soldier came forward and began speaking to Mau directly. But Mau said:

"Explain to the people! It is they who are your judges What they decide we will carry out!"

"The prisoner turned to the assembled thousands and began shouting in a high voice. What harm had he done if he had returned what he had taken? Why should he be shot if they got back what he had taken? He knew the rules of the Red Army but he had not thought much about them. When the Army passed them he had not voted. He thought poor soldiers took what they wanted after victory. How else should their families live?"

"A young prisoner came forward, lifted his chin and yelled:

"What shall a man do if his own commander leads in the looting? I didn't think of looting until I saw our commanders and I would have stopped if they had ordered me to!"

"Washrag!" yelled a furious voice.

"Another prisoner followed, saying that in the past he had always followed Wang and Yuan, and they had always looted. It was in his blood, he supposed, and there was no help for it!

"Then came a very tall, thin man:

"We have done wrong and we deserve to be punished,' he said. 'Shoot us for we have done wrong! Our commanders led us, but we followed like sheep.'" (Ibid., pages 95-6)

The five Company Commanders who allowed the looting were shot, along with one man who committed rape. (Ibid., p98.) That's how real revolutionary warfare works.

She also has a lot to say about the lies told at the time by the Kuomintang – a topic on which Western experts have mostly maintained a deafening silence. Chang and Halliday are an example: their supposedly massive research could have hardly missed the rival claims. When claims by the left may be mistaken, you hear all about it. But not the other side, which creates a very false impression. For instance:

"After the militarists occupied Namyung again, many White soldiers and a number of petty officers were arrested and shot, accused of helping the Red troops. Workers and intellectuals were beheaded in the streets as suspicious characters, and peasants avoided the city as if it were stricken with the plague. Even in Canton to the far south the police began raiding labor unions and clubs of university students, leading away men and women, boys and girls who

were never heard of again.

"The younger generation is poisoned through and through with Communism!' Kuomintang politicians bitterly complained.

"To the foreign consuls, the militarists sent secretaries clad in foreign suits and speaking English with an American accent. The foreign officials did not care how often the secretaries explained that the Reds had been so badly defeated-that there remained of them only 'fleeing remnants who are being surrounded and annihilated.'

"And despite these Kuomintang assurances, the foreign press and foreign correspondents kept writing that 'Red bandits' were slaughtering workers and peasants, and that the dead bodies of Soviet Russian military officers had been found after a battle with the Reds. Where, asked the foreign and Kuomintang press, did the Reds get their guns and bullets if not from Soviet Russia? Where did they get the brains to fight if not directed by some white man? In leading articles they wrote about the 'Red Scourge in Asia,' and said the only cure for it would be to wipe out Soviet Russia.

"Such were some of the shadows which were cast over China and over the whole world when the Chinese workers and peasants fought. Shadows-for whom? Light-for whom?" (Ibid., p122.)

Otto Braun (Li De) was the only known foreigner fighting with the Jiangxi Red Area. He arrived there from Shanghai with the party leaders, well after the events Smedley tells about. The weakness of Chiang Kai-shek's corrupt branch of the Kuomintang is shown by their belief that a formidable enemy must have foreigners behind it. The Japanese had shown that East Asians could copy Western strengths (and also Western vices) But most Chinese in those days could not rid themselves of the idea of foreigners being much superior at waging war.

Smedley, incidentally, was probably unaware of Mao's downgrading by the Shanghai leadership and his subsequent restoration with increased power. She does mention the failed Li-Lisan line, already officially condemned, and mentions just why it was a failure (page 156). (This was discussed in detail in a previous issue: Problems 25: *China: Blue Ants and Dangerous Reds*.)

Chinese Family Values

Smedley also tells of wider events in early-1930s China in an earlier book called *China's Destinies*.³⁵ In some ways it's more useful,

³⁵ Smedley, Agnes. *Chinese Destinies: Sketches of Present-Day China*. Hurst & Blackett, London 1934

given that it covers many things that are now almost forgotten, whereas many other accounts of the Red Army in its early days are now available. It is well worth reading by anyone with any sort of interest in China's past, giving an excellent set of insights into Mainland China under Kuomintang rule.³⁶ A lot of it is very hard to summarise, particularly a chapter entitled *The Living Dead*, about three very different women who had been Communists before the crackdown of 1927. It also has a chapter called *Contrasts* that gives a fascinating account of female workers in the silk industry who were suspected of being lesbians. But the chapters on the Red Army includes some highly interesting insights – and one astonishing story about Mao that I'm very surprised has been overlooked by serious scholars. Like *China's Red Army Marches*, *China's Destinies* has been largely ignored.

To start with conventional matters; Smedley gives a typical instance of a revolt against traditional Chinese marriages. A father complains that his son will not marry the wife he has selected for him:

"I am trying to get my son married,' he began. 'He is twenty years old, but he refuses to marry. Look at him – I sent him to a city school for three years and he comes back with stylish ideas...

"He has become new style with his wish to read books. He says he doesn't *know* the girl! *Know her!* The very girl he must marry! I thought I would clout him again for disrespect, but it was no use. So I called all the old men from the village to give him good council. They came and gave him good advice. 'Marry,' they said; 'don't disobey your father. The girl's family is already angry and the girl is shamed. Her life is ruined if you don't marry her. And your father's name will be shamed.' But no. He just said to them, 'But what about *me*? Why should my father ruin *my* life?' Such a son I have, who has no respect even for the wisdom of men three times older than he is!" (*Chinese Destinies*, pages 10-11)

One point Smedley misses is that in Traditional China, almost alone among the world's many cultures, an agreement between the parents of the intended bride and groom was deemed to constitute a marriage. There would be a ceremony later, normally the first time the couple would see each other. But this was seen as just confirming a marriage that had already taken place. In most cultures, nothing is solid until the actual ceremony happens. Also some sort of consent is

necessary by the actual bride and groom, even if both of them and brides in particular were often bullied and coerced into such consent.

It's on the basis of this exceptional custom from Traditional China that Chang and Halliday, among others, claim that Mao had four marriages rather than three.³⁷ They don't dispute Mao's account that he never accepted this offered bride or lived with her, and there was certainly no ceremony. But here, as in so many other cases, they believe what suits them momentarily without trying to think matters through. And this bizarre notion infests lots of other books about China. It is even given official approval by the Wikipedia.³⁸

Had Mao become a Roman Catholic rather than a Communist, the Church would definitely have agreed that he was not married (or not until his actual first marriage to an educated leftist lady who was the daughter of one of his teachers). Catholicism is strict on such matters, but also insists that marriage requires both a proper ceremony and the consent of both parties. A marriage is also viewed as being freely nullifiable if sex does not follow. Some people have such a hatred of Mao that they lose touch with common sense.

Smedley had plenty of common sense. A lot of what she says is about the suffering of ordinary people, whom she accepted as fellow humans in defiance of the racism of her day:

"A high British official calls Shanghai a 'pearl of a city'. And the daily Press in Shanghai reports that thirty-six thousand dead bodies were picked up in the streets of this city in the year of our Lord, nineteen hundred and thirty, and thirty-two thousand in the year of grace nineteen hundred and thirty-one. The city maintains an ambulance that goes about the city just to pick up the dead. For Shanghai is a 'pearl of a city' and the dead can't be left lying about the streets like that." (*Chinese Destinies*, p27.)

She also finds unexpected beauty and hope. She describes one Chinese Communist woman as follows:

"There are those who will ask: 'Is Shan-fei young and beautiful?'

"Shan-fei is twenty-five years of age. Her skin is dark and her face broad; her cheek-bones are high. Her eyes are as black as midnight, but they glisten and seem to see through a darkness that is darker than the midnight in China. She is squarely built like a peasant and it seems that it would be very difficult

³⁶ It is available second-hand through Amazon Books, or in a modern edition grossly overpriced at £100.

³⁷ In *Mao: The Unknown Story*.

³⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mao_Zedong#Wives as at 02/02/16

to push her off the earth – so elemental is she, so firmly rooted to the earth. Beautiful? I do not know – is the earth beautiful?" (Ibid., page 44-5.)

On military matters, Smedley doesn't just talk about the Red Army. She tells of the impressive resistance by one of Kuomintang China's better armies. How it had some success against the Japanese in 1932 but was let down:

"In the hospitals of Shanghai, during the Japanese invasion in February and March 1932, I watched the ambulances bring in the wounded from the battlefield. Soldiers of the 19th Route Army that fought the Japanese invasion, they were poor men and boys, some of them no more than thirteen or fourteen years of age. Peasants, workers, coolies, from distant villages, they had joined the army to earn their daily bowl of rice and the few promised dollars that would mean so much to their poor families. Clad in faded, threadbare cotton uniforms, in old rag caps, grass sandals on their feet, and armed with nothing but rifles and hand-grenades, they had fought the gigantic machine of Japanese imperialism, a machine that made each Japanese the equal of a thousand Chinese. They had not been paid their wages for five months, yet when the invasion began they fought, never retreating an inch. Their heroism, their ability to fight, terrified the foreigners and astounded the Japanese...

"Chinese throughout the world cabled money to the army. But the money never reached the soldiers. It lodged in the pockets of the bankers and politicians through whose hands it went. Sitting behind the battle-line, in the safety of the foreign settlements, these long-gowned or foreign-clad 'patriots' claimed the heroism of these simple men as their own. And they paid themselves well for it." (Ibid., pages 88-9.)

This 19th Route Army were later the main force in the Fujian Rebellion, a small uprising against Chiang Kai-shek that was the high point of the weak Third Force between the Communists and Chiang. And have been largely ignored ever since, since they were demanding in the 1930s the things that the West conceded to Asia in the 1940s and 1950s. By then, Communism was a major force and the West knew it had to concede a lot to Asians or lose the Cold War. But before then, Asians demanding rights would be slapped down, or the job left to lackeys of the sort that Chiang Kai-shek had become.

I discuss later the possible connection between this 19th Route Army and the so-called A. B. Group who existed briefly on the fringes of the Mao-Zhu Red Area in South China. For now, note that for several key years the 19th Route Army had accepted

Chiang Kai-shek's leadership and helped with the attempts to suppress the Chinese Communists.

Smedley praised the 19th Route Army, but saw the Chinese Communists as the only effective anti-Imperialist force. She was also contemptuous of most foreigners in Shanghai, who hardly ever learned the language despite spending years in the country:

"Later I dined with three liberal newspaper men. They are friendly to China, but they also could not put me in touch with the Chinese I wished to meet. They could only sent out news – some good, it is true – which they gathered from the Chinese foreign Press and from a few Chinese officials...

"Out here you want your own kind. It is impossible to come close to the Chinese.'

"Why?'

"Well, the Chinese simply don't like foreigners'

"Why?'

"I pressed the point, and of that that 'why' developed an argument that led them to later remark to friends that I was new and raw to China and after a couple of years would come back to 'my own kind' – which meant a small colony made up chiefly of business men and Babbits in general, who in Europe and America would be small and mediocre shopkeepers, but in China they live like princes." (Ibid., p105.)

Mao – a Genuinely Unknown Story

The most remarkable thing I found in *Chinese Destinies* was her account of the fall of a walled city run by powerful landlords:

"To a million peasants of south Kiangsi [Jiangxi] the very name of Shangpo is a thing of evil... For within these city walls lived the great landlords, the eighteen powerful families who owned the hundreds of thousand of *mau* of land round the hundreds of decaying villages.

"In this town they lived, and the members of their families totally fully three thousand. They were the landlords, the bankers and moneylenders, the members of the Kuomintang and of the Chamber of Commerce; and their members were the officers of the *Min Tuan*, or militia, and the police." (Ibid., p265.)

This city is attacked and captured by the Red Army, supposedly with the help of a bomb-dropping aircraft captured from the White armies (Ibid., page 272). That's most improbable: they would have had no fuel, bombs or pilot and had no airforce until 1949. But the really odd thing is the account of what happened after the capture. The peasants demanded that all the landlords be killed:

"To the killing of the landlords the Red Army commanders agreed if the masses wanted it. But they made one request: they said that only the chief heads of the big families should be executed – that the women and children should be spared; nor should the sons be killed just because they were sons. All day long Red Army commanders talked like this. At first the peasants could not believe their own ears.

"'What is this' they exclaimed. 'It is the *family* that owns the land..."

"Some of the Red Army commanders went out and talked to the people. There came first the secretary of the Communist Party in the Army, the commander Mau Tse-tung. His name was a legend. But when he talked he also talked about Communism and what it will do to the social system. He talked for a long time. His ideas were good. But about the families he was all wrong! From the audience men accused him of trying to protect the landlords from the peasants. Nor could any of his replies silence them..."

"Then they complained against the Red Army commanders, until these commanders, hearing of the endless suffering of the peasants, stepped back and said: 'Why should we try to save the big families from them?'" (Ibid., pages 276-7.)

In Smedley's account, the Red Army gives up and lets the peasants kill all of the landlord families, including even babies (Ibid., p278-9). Should one believe this?

I mentioned earlier how her other book has a lot of inaccuracies about Mao. And it's interesting that she associates Mao with the incident but not Zhu De, who was then the Top Man in region. Still, I find it puzzled that this astonishing story about Mao has been so totally overlooked.

Chang and Halliday don't have it in *Mao, the Unknown Story*. They are not serious thinkers and their book is an enormous long anti-Mao rant. They take little notice of Smedley, and their supposedly comprehensive research skipped *Chinese Destinies*. It is not in their bibliography.

I've told elsewhere of the cowboy scholarship of 'Wild Swan' Chang and 'Doc' Halliday.³⁹ They often misquote sources on

³⁹ <http://gwydionwilliams.com/42-china/42-1-chinese-politics/a-review-of-mao-the-unknown-story/>. Also *Problems* 23 for their claim that the CPC's First Congress occurred in 1920 rather than 1921.

I'm making a joke based on two noted gunfighters of the USA's Wild West: lawman and gambler 'Wild Bill' Hickok and dentist and gambler Doc Holliday. 'Cowboy' is British slang for shoddy work. Jung Chang's birth-name was *er-hong*, which means 'second swan'. A family history called *Wild Swans* was her first major success. Halliday is an genuine academic: just not a good one.

matters where they can be checked. They also make themselves very hard to check, because in *Mao, the Unknown Story* they don't use the standard method of tying one particular source, and usually a specific page or pages of one source for any particular claim. Any claim might be based on something in any one of a number of sources, mostly large books. Checking is very hard.

The Shangpo story deserves to be looked into – but is very likely untrue. I went looking using Google and found that there were several places with that name, but not in Jiangxi. I then asked on the questions forum Quora, which confirmed that no such city could be found there. Several similar names do exist elsewhere:

"There is not a city called Shangpo in Jiangxi. Shangrao, however, is located in the northeastern part of this province..."

"Shangpu is a 'township' outside of Shanghai in Zhejiang. It's name mean's 'On the Pu (river),' the river that runs through Shanghai and gives its main districts of Pudong and Puxi it's name."⁴⁰

Given the nonsense about a Red Army warplane, my strong feeling is that the whole thing is a falsehood, probably fed to Smedley by people hostile to Mao. I doubt the actual leadership would have done something so damaging to the party as a whole: but within the tight discipline and intense belief of a Leninist organisation, internal rivalries can become bitter. When Smedley later met Mao, she got a sharp telling-off about her foolishness during the Xian Incident. She had the largeness of spirit to get over it and make friends: not many people are like that.

Regarding false reports, I'd also wonder if the report of Mao's death published in Moscow in 1930 were just an innocent error. This incident does get included in the standard story; or instance:

"Mao was intermittently reported as deathly ill or outcast by his comrades. Moscow, which supposedly directed the CCP, knew as little as everyone else. In March 1930, *Inprecorr*, the official Comintern organ, ran Mao's obituary, saying he had died of tuberculosis."⁴¹

Mao was reported as either incurably ill or dead by various sources that would mostly be reliable. It is true he was ill a lot of the time. But it could also be that people within the party

⁴⁰ <https://www.quora.com/China/Is-Shangpo-a-real-city-in-the-Chinese-province-of-Jiangxi> as at 2/2/2016

⁴¹ Hamilton, J M. *Edgar Snow: A Biography*. John Wiley & Sons 1988. Page 61

were hoping to discard the man while hanging onto the legend. If Mao later made his own position unquestionable, he had some basis in his own history for seeing it as necessary.

Regarding the supposed massacre of landlord families, I've set out all I could find. As I said, the incident and Smedley's book seem to have been wholly overlooked.

Zhu and the Great Road

Smedley wrote two more books about China, covering the Sino-Japanese War. I discuss these in the next article. But she also wrote more about the South China Red Areas in her unfinished biography of Zhu De, a work called *The Great Road*. It includes material that supplements Smedley's first books. Benefits from her finally getting direct contact with Mao, Zhu and those close to them.

The book we have is a thin shadow of the book that might have been. Smedley died in her late 50s. She worn herself out with hard work and hard living, mostly for the benefit of Chinese whose lives were vastly harder than hers:

"What she left [before her death after an operation needed because of her failing health] was all in first draft which she intended to revise as well as supplement. The reader will notice that there is a complete blank between the end of the Second Kuomintang Extermination Campaign in 1931 and the beginning of the Long March in October 1934, and that the story after the end of 1937, when she stopped seeing Chu Teh... is skimpish and is really only a preliminary sketch. This is easy to understand since her plan to return to China was never fulfilled."⁴²

What we have fascinated me. Already very familiar with the life of Mao, I was surprised at how many points he and Zhu had in common – points mostly *not* shared with other Chinese Communist leaders. Both came from peasant backgrounds. Both were clever enough to be sent for an expensive education. Both were married several times. Both were born in December. Both initially became teachers. But Zhu was born seven years before Mao, and moved from teaching to a military career in one of the Western-style regional armies that later overthrew Imperial China. That then degenerated into warlordism.

Warlordism was a period of weakness and suffering for China, not cured by Kuomintang rule on the Mainland, where Chiang Kai-shek

betrayed the promise of the Northern Expedition and functioned as just the biggest of the warlords. Other warlords tried to be authentic nationalists, and in some cases also social radicals. Of these, Feng Yuxiang the Christian General was the most powerful. There was also the remarkable career of He Long / Ho Lung, a life full of adventure that would make an excellent film drama. But Zhu had the biggest impact on history.

Zhu De was clever child, and helped in his education by his family, in line with Chinese traditions. He got as far as being a successful candidate in the first level of China's three-stage Imperial Examination system, gaining this distinction shortly before the whole thing was abolished in one of the bungling efforts at reform by the notorious Dowager Empress. Zhu was in any case already rejecting that system of thought: he opted for teacher training as a teacher of Physical Education. In Chinese terms this was sharply radical; Chinese intellectuals had traditionally prided themselves on doing no physical work and staying distant from everything practical. They favoured fine gardens for their rest and retirement –tourists in China are likely to be shown several, and they are indeed well worth a visit. But whereas upper-class Britons might do some bits of their own gardening, this would have been unthinkable in Traditional China.

Zhu did another unthinkable when he moved from teaching to enrol in a military academy in Yunnan. He had been born in neighbouring Sichuan, but the two Chinese provinces are large enough to have been large nations had China disintegrated or been partitioned. He went to Yunnan, because it was briefly one of the most radical parts of China:

"I spent but one night at home, but that one night was enough,' General Chu said. 'When I told my family that I was leaving to join the new army, they thought I had gone insane.' To become a teacher of such an outrageous subject as physical training was one thing, but to join the scum of the earth was more than they could take... When he assured them he was perfectly sane and that he had dedicated his life to the liberation of China from Manchu and foreign rule, 'the reaction was terrible, terrible!' This was the last straw... and when he left for Chengtu [Chengdu] no one appeared even to bid him farewell. He left his home, an outcast, with all doors and hearts closed against him.

'It was terrible, terrible,' said General Chu. 'Yet I

⁴² Smedley, Agnes. *The Great Road: The Life and Times of Chu Teh*. Monthly Review Press 1956. Page xi

had chosen my road and I could not turn back."⁴³

But a road to where? The officers of the Reform Armies were interested in overthrowing the Manchu, but not in ending their own superiority over ordinary Chinese:

"The soldiers of the Reform Army had been given modern military training, weapons, and uniforms, but nothing had been done to change their minds. No changes had been made in their treatment as men, and they were still subject to the same brutalizing and humiliating beatings and cursings as in past ages. Not even the revolutionary intellectuals could think of the common soldier as anything but a ruffian who had to be treated like an animal.

"Chu Teh was the first man in the Yunnan Military Academy to raise the question of the human treatment of the common soldier." (Ibid., page 88.)

This was a major reason why the Revolution of 1911-12 failed to produce a successful New China. But also it was a set of similar armies rather than a single army. Much of it didn't have even the elite-only radicalism found in Yunnan.

The Revolution began in the city of Wuhan with modern-minded military officers of the sort who had been training in Yunnan. But North China was dominated by the Beiyang Army,⁴⁴ the largely-overlooked main cause of China's failures between 1912 and 1949. Yuan Shikai created it with modern fighting methods, but a backward outlook on life in general. In a previous article,⁴⁵ I detailed how his success was based on never confronting foreign armies and relying just on being the best army in China. Chiang Kai-shek also was unready to risk a simultaneous fight with both the fragments of the Beiyang Army and Global Imperialism. It was left to Chinese Communism to do the job, with the People's Liberation Army absorbing and remoulding the Beiyang fragments while Lin Biao in Manchuria surrounded and destroyed Chiang Kai-shek's best troops.

The Failed Republic

In 1912, Yuan Shikai was formidable as undisputed commander of the Beiyang Army. He had been dismissed by the useless little clique of aristocratic Manchus whom ruled after the death of Cixi, the obstructive but politically gifted Dowager Empress. Reappointed when the Revolution broke out

and became formidable in South China. Yuan's armies were loyal to him and dominated North China. He supposedly served the dynasty, with its weak replacement Dowager Empress and absurd child Emperor, but was not loyal to them. Sun Yat-sen as President of a newly created Chinese Republic chose to compromise: the dynasty would be deposed and Yuan Shikai would take over as President. (Which is why I always call it the Revolution of 1911-12, even though 1911 Revolution is the standard term. At the start of 1912, no one could be sure than the Wuchang Uprising that began in October 1911 would end up as more than another failed revolt against the dynasty.)

The disadvantages of Yuan as President were clear, but it's moot if South China would have won a civil war if it had happened then. They tended to lose the various wars that were fought later on, with the Soviet-trained army of the Kuomintang's Northern Expedition as the grand exception. Historically, North China has normally been the stronger, containing most of the traditional capitals. In various invasions and civil wars, it has been much more common for unification or conquest to proceed north to south than south to north. The Taiping, based in South China, had failed and been utterly destroyed.

The Kuomintang, much stronger in South China than North China, only partly overcame this norm. It stopped its highly successful Northern Expedition at the Yangtze Valley, with Chiang concentrating his efforts on destroying Communists and winning over or destroying serious radicals and anti-imperialists. He did later get the various warlords to officially recognise his Nanking-based government. He managed by stages to reduce or destroy the power of some of those warlords, north and south, including moving in on them if they patriotically committed a lot of their forces to the anti-Japanese war. Such was the fate of Long Yun, 'Cloud Dragon', a not-very-progressive warlord who had risen within the same Yunnan army that had produced Zhu De. In 1945, Chiang organised a coup against him and replaced him.⁴⁶

In China's final Civil War from 1946 to 1949, many warlords including most survivors of the former Beiyang Army made individual deals with the Chinese Communists as the People's Liberation Army advanced. Many survived in positions of comfortable powerlessness within

⁴³ Ibid., page 80-1

⁴⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beiyang_Army

⁴⁵ Problems 22: *China's Blue Republic (1912-49)*

⁴⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_Yun

the new People's Republic.

(They might have had more, had the USA not been blindly hostile to the new People's Republic. Mao's new government did also include many Third Force element with no guns. He may well have planned to follow the moderate line he'd outlined in his essay *On New Democracy*. But with the USA still insisting that Chiang's Kuomintang were the real government of China, he had strong reason to respond and become strongly anti-Western. A lot of Westernised intellectuals suffered, but seem not to see that the USA was at least partly to blame. The former warlords apparently kept quiet and did OK.)

Back in 1916, Yuan Shikai's armies invaded Yunnan after the warlord of Yunnan opposed his attempts to make himself Emperor:

"We had the Ko Lai Hui peasants behind us,' General Chu stated proudly, 'and they were like the sands of the sea... The Yunnan Army won the renown that is still associated with it.'

"It was in this struggle also that Chu Teh won his reputation for fierce tenacity and loyalty. Men who saw him in action said that he seemed to be able to do with three or four hours sleep a night and that his physical strength seemed limitless. His troops knew him as a peasant like themselves, a man who treated them like men and would allow no officer to curse or strike them." (Ibid., page 115.)

The Ko Lai Hui were an ancient Secret Society: one of many that existed in opposition to Manchu rule. Many lapsed into pure criminality: that was the basis for the famous Triads, some of which have ancient roots while others just borrow respectable traditions for pure criminality. But some remained true to their origins, and the Ko Lai Hui were one. (Another was the Gelaohui, which included General He Long and was partly absorbed by Chinese Communism's rural insurgency.) Zhu himself became a member of the Ko Lai Hui, having earlier been part of a parallel secret organisation among military officers.

Yuan Shikai tried to make himself Emperor after a drastic failure of an attempt to give China a functional system of Representative Government. It was not democratic: only rich men could vote, using a system that had been devised for a Constitutional Monarchy, but was not implement at a national level. A national parliament was duly elected and might have governed on behalf of the rich and powerful – but they never seem to have viewed themselves as a coherent entity rather than a group of unconnected individuals. They acted as people thrown together by chance, like

passengers on a cruise liner.

The English Revolution was carried through by gentry who had been developing a shared identity in the House of Commons for some 300 years. Gentry who had intermittently accepted or rejected would-be monarchs in the misnamed 'Wars of the Roses'. People whose support the various monarchs needed to confirm many major decisions. Likewise the American Revolution was a revolt by a majority of a stratum of British American gentry who had been running their Thirteen Colonies for London before London lost them, thanks to a narrow refusal to share power by the House of Commons. Having had a similar mix of connections with Britain, these people were able to come together as a Continental Congress, helped by a British government attitude of lumping together all Americans rather than trying to take advantage of existing differences. By contrast the French Revolution brought together people with few previous connections. They failed to produce a stable or coherent government, eventually turning over power to Napoleon as First Consul and later Emperor. When they tried it again in 1848, the peasantry elected Napoleon's nephew on the strength of his name, and he was later able to become Emperor Napoleon the Third with the approval of a clear majority. China had broadly the same problems: the new Parliament and later assemblies were legal entities but not functional entities with a will to exercise power in their own right. But before Mao, it had no one who could make anything coherent out of the existing confusion.

Yunnan was part of the successful opposition to Yuan Shikai becoming Emperor. He abandoned the claim, and soon afterwards died – a very common pattern for defeated politicians. But the opposition had been united only in what it *didn't* want. China's Parliament and President were treated as minor factors in a power-struggle dominated by warlords with armies.

Zhu as a Family Man

During this period, Zhu was twice married. Earlier, his parents had hoped to marry him to the daughter of a rich family after his success in the ancient Imperial Examination System. But he was unwilling to wreck his life like that:

"His family could get money by marrying him off to some well-to-do girl who would most certainly be illiterate and foot-bound. The subject had already been proposed to him, but the new winds of freedom

were blowing through China and young men were saying that they would never marry until China was free; and that, even then, they would marry only educated girls."⁴⁷

After the Manchus were overthrown in the Revolution of 1911-12, Chu Teh did just this. Nothing like modern 'dating' was possible in those days. But he chose an educated girl whose brother he knew. Smedley comments

"Whether or not General Chu loved this girl he never said, nor was it necessary for him to say anything for me to understand that he did not... He was proud that the marriage was not bourgeois, and that the two of them had even met and talked, in the presence of [his friend's] family, before they made up their minds. This was a revolutionary step in those days; respectable girls, even after the Revolution, still did not talk with their husbands before marriage." (Ibid., page 106).

This wife was named Hsiai Chu-fen. She bore Zhu a son, but died in 1916, probably of typhoid. In line with Chinese custom, he quickly remarried in order to have a mother for his son. And he once again chose an educated woman who was self-willed by the standards of the time:

"Before the year was out, therefore, he agreed to marry again; one of his army friends acted as a go-between. This marriage also was modern for the time, for the friend had an educated sister 'with natural feet' who ... had refused to marry any suitor unless she had first seen and talked with him before making up her mind...

"When General Chu talked of this woman who soon became his wife, his voice and manner underwent a very great change, a change of which he seemed utterly unconscious. The word 'love' never passed his lips, yet it seemed to me that he had loved Chen Yu-chen from almost the moment of their first meeting.

"She was not a beautiful woman, he remarked, nor was she ugly, yet there was something indefinably attractive about her." (Ibid., page 122.)

But Zhu was still only partly emancipated from traditional values.

"In the autumn of 1919 he had brought over twenty members of his family to Luchow to live with him and his wife. He was sinking back into feudalism, proving himself a filial son and gaining face by proving that he had, and could provide for, a large family."⁴⁸

But things did not go well. He enrolled his two younger brothers as military officers, and both were killed in a short local war that Zhu's forces lost. He started smoking opium and soon had a bad addiction. After further setbacks, his family returned home, but his father died on the journey (Ibid., p129-130). Smedley sums up where his life had led: a failure typical of the whole warlord era:

"He was a man of thirty-five, an official who smoked opium, with a fine wife but with more than one woman on the side when it pleased him. He stood in the wreckage of his own personal dreams and his dead hopes for his country." (Ibid., page 132.)

From Russia With Hope

Nothing coherent had emerged after Yuan Shikai's failure. Yunnan went downhill with the death soon afterwards of their leader Tsai Ao (whose name is nowadays transcribed as Cai E). Zhu and other military officers found themselves drawn into an endless and pointless cycle of warlord wars.

What was the alternative? By 1920, the Bolsheviks were getting the upper hand in the Russian Civil War, even though it lasted till 1922. This impressed many Chinese, and led to the formation of pro-Bolshevik groups both in China and among Chinese working in France. That led on to the foundation of a regular Communist Party in 1921, secret and small but well-organised and including people who already had power, contacts, and a following. Mao was one, being already a major leader among young radicals in Hunan. But Zhu's road was different:

"Though ignorant of Marxism... he and his comrades were deeply impressed by the news of the victories of the Russian Red Army over the armies of the czarist warlords and of the invading capitalist countries. How had the Russian revolutionaries been able to defeat such powerful armies, even of the Western world, and establish their own government, whereas the Chinese had failed? ... [They] came to the decision that there was something fundamentally wrong with China. After all, they argued, the foreign powers could not have corrupted any Chinese had Chinese refused to sell themselves." (Ibid., p128.)

But Zhu had by then adopted a warlord life-style. Only when news reached him of the Chinese Communist Party's early activities did he react:

"A new wind had begun blowing through China, and the press he read was filled with reports of the new labour movement and the Communist Party which guided it. From what he read Chu Teh decided to join the new Communist Party. Just what its principles were he did not know, fully, but one thing became more than clear: the foreign imperialists attacked the party with everything ugly in their vocabulary. If this party was regarded by the foreign enemies of China as a menace to them, it was the party for Chu Teh." (Ibid., page 144.)

There was a successful strike in Hong Kong, which got support from the British Labour Party. Zhu became convinced that Communism was the answer. He and a friend set off to find out.

Having been long-term members of the Kuomintang, they also met Sun Yatsen in Shanghai. Sun asked them to help reorganise the Yunnan Army, which was then in Guangxi [Kwangsi]. But they refused:

"Sung and I had lost all faith in such tactics as the alliances which Dr. Sun and his Kuomintang followers made with this or that militarist. Such tactics had always ended in defeat for the revolution and the strengthening of the warlords. We ourselves had spent eleven years of our lives in such a squirrel cage. The Chinese revolution had failed, while the Russian Revolution had succeeded, and the Russians had succeeded because they were Communists with a theory and a method of which we were ignorant.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pages 68-9

⁴⁸ Ibid., page 128

"We told Dr. Sun that we had decided to study abroad, to meet Communists and study Communism, before re-entering national affairs in China. The great Hongkong strike victory, together with the rise of the labor movement in China, proved to us that the Communists knew something we needed to know."⁴⁹

"Next came the meeting with Chen Tu-hsiu [Chen Duxiu], secretary of the Communist Party... Chu went to this meeting in the belief that he had only to apply for membership in the Communist Party to be accepted. Thus it had been with the Kuomintang, which anyone who applied could join...

"A man could join the Communist Party, Chen Tu-hsiu told him, provided he adopted the workers' cause as his own, and was prepared to give his life to it. For a man like Chu Teh this required long study and sincere application."⁵⁰

Determined to improve himself, Zhu abandoned his privileged warlord life-style. He went to France to learn about the modern world:

"After we landed in France I saw that Europe was not a paradise of modern science as I had thought. French workers were better dressed than Chinese, yet they were haunted men, and the French government was a market place where officials bargained and bought and sold...

"In the home of a Chinese merchant where the two friends found lodging, they heard of a group of Chinese students who had just organised a branch of the Chinese Communist Party... The chief organiser of the group seemed to be a student named Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai]... someone gave him the Berlin address of Chou En-lai, who had gone to Germany to organise another group there...

"Chou smiled a little, said he would help them find rooms, and arrange for them to join the Berlin Communist group as candidates until their application had been sent to China and an answer received. When the reply came a few months later they were enrolled as full members, but Chu's membership was kept a secret from outsiders.

"General Chu explained this procedure as necessary because, as a general in the Yunnan Army, he had been one of the earliest Kuomintang members and he might be sent back to Yunnan by the Communist Party at some future date...

"He spent his time studying hungrily, avidly, with young men many of whom were almost young enough to be his sons." (Ibid., page 151-2.)

Chen Duxiu, one of two co-founders of Chinese Communism, was a sophisticated intellectual who proved ineffective as a leader. He was expecting reality to confirm to his theories, and had no idea what to do when the world went otherwise. While other Chinese Communists adapted, with the leadership leading an underground fight in Shanghai and others forming Red Areas in impoverished rural areas, Chen Duxiu went off on his own after being removed as leader. For a time he looked to Trotsky, who had criticised the alliance with the Kuomintang, though Trotsky *also* criticised

the rural partisan struggle that was to actually succeed. But Chen Duxiu wasn't really a Trotskyist – he didn't fight. He ended up irrelevant.

Chen Duxiu rejecting Zhu fits this pattern. Clearly there were risks working with a former radical who had decayed into something close to a standard corrupt warlord. But the man was also a gifted military leader, and it was clear by 1921 that nothing could change in China without military power. Zhou Enlai seems from the start to have understood that Marxist theory was only a guide to action and that opportunities must be grasped. Zhou was also in his later career ready to work with a range of different people to see if their methods would work, rather than sticking dogmatically to one strategy even after it had clearly failed. So he helped Zhu to become a genuine Communist.

Zhu returned to China in 1926, with the Northern Expedition led by the Kuomintang about to begin. Chiang Kai-shek had made his first moves to reduce Communist Party influence:

"Because of the danger signals from China, he was now glad that he had kept his membership of the Communist Party a secret from all but his party comrades, and that he was known generally only as a Kuomintang member. The Canton revolutionary government was trying to neutralise or win over some of the less obnoxious minor warlords, and he felt that he might be of some service with his former military colleagues. In 1922, he remembered, General Yang Sen of Szechwan, once a 1911 revolutionary, had urged him to join his staff. Who could say – perhaps he could now play a political as well as a military role in the new revolutionary wave facing China?"⁵¹

"Yang received me as if I were his closest and oldest friend," General Chu said with a grim expression. 'I had no illusions. Like all militarists, he was willing to join the side that paid the most, and he thought I had come to offer him money'...

"When Chu declared that he had brought no money and that Moscow was not financing the Nationalist movement, Yang thought he was only bargaining...

"Yang remained unimpressed and continued waiting to see which side would win. Day by day Chu talked with him about the Nationalist movement and day by day news of the revolutionary victories kept pouring in. The Northern Expedition was rolling along, its way paved by the peasants and workers who rose in their millions...

"In the north, General Feng Yu-hsiang [Feng Yuxiang], who had joined the Kuomintang two years before, was leading his Kuo Min Chun, or People's Army, against the northern warlords. General Feng had become a Christian and had been the pride of missionaries who had fondly christened him 'the Christian General'. However, after Feng joined the Nationalists, the missionaries and other foreigners began referring to him contemptuously as 'the so-called Christian General'...

"Yang Sen did not send troops to support his ally Wu Pei-fu [Wu Peifu, from the Beiyang Army, but dominant in Central China until defeated by the Northern Expedition]...

⁴⁹ Ibid., pages 147-8

⁵⁰ Ibid., pages 149-150

⁵¹ Ibid., page 165

"Even after the Ironsides took Wuhan, Yang Sen still dickered and wavered, and Chu Teh soon learned the reason. Landlords and industrialists fleeing from Hunan and the Wuhan cities had reached his headquarters with rumours of widespread conflict within the ranks of the Northern Expeditionary Army. Many officers in that army, they told Yang, were themselves landowners or the sons of landowners, or members of industrialist families."⁵²

Moscow was in fact supplying arms and money to the Kuomintang. But not enough money to buy off warlords, who anyway didn't stay bought. But a genuine revolution was occurring, and the Northern Expedition was having startling success.

The key issue was land reform, land to the peasants. Had this been carried through – it was part of Sun Yatsen's program – then China might have developed along capitalist lines with a mass of small peasant owners being gradually destroyed by market forces, while industry developed in the cities. But this would have been much too radical for Chiang Kai-shek, who preferred to keep the gigantic traditionalist class of landlords in being and powerful. Whereas the Communists, in line with Marxist theory, thought that rural capitalism was the logical next step, Chiang preferred the pre-capitalist order of non-productive landlords who had no interest in improvement and were parasitic.

Chiang also faced the problem of whether he would dare to be a serious anti-imperialist, taking back chunks of China that had been handed over to foreign control. As I explained in a previous article,⁵³ the global empires were ready for a fight. Britain in particular was using gunboats and larger warships on the Yangtze, a river big enough to let them sail a long way into China. Had Chiang been of the calibre of Kemal Ataturk, he would have taken them on with his heavy artillery and maybe won, as the Communists were to do in 1949 in a major battle following the original fight with the British frigate *Amethyst*.⁵⁴ But Ataturk had always been a military man, quite ready to die obscurely for the greater good in the early stages of the Gallipoli landings, which half-accidentally made him famous. Chiang had been corrupted by his long association with the Shanghai Green Gang, who were typical gangsters in bullying ordinary people and cringing before superior power.

As it happened, Yang Sen was made of tougher stuff. Smedley records how the British sent gunboats against him, and how he stopped fence-sitting and joined the Kuomintang forces. But sadly, he remained just a warlord in outlook. He later sided with Chiang and ended up in Taiwan.

(The Wikipedia also tells of how Yang Sen published a book supporting the claims of herbalist and martial artist Li Ching-Yuen, who claimed to be 250 years old.⁵⁵ The man came to prominence in

1927, but died a mere six years later, in 1933.⁵⁶ Yang may well have been personally sincere, but this illustrates just how much absurd old thinking the Chinese Communists needed to clear away before China could make progress.)

Having apparently won over a key general, Zhu went down the Yangtze to Wuhan, centre of the Kuomintang Left. It was there that he first encountered Mao:

"General Chu remembered reading a number of articles on the peasant movement written by Mao Tse-tung, the man who was soon to become his alter ego and with whom his life thereafter became so intertwined that for years the public often thought them one man by the name of Chu Mao.

"This man, Mao Tse-tung, was an educated peasant who had fought as a soldier in the 1911 Revolution, had played a leading role in the May 4th Movement in his native Hunan Province, had founded the first Marxian study group and later the first Communist Party group in that province. Mao had been a delegate to the First Congress that founded the Chinese Communist Party on July 1, 1921...

"Reading Mao Tse-tung's articles on this mighty upsurge, General Chu seemed to see the clear outlines of possible future calamity. The peasant movement, like the labor unions, was meeting with fierce resistance not only from the old social forces, but from many high officers within the revolutionary army, including its commander in chief, Chiang Kai-shek, and in many places rightist Kuomintang leaders had arrested and imprisoned peasant leaders."⁵⁷

(Smedley is slightly inaccurate about Mao. In his account of his life to Edgar Snow, Mao explains that he had joined up to fight for the revolution in 1911, but had not in fact seen any action.)

Returning from Wuhan, Zhu found that Yang Sen had wavered back and was now unwilling to fight without money, which the Kuomintang lacked. He also objected to his men getting political education, but did accept some political workers. He then decided to switch back to supporting Wu Pei-fu, and Zhu had to flee along with the political workers he had brought. In the event Yang Sen took no part in the fighting (Ibid., p181-2). Yang Sen accepted Chiang Kai-shek's leadership when it was clear the man had won.

Zhu meantime fled to the Kuomintang's Twentieth Army, known as the Ironsides. This was now commanded by Ho Lung (He Long), a man with a radical background in peasant secret societies and a supporter of Communism. Zhu probably hoped to join this army, but the Kuomintang leadership instead sent him to be director of a new Military Training School for the Yunnan Army. This army was now based in Jiangxi and was inclined to support Chiang Kai-shek, while still obeying Wuhan. But Zhu was in command of 1300 cadets based at a school in

⁵² Ibid., page 172-3

⁵³ Problems 22: *China's Blue Republic (1912-49)*

⁵⁴ Detailed in Problems 25: *China: Blue Ants and Dangerous Reds*

⁵⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yang_Sen

⁵⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Ching-Yuen

⁵⁷ Ibid., page 176-7

Nanchang, and so also became garrison commander. (Ibid., pages 184-5.)

There followed a period of complex politics, with Chiang Kai-shek openly suppressing both the Communists and the various worker and peasant rebels, while the Left Kuomintang at Wuhan dithered. In the end the bulk of it weakly surrendered to Chiang. Meantime the Communists decided they had to form their own army, which led to the Nanchang Uprising of August 1st, counted as the birth of the Chinese Communist's Red Army. (Ibid., p200-202) But they carried on fighting a conventional war, and were soon scattered and defeated. Zhu had been deputy to Zhou Enlai for the 9th Army, and took over when Zhou caught malaria and was taken secretly to Hong Kong to recover.

Zhu led the much-reduced army through great hardships before learning of Mao's first small Red Area and joining it. And became its leader, with Mao as his deputy:

"This decision was taken at a Communist Party conference immediately after Chu Teh's forces reached the mountain base... decided to reorganise Chu's and Mao's troops into one united force, called the Fourth Red Army because so many of the men sprang from the old Fourth Army of the Great Revolution...

"In the military reorganisation, he said, he was elected commander in chief and Mao Tse-tung was political commissar. Mao directed all party work in the army and among the masses, and all political-educational work among the troops".⁵⁸

They had to learn new methods of warfare:

"Chu tramped over the entire region, studying the terrain and defences and talking with the bandit-peasant leaders Wang and Yuan. They told him of Old Deaf Chu, a bandit, who had said: 'You don't have to know how to fight; all you have to know is how to encircle the enemy.'...

"I learned a lot from the tactics of Old Deaf Chu,' General Chu laughed. 'Kuomintang armies all fought by the usual Japanese military tactics, always advancing in one column, with front and flank guards. Beyond this they knew nothing. But we split up into small, swift combat units which got in their rear and on their flanks, and attacked, cutting them into segments. There's nothing secret about such tactics. Anyone can learn them, and the militarists later tried to use them against us. They failed because such guerrilla warfare requires not only a thorough knowledge of the terrain of the battle area but also the support of the common people. The people hated and spied on the Kuomintang militarists, waylaid and destroyed small units and stragglers, and captured their transport columns."⁵⁹

During this period he married again, choosing a woman suitable for the new life he was leading:

"Chu Teh ... first heard, and then met, a woman speaker who was known widely among the peasants as an intrepid peasant organiser. She was twenty-five years of age, and

a powerful and intelligent speaker. She had natural feet, was physically strong, her hair was bobbed and her dark skin was pockmarked. She was not beautiful, but she had magnificent eyes that gleamed with intelligence and fiery determination.

"She was introduced to Chu Teh as Wu Yu-lan, a writer and a member of an intellectual family that had played a leading role in the Great Revolution [Northern Expedition and associated uprisings]. Her two brothers immediately joined the revolutionary army and she joined its Political Department.

"Wu Yu-lan and I were married in Leiyang,' General Chu remarked, and when I glanced up quickly he seemed somewhat embarrassed and hastened to explain. 'It was not a conventional marriage. I had a wife in Szechwan whom I had not seen since 1922. We had sometimes corresponded but she had long known that my life belonged to the revolution and that I would never return home. Both Wu Yu-lan and her family knew all this, but they were not bound by conventional forms...

"I interrupted General Chu to ask:

"Why are you so depressed when you speak of Wu Yu-lan? Didn't you love her?"

"Staring grimly at some imaginary scene in the dim room about us, he replied in a hoarse voice:

"She was later captured by the Kuomintang. They tortured and beheaded her, then stuck her head on a pole and mounted it in one of the main streets of Changsha in Hunan, where she had been born."⁶⁰

The Kuomintang as tamed and degraded by Chiang Kai-shek had a particular fear of emancipated women. Women could flourish as behind-the-scenes manipulators – all three Soong sisters were that, even Madam Sun, who carried on her late husband's work but in most ways remained conventional. Independent women were another matter: they were either made sex-slaves or killed.

They also targeted women who were not radical, but were related to one of their enemies:

"In a Kuomintang newspaper at the time [1935], General Chu found a news item about his second wife, Yu-chen, and son. Kuomintang militarists had fallen upon his wife's home in Nanchi and destroyed everything. Chu Teh's son, a student of nineteen, the report laconically remarked, had escaped but was being 'hunted down'. General Chu waited in the hope that his son would make his way to the Red Army. He never heard of his wife or son again. There was no doubt in his mind but that they were killed by the Kuomintang." (Ibid., page 314.)

Considering what they'd been through, the attitudes of the Chinese Communists after 1949 were rather mild. They normally made an effort to change and reform people. Only if you held out and became an obstacle to creating New China would you suffer. And as I explained earlier, they might have been milder about this if they hadn't had the USA denying their status as a sovereign government. Plausibly planning to invade with Taiwan as a front almost up to the time Nixon made

⁵⁸ Ibid., p228-230

⁵⁹ Ibid., page 232-3

⁶⁰ Ibid., pages 223-4

peace in the early 1970s.

Zhu was to marry once more, a wife who had been a leader in her own right:

"In one region along the river a woman agricultural laborer had appeared as a Partisan leader. Her name was Kang Keh-chin [Kang Keqing]. It became known far and wide and was a battle-cry for thousands of poor peasants." (*China's Red Army Marches*, page 131.)

"The land problem was the chief reason for the calling of the Hsinkwo conference a few days after the Red Army arrived in Tungku... Delegates from all the mass organisations in Tungku and the regions beyond. There was even a delegation from the wounded in the hospital, and up from the Wanan district to the west came a delegation of Peasant Partisans, and among them was the woman leader Kang. She carried a rifle as if it were a part of her and, like the men, she walked with lithe decision and certainty. A woman in her middle twenties, of medium height and shingled hair, she wore the usual clean blue jacket and long loose trousers of the peasant woman. Her face was pock-marked and men said that because of this she was not beautiful. But they admitted that her large black eyes were beautiful and shone with the fire of conviction, and when she smiled, two rows of white teeth gleamed between beautiful red lips. Illiterate she was indeed, for she had been the slave of a rich landlord who had bought her in childhood and used her a field laborer. Though she could recognise but a few written characters, still she was very intelligent so that men said of her:

"'Her thoughts are as clear and direct as bullets fired from a machine-gun'

"Kang was later to become Chu Teh's wife. But at this time neither thought of that, for Chu Teh's heart was still filled with the memories of the girl Chang, his first wife."⁶¹

There's a muddle here: Zhu had three previous wives, one still living, but none of them called Chang. But Chinese commonly use several names, so this probably references Wu Yu-lan.

Smedley has more about Kang in *The Great Road* (pages 272-3). Zhu explained that she had been 'a girl who grew up and was educated in the army'. Unlike his previous wives, she'd been illiterate when he first met her. But she was intelligent and learned well.

A Politicised Army

Self-development and educating the uneducated was a vital part of Leninism, particularly in China:

"We aimed so to train our men that even if only one escaped alive he would be able to rise up and lead the people,' General Chu said. 'We fought many battles during that terrible time and in one we lost two hundred men. In another, twenty of our men and one Whampoa cadet were captured. They joined an enemy regiment that garrisoned a south Kiangsi hsien [xian, county or district]. A few months later they led that entire regiment in insurrection and turned the hsien into a guerrilla base. It later became one of our strongest Soviet districts."⁶²

The Communists were introducing basic democracy into China, where it was quite new. There was the occasional mutli-party election in China, but it was meaningless because ordinary people had never been taught to act for themselves in spheres outside of their own families. Also meaningless because the Kuomintang had a habit of using its gangster friends to murder even fairly minor opposition leaders. But even without this, there was no popular feeling that could self-organise. Nothing outside of what was created by what was originally a small Russian-inspired group of Marxist intellectuals.

The Party allowed no disloyalty about the basic aims, but would allow free discussion of methods:

"But the most powerful educational method evolved by the Red Army, and one which it practiced throughout its existence, consisted of the conferences in which past battles or campaigns were analyzed. In these conferences, every commander and fighter participated, including General Chu and Mao Tse-tung. All rank disappeared and men had full rights of free speech. Not only was the plan of battle or campaign discussed and, if men felt the necessity, criticized, but the individual conduct of any commander or fighter could be criticized. Of course men could defend themselves against criticism which they felt to be unjust...

"General Chu placed the greatest importance on such conferences. They developed the men in every possible way, he said, and also kept the army democratic. By such methods... men who failed to do their duty in battle, or who violated the democratic regulations of the army, would be demoted and reeducated, while men who distinguished themselves by intelligence or special courage were promoted from the ranks. At the same time the inarticulate peasant fighter learned to think and express himself on military, political and human problems. He learned the nature of a democratic army, as opposed to the old feudal militaristic armies, he learned vigilance and responsibility, and he learned to value his own worth as a man and as a responsible member of the revolutionary army."⁶³

But there were limits on how much disagreement was allowed. There was a particularly nasty instance when the Zhu-Mao Red Army tried absorbing a small Red Area that had independently formed nearby.

The AB Group – a Social Democrat Venture?

In *China's Red Army Marches*, Smedley describes the problems Zhu and Mao had with an alternative Red Army in the Tungku and Hsinkwo district. It had seemed much like their own, only smaller:

"Peasants would lift their faces towards the high mountain ranges that shielded Tungku and Hsinkwo and say:

"'Up there is Tungku', or 'There lies Hsinkwo.'

"And every man understood. For up there in the mountain regions the peasants and workers had revolted, disarmed the White troops and the Peace Preservation Corps of the landlords and merchants, and armed

⁶¹ *China's Red Army Marches*, page 137.

⁶² *The Great Road*, page 237

⁶³ *Ibid.*, page 240

themselves...

"In late February of 1929, as the Red Army led by Chu Teh and Mau Tse-tung marched towards Tungku and Hsinkwo districts following their victory at Tapoteh, peasants in territory held by Kuomintang troops began to hold secret meetings. When the Red Army approached they would fall upon the White troops and fight..."

"The Red troops would give the few guns they could spare, instruct the peasants and workers in their use, and march onwards towards Tungku and Hsinkwo..."

"Just beyond the village of Lungfung was the southeasters Nine Level Pass leading upward into Tungku, and at its base appeared a delegation of men and women led by Commander Lu Shu-chow, chief of the Hsinkwo-Tungku Red Army. Lu was a young, energetic man, a Whampoo Military cadet [Whampoa]. This meant he had trained in Canton during the days of the early revolutionary period – trained by military experts from the Red Army of Soviet Russia. And he was a Communist.

"Lu told of other passes leading into the mountain stronghold of Tungku..."

"To the west of the mountain was another pass, small and perilous, leading down to the Partisan region to the west... Down there where the Kuomintang still ruled, Kang led her bands of poor peasants and agricultural laborers. Nor was she alone in leadership, for men who had been laborers, serfs, slaves, and also Communist workers from the cities, had gone into this region, organised, and fought." (*China's Red Army Marches*, pages 131-3)

To be exact: in this region there were *two* small Red ventures: the Hsinkwo-Tungku Red Army and a much smaller partisan group that included Kang Keqing, which I mentioned earlier. They do not seem to have been connected, and Kang's partisans were absorbed without trouble. It was tragically otherwise in the case of Hsinkwo-Tungku:

"The region seemed impregnable. The masses were as firm in their revolutionary strength as the cliffs about them. This the Red Army soon realised. And yet things were not all right. When the Red Army leaders asked the reason for the friction, for the discontent about them, men spoke readily. It was because of the landlords. Many landlords had remained in the region after the uprising. And some of their sons or other relatives had taken part in the uprising and had risen to leading positions in the Peasant Leagues and in the Hsinkwo-Tungku Red Army. Many of the smaller landlords had even posed as peasants, calling themselves rich or middle peasants... most of the estates of the landlords had not been confiscated and divided at all..."

"Now what could be done, the peasants asked, when such men as Chen Ming-chuen and Li Wen-ling were so powerful? Both these men were the sons of rich landlords, yet they talked of the Revolution in big words. They were both Communists, yet they protected the landlords! Chen was commander of one of the Red regiments of Tungku and Li commander of a Red regiment at Hsinkwo... The poor peasant were the vast majority of the population, yet they still had been given little or almost no land.

"The Red Army met Chen and Li, these two sons of landlords. Chen was a big, well-fed fellow nearing thirty, bespectacled, and with more words than a dog has fleas.

He could read and write everything and he could quote foreign authors to support his ideas. The masses stood in awe before men of learning, and Chen could explain to them the ways of revolution in all lands. They believed him, for it was so written. And they allowed his land to remain intact.

"Chen was a man who had studied in a missionary school in Shanghai, and after the counter-revolution began he had joined the Communist Party.

"It was the fashion to be a Communist during the revolutionary period of 1925-27,' he could sarcastically declare. 'But after the counter-revolution began, men who joined the Party had to be convinces Communists, unafraid of death!'"

"But the Red commander Li also had his arguments. He was the son of a landlord but had joined the Communist Party in Hankow, where he was a student, during the great revolutionary period. But he had not left the Party after the counter-revolution began; he had even returned to Hsinkwo and Tungku region and taken part in the uprising. He had a good revolutionary record. He had even allowed nearly half of his land to be divided. Yet, why had his family kept the richest land for themselves, sitting on it like gods in the temple, doing nothing?"⁶⁴

Smedley tells the story in a way that anticipates later events. Presumably when she was given the story, there was general agreement in the Communist Party that the Hsinkwo and Tungku Red Army was unacceptably moderate. This may even have been the reason why the Central Committee in Shanghai chose to promote Zhu De to overall commander of all Red Armies, and Mao to Chairman of all of the Soviet areas. If they had some disagreements with Mao, they may also have felt he had to be given authority over others who were much less acceptable.

To return to the story as Smedley tells it. Mao and Zhu felt that things had to change. A conference was held at Hsinkwo, where it was agreed that the land should be divided. But this failed to happen. The poor peasants were disappointed and confused.

"Put out the landlords!' Mau Tse-tung, secretary of the Communist Party in the Army, told them.

"But they did not know how. The Red Army was now facing a great campaign and its commanders could not halt to do as the peasants asked. So the land problem remained unresolved." (*Ibid.*, p140)

A Soldier's Story

The disagreement about landlords apparently led on to covert betrayal. Smedley's account is based on that of a young soldier:

"You think I am very young to be a soldier in the Red Army? No! For I am a worker. I was a worker in the mines when I was only seven years old, and we workers have no childhood. We have the responsibilities of men when we are children.

"I am young but I have been in many battles. The first

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, page 135-6

great battle in which I fought was when the Red Army defeated the Kuomintang army of a hundred and fifty thousand sent against us. The decisive battle came on the eve of New Year, 1930 – I mean the New Year of the western calendar...

"The Whites used airplanes to bomb Tungku and they caused great damage. But that would not have forced us to retreat had it not been for unexpected events from within. A battalion of White troops with their officers had mutinied and joined us a few weeks before, and this battalion held the northern pass leading into the Tungku basin. They now mutinied again, under command of their officers, and let two divisions of White troops, the 18th and 50th, up through the pass. We learned later that these officers had deserted to us deliberately, at orders of the counter-revolutionary organization, the A. B. Society, or Anti-Bolshevik Society. They had pretended to join us in order to strike at us from within. Members of this Society of landlords and merchants had men within our own Army, but we did not know who they were until later. But at that time they all worked together and betrayed Tungku to the enemy.

"At the time our Red Army, with thirty thousand men was in Tungku. We also had Red Guards, and five hundred armed members of the Women's Volunteer Corps under command of Kang, the woman Partisan leader who had been an agricultural laborer in the Wanan district...

"Because of the betrayal from within and because of the air bombing, we were forced to retreat from Tungku. But before we left we held the northern pass until we cleaned out the revolt. We shot every one of the officers who we thought had taken part in it, and we shot many of the soldiers who followed them...

"Behind in Tungku the 18th and 50th White divisions came up the northern pass and destroyed everything in the Tungku basin. They burned all the houses, all our new schools in the villages, and the headquarters of our Soviet Government and mass organisations. Only the temples were left standing in the forests and ravines, for the Whites are superstitious and feared the gods.

"The guides of the White troops were the landlords. Some were men who did not know the mountain paths and hills, but others were landlords from this region who had escaped the year before, helped by their sons and relatives who had wormed their way into our Army and organizations. Later we cleaned them out also." (Ibid., pages 174-5.)

The Red Army later managed to defeat the main White forces. When the 18th division surrendered, its officers were put on trial before the people of Tungku. Most were condemned and killed. There was one exception – a brigade commander who was

rated as decent and was allowed to return to White territory.

Another White general tried to change sides, which had been entirely normal in Chinese civil wars:

"General Chang argued and said he was willing to fight for the masses, but Comrade Peng [Peng Dehuai] told him to convince his own soldiers of that.

"Very much depressed, and not believing that a commander has no power over the will of the masses, General Chang then asked to speak with Mau Tse-tung. He thought Mau was a big and powerful General and would save his life.

"His guards asked where Mau was and were directed to a peasant's home. There they found Comrade Mau lying down on a bed, for he is not a strong man and coughs very much. When the guards brought General Chang in, an empty rice bowl and a bowl of streaming tea was on the little table near Mau's head. A number of peasants were about him, talking.

"When General Chang saw Comrade Mau lying in a peasant's hut, dressed just like an ordinary fighting member of the Red Army, he thought the guards were playing a cruel joke on him. This could not be the big General, Mau Tse-tung, one of the most powerful in the Red Army and secretary of the Communist Party. But Comrade Mau arose and said:

"I am Mau Tse-tung – what do you want?"

"General Chang saw that all the peasants and the guards were serious, and that the man before him was serious. He became very much afraid, for then he saw that Mau Tse-tung was not a General but a man of the masses, a Communist. And so Chang no longer spoke of serving the revolutionary masses. He merely pleaded:

"Save my life! I do not want to die!"

"Comrade Mau answered firmly: 'I am not a White officer with the power to alter the decisions of the masses'... only your own soldiers can save you. Appeal to them!'

"General Chang stood for a long time looking at Mau Tse-tung. Perhaps he knew his life was lost. We of the Red Army always think of the Revolution, and of our comrades in the Kuomintang cities who are caught like dogs, tortured and murdered. Here was one of the men who murder them.

"I do not know what Chang's soldiers answered to his plea, but I know they beheaded him. It is forbidden to torture in the Red Army, so they did not do that. They buried the body, but they bound the head on a board with a red cloth, and on the board they painted these words:

"This is the head of Chang Hui-tseng, commander of the 18th white division, enemy of the

people!

"They threw the head in the river that flows to Kian, and later we read in newspapers from Kuomintang territory that it had been found and taken to Nanchang where Chiang Kai-shek, the White General, held a big funeral over it." (Ibid., p183-4)

Red Army Oppositionists

The Red Army units in Tungku and Hsinkwo were not at that time suspected of treachery, though they were blamed for having been soft on landlords. The big split came later. And according to Smedley, the Oppositionists started it:

"At Pei-aa, the villages of White Sand, another scene in the great historic drama of China would soon be enacted. Here in the mountains beyond Tungku would be held a mass trial of nearly four thousand men accused of counter-revolutionary activities within the Soviet regions.

"Of the four thousand men, some three thousand were simple soldiers, and it was said by the multitudes converging on Pei-sa from all directions that they would surely be released. But first they would have to listen to the trial of another thousand who had aided the five. Even of these last thousand, no more than a few hundred landlords or sons of the gentry were conscious counter-revolutionaries. As for them and the five chief leaders – well, let them speak up when the time came and convince the masses that they deserved life!...

"The prisoners were members or followers of the 'A.B.' or 'Anti-Bolshevik Society'. Their record in the service of their masters was long and bloody.

"It was in the early part of 1927, when the masses of the Chinese people lifted their faces from the earth and began to fight their ancient oppressors, that a reactionary member of the Kuomintang whose name was Tuan Shih-ming organised the A.B. Society. The purpose of the Society was secretly to fight the Revolution from within. To this end its members were to enter the Communist Party and the mass organisations and, as Communists, go into every region where workers and peasants were in revolt. They were to join the revolting people [sic], fighting with them until they gained control of the movement. They were to organise all counter-revolutionary forces about them, spy, sabotage, disrupt, spread confusing rumors, and when the time came lead counter-revolutionary uprisings.

"The members of the A.B. Society were drawn from the ranks of the landlords, capitalists, militarists, and the old aristocratic gentry. Later some of them were rich peasants who owned much land and had been small landlords.

"As the months passed this Society had formed

active alliances with all elements opposed to the Communist Party. Within its ranks were found the so-called 'Left-Wing Kuomintang' who also called themselves Social Democrats; and later still a rival Social Democratic clique. Through the Social Democrats the 'Abists' made alliances with groups that had been expelled or had withdrawn from the Communist Party. These latter groups were the 'Trotzkist Opposition' and the 'Right-wing Communists,' called the 'Liquidationists'.

"The A.B. Society had its seat in the headquarters of the Kuomintang in Nanking. But in Shanghai were foreigners – members of the police and every imperial Secret Service – who had also formed a league to fight Communism. And these foreign imperialists met in secret conference with the A.B. Society and helped direct its activities... It seemed that, because of this, there was no limit to the amount of money the A.B. Society had at its command."⁶⁵

In revolutions, betrayals do happen. In the American Revolution, there was Benedict Arnold, who had earlier been a genuine hero at the Battles of Saratoga. And where there's open politics with political rivals tolerating each other, it is quite common for people to be Communists when young and all sorts of other things when they get older and more powerful. Many of the USA's notorious right-wing Neo-Cons began as left-wingers. Some of those who attended the founding meeting of the Chinese Communist Party ended up as members of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang.

A suggestion that a major leader of the Kuomintang might become a fascist and end up as a collaborator with the Japanese conquest of China might seem an absurd slander: except that Wang Jingwei did exactly that.⁶⁶ Likewise Marshal Petain with Vichy France (though it seems he had more justification than is generally recognised). For that matter, Benito Mussolini had been a prominent Italian Socialist before deciding to support Italy's anti-Austrian participation in World War One. Sir Oswald Moseley, the only notable British Fascist, began his political career in the Tory Party but was for a time part of the Labour Left. He had some sensible policies, the ideas later implemented under the label 'Keynesianism' or Mixed Economy.

'Liquidationists' were a genuine faction of the left in the Russian Empire. They split from the Mensheviks, advocating an end to underground party work now that legal left-wing politics were possible. It seems to have

⁶⁵ Ibid., pages 261-2

⁶⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Jingwei

been applied to some dissident Chinese Communists by the mainstream movement.

But where did knowledge or false suspicion of an A.B. League come from?

"In the autumn of 1930 had come the capture of the big White city by the Red Army. Before the documents of the old rulers were burned they were carefully examined. And in the headquarters of the Kuomintang and in the military headquarters of the White Generals were found many reports from A.B. leaders in the Soviet regions and in the Red Army itself. Some of these had been sent by Red Army commanders; and though signed by false names still the codes to the names were also found...

"It was perhaps on this day in Kian that the Chinese G.P.U. as a real fighting organization protecting the Revolution was born.

"Not one A.B. leader was arrested. Instead, men went out from the Red Army to sit with the abists everywhere, to work with them night and day, to become their friends, messengers and confidants.

"But almost as soon as plans were laid for tracking to earth the last member of the A.B. Society, the first big Kuomintang war on the Soviet regions began." (*China's Red Army Marches*, pages 266-7.)

It's always possible the documents were a fabrication, intentionally left behind to get the Red Army fighting itself. What I think more likely is that a Kuomintang body that may indeed have been called the A.B. Society was funding people in the Red Areas. Some of these would have viewed themselves as genuine leftists taking a moderate line that was more likely to succeed in the long run.

Smedley's casual remarks about the 'Chinese G.P.U.' read oddly today. But the Russian GPU – later OGPU, NKVD and finally KGB – didn't then have the reputation it acquired after the brutal purges of the later 1930s.

Incidentally, the GPU's biggest success seems to have been 'Operation Trust', a dummy anti-Bolshevik organisation called the '*Monarchist Union of Central Russia*' (which in turn posed as the 'Moscow Municipal Credit Association').⁶⁷ It had genuine monarchists and other anti-Bolsheviks in it, but was run by the GPU. The story is that it managed to lure in two dangerous enemies, the Social-Revolutionary Boris Savinkov and the British agent and supposed super-spy 'Sidney Reilly', whose real identity remains a matter of dispute. Since both men were easily caught, the GPU must have had plenty of defectors or

infiltrators, though I keep an open mind about the various detailed stories that have been circulated.

(Reilly posed as Irish, but may have been a Ukrainian Jew originally called Zigmund Markovich Rozenblum, or perhaps Georgy Rosenblum. He may have been the product of an adulterous relationship.⁶⁸ This last is the view presented in a 1980s ITV mini-series called *Reilly, Ace of Spies*.⁶⁹ Trying to find out the truth about secretive professional liars is a hopeless task, so I simply set out the possibilities.)

The vast conspiracy of the 'Trust' may be largely fictional. But similar scams – us against them or them against us – are very popular in Western thriller-fiction. They must sometimes happen in real life.

Smedley herself was hostile to organisation but often inclined to hard-line attitudes, as she was to show later during the Xian Incident, when she wanted Chiang Kai-shek to be put on trial and executed as a traitor to China. She seems in her earlier books to have accepted the official line without question: note for instance her use of the awkward phrase 'revolting people', the sort of thing you get when Chinese try to express their views in English. Smedley usually smoothes this into good English, but here she seems to have been mostly repeating what she was told.

What Smedley says later on supports the notion of the opposition to Zhu and Mao including independent leftists who made an alliance with the enemy in the hope of becoming a functional Third Force:

"In the midst of this victory that crushed the first offensive against the Soviets, reports came in that three A.B. leaders in Fu-tien district, bordering Kian, had led a counter-revolutionary uprising. The students in the Red Army Military academy had fought, but half of them were disarmed and imprisoned and many shot.

"But still the A.B. leaders in Fu-tien dared not show their true colours. Knowing the strength of the Revolution, they had to stage their revolt under the red banner of the Soviets... They set up their own Provincial Communist Party Committee, and they captured, imprisoned, and killed hundreds of men and women who refused to surrender to them. They called mass meetings and declared that they were the only true Communists, that Mau Tse-tung was a 'Party Emperor' and Chu Teh another dictator.

⁶⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Trust

⁶⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidney_Reilly

⁶⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reilly,_Ace_of_Spies

"Before the Red Army could move down on them, the second White war on the Soviets began. After a series of sweeping victories, the Red Army moved rapidly eastward... defeated two White divisions, and marched into three Soviet districts where there had been an uprising against the Soviets. The Red Army smashed the uprising, captured its leaders, raided their homes and headquarters, and unearthed new counter-revolutionary documents.

"The two chief documents found in Fukien were these: one agreement between the A.B. Society and the Social Democrats, with ten points carefully outlined. The tenth point declared that the A.B. Society would provide the Social Democrats with funds.

"The second document was an agreement between the Social Democrats and the 'Trotskyist Opposition' [sic]. The Trotskyists had been allowed to maintain their own program, but the Social Democrats were to supply them with money. The Social Democrats and Trotskyists had staged the uprising against the Soviets in western Fukien Province." (Ibid., pages 268-9.)

An Armed Social-Democrat Speaks

Smedley was telling what she believed to be the truth. But she was getting the official party line, which often lumped together various foes as if they were a single movement with one intent. This is a feature of Leninism in general: a source of both strength and weakness.

To create an efficient organisation with iron discipline is hard enough: to create one that also has a nuanced and sympathetic attitude to people who are trying to destroy them is more than human nature is capable of. Most commentators on Leninism simply fail to think the matter through. (And also fail to think about what various Anglo nations have done when faced with a war they saw as a matter of simple survival.)

My guess is that many of the Fukien rebels were authentic leftists caught up in conspiratorial politics. They'd managed to form their own small Red Area in the Tungku and Hsinkwo area, but done so under the banner of the Chinese Communists, who were much better known. Much more respected after their amazing growth during the period of alliance with the Kuomintang. This status was the fruit of the 'disastrous' alliance with the Kuomintang: without it there might have been little reason for the mass of radical Chinese to have treated Leninism as a more serious option than other radical creeds. There had indeed been a strong Anarchist movement in China: the Communists absorbed much of it

and marginalised the rest.

Note also that the Chinese name for their Communist Party is literally 'Share-Production Party' and so might suit Social Democrats as much as Communists. For that matter, the Bolsheviks had called themselves Social-Democrats when they staged the October Revolution, and only revived the name Communist Party in 1918.

We know of at least one Fukien rebel willing once caught to identify himself as a Social Democrat and justify himself as such.

"The full report of the trial of one prisoner was published in the Chinese Soviet Press. The prisoner was a man by the name of Chiang Tsi-hwa. The chairman of the Tribunal had said:

"Here before you sit thousands of people. You now have a brilliant opportunity to agitate for your Party. Speak – why did you join the Social Democratic Party and lead this uprising?"

"Chiang spoke. The Communist Party policy was often wrong, he said. He believed in equality, in freedom, he believed in a Peasant League Government, but not in the Soviets. He believed that land should not be confiscated and divided, but only that rent should be decreased by twenty-five percent, and interest on money loaned the peasants lowered. This program was supported by the peasants, he declared...

"In the final judgement, the chairman had answered him:

"Only the landlords and the rich peasants can ever agree with a program like yours, for the mass of poor peasants and agricultural laborers wish to pay no rent at all. They have no desire even to borrow money, let alone pay interest on it.

"You have said the Communist Party has made mistakes. Yes, we know that. We have made many. But we try to correct our mistakes, while you used them as an excuse to become an active counter-revolutionary..."

"The anti-imperialist united front which the Communist Party long ago made with the Kuomintang you have used as a rusty dagger to stab us in the back. Here is your agreement with the Social-Democrats! The Social-Democrats made their agreement with the A.B. Society, and the Abists make theirs with the imperialists. You are all links in one counter-revolutionary chain." (Ibid., p269-271)

Unsurprisingly, the man got a death sentence. What is surprising is that those who say Mao went too far pay almost no attention to those who tried for a more moderate line. Of course you might seriously doubt that a more moderate revolutionary program could even have won the necessary mass support,

which rested on poor peasants. But those who take it on themselves to sneer at Mao's highly successful revolution ought to have some coherent alternative in mind. Mostly they don't, apart from the current hazy notion that 'capitalism' would have elevated China eventually.

The Fukien rebellion may have been one of the very few occasions when non-Communist socialists have had their own armed forces. (Excluding socialist-influenced organisations like the Provisional IRA, whose main aim and purpose is nationalist). The only other case I can think of was the short-lived Menshevik Republic in Georgia. And the Spanish Socialists when in government before the Spanish Civil War also formed a 'Republican Guard'. It was important in the failure of the initial military coup, along with resistance from some of the existing Civil Guard.

In Fukien, some of the other leaders of the revolt reportedly did admit to being members of the Anti-Bolshevik Society, while making various justifications for their policy as the best way forward. It seems to have been an alliance of incompatible elements.

Whatever the intentions of these Chinese Social-Democrats and other mixed leftists, the right-wingers who subsidised them got their money's worth. My belief is that they'd only have lasted for as long as the warlords found them useful. Though the Comintern made errors, the guiding hand of the Comintern did prevent the factionalism that weakens most Far Left movements. Where several armed groups try to carry through a revolution for the same broad purposes, the norm is for all of them to fail.

Smedley Once Again Ignored

The matter of the A.B. Group is part of the story of Chinese Communism and of Mao's rise to power. But the conventional story always is that these were loyal Communists picked on for no rational reason. No one seems to want to think about them as an alternative approach which should be considered on its merits.

Stuart Schram's 1966 biography of Mao is much friendlier than anything found today: yet he totally ignores both *China's Red Army Marches* and *Chinese Destinies*. He does cite *The Great Road* on some minor matters. He ignores its account of the A. B. Group (which I quote later on). He is somehow certain that the Mao-Zhu Red Area attacked a number of loyal members for no good reason. He doesn't

set out the alternatives and say why he believes this: he fails to share with his readers the possibility of an alternative view.

Smedley's account is as close to an official Chinese Communist account of the matter as one can find. Or at least as can be found in English: but it seems also that the Chinese Communists have been cautious about what they say officially about a period that was complex and involved the reputations of people who played a major role in Chinese Communism later on. As I've mentioned elsewhere,⁷⁰ Deng Xiaoping was very much a follower of Mao at the time, even though he joined Chinese Communism independently as part of Zhou Enlai's group of Chinese students and workers in France.

It is also possible that the attitude to the dissidents was later viewed as too harsh by Mao and others. Maybe delaying land redistribution hadn't been such a bad idea, and more flexibility could have avoided the open break. Much later in North China, the Red Army under Mao would often delay land reform and merely impose a reduction in rents. Some landlords were happy to adopt Communist slogans, so long as they kept possession of their land. Only once they were solidly in control did the party carry through a thorough land reform in regions that had missed it. What happened to the landlords who'd supported the earlier milder policies doesn't seem to be documented anywhere.

Regardless, Smedley insists that there was secret contact with the enemy, and acceptance of payments from them. That there was a revolt in which people loyal to the Zhu-Mao line were killed. That makes a gigantic difference to how one views the subsequent purge and executions.

If people think Smedley's account is wrong, they should summarise it and say why they think it wrong. But Western writers have simply ignored this part of her work. She gets a mention for her time in Yen-an, where she was one of several Western observers. But even though she was the only Anglo to write in detail about the Red Areas in the South China, no one takes notice.

The next article in this series will zigzag back to earlier times and tell more about the rise of Zhu Du. *The Great Road* is sadly incomplete about the Red Areas in the South China. But it gives an account of the A.B. Group and its suppression as seen by Zhu:

⁷⁰ Problems 24: *China 1949: Fixing a Broken Society*

"Thinking back on those far-off days, General Chu Teh [Zhu De] admitted that while there were conflicts and contradictions among the counter-revolutionary and imperialist forces, the revolutionaries also had problems not easily solved. For example, he said, upon arriving on Tungku, he and his comrades found a most curious situation among the Communist leaders who controlled the stronghold. These men were the sons of landlords, or even landlords themselves, yet they were by and large young educated men who had played a serious role in the Great Revolution [Northern Expedition] during which period they had become Communists... All of them had taken part in the Nanchang uprising, after which they had returned to their native homes in the Tungku region to begin the agrarian revolution.

"These 'intellectuals,' as General Chu called them, had done everything for the revolution – except divide their own land among their tenants. As benevolent landlords and as natives of the region, they had the support of the peasants and of their own tenants.

"Here, in the midst of the Communist Party and the agrarian revolution which it had begun, were clear remnants of feudalism both in thought and in action. The problem was further complicated for Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh, and their staffs because, at that moment when strong enemy forces were concentrated against the Red Army, they dared not insist that the native Tungku party leaders live up to the program and policies of the cause to which they had pledged their lives. To have insisted on this at such a moment might have precipitated a serious internal struggle. The Red Army, therefore, could only wait for the revolutionary ferment to work among the Tungku masses.

"This ferment worked about a year later, when the agrarian revolution swept Kiangsi like a flame. The Twentieth Red Army Corps of Tungku natives, whose commanders and political leaders were members or followers of the Tungku leaders, arose in insurrection against the Red Army. Fearful of their own peasant troops, the commanders of this army dared not denounce the Communist Party and the Red Army as such. Instead, they denounced Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh as false Communists, and set up their own small Communist Party.

"Of all such local leaders, only one remained loyal to the Red Army. This man, later chief of staff of the Fifteenth Red Army Corps, was still with the Red Army in 1937 when General Chu talked to me."⁷¹

After an account of the failed 'Li Lisan Line' of attacks on large cities, Smedley tells of what they found after capturing a small city called

Kian:

"General Chu remembered Kian especially because there he unearthed important documents in enemy military headquarters...

"The other captured documents dealt with the so-called Anti-Bolshevik, or A. B., Corps, a cloak-and-dagger outfit of Kuomintang secret police which had a network of sabotage and terrorism throughout the Soviet areas. The documents filled General Chu with foreboding because the names of A. B. members in the Soviet area were given in code which the Communists were unable to break for many months... There had been enough carelessness, however, to provide important clues, such as a receipt for money openly signed by a landlord in the Tungku-Hsingkuo Soviet District. One of the chief Communist leaders in this district, Li Wen-ling, was the son of this same landlord...

"Chu Teh's method of dealing with the problem was to go directly to the troops, explain all the tactics employed by the A. B. Corps, and urge vigilance. Specially trained bodyguards protected him, Mao, and other leaders, but three of these bodyguards were secretly murdered before the back of the A. B. Corps was broken forever."⁷²

The unfinished biography then tells of the wider campaign, before returning to the matter of the A. B. Corps / A. B. Group. (I'd suppose that Smedley used different English translations at different times for the same Chinese term.). What Zhu says comes as a digression in an account of a major battle:

"General Chu digressed to tell of treachery in the ranks of the Red Army itself, a treachery which threatened to turn the tide in favor of the enemy. In the midst of weeks of fighting, he said, Liu Ti-tsao, son of a landlord, led his Twentieth Red Army of Tungku peasants in mutiny...

"Liu Ti-tsao and Li Wen-ling, the chief political leader in the Tungku-Hsingkuo area, whose family was proved to be in connection with the A. B. Corps, had been among the most determined followers of Li-Lisanism which Chu Teh and Mao were fighting... Despite all the complications and confusion General Chu was convinced that landlordism in Tungku, which the Communists had not yet cleared out, was the real cause of the mutiny of the Twentieth Red Army.

"Of course Liu and Li did not dare expose their real motives to their peasant troops. They therefore accused Chu Teh of being 'just another Chiang Kai-shek' and Mao Tse-tung as a 'Party Emperor' who had betrayed the Communist Party. Their oratory

⁷¹ Smedley, Agnes. *The Great Road: The Life and Times of Chu Teh*. Monthly Review Press 1956. p242-3

⁷² Ibid., page 280-1. Smedley was often inconsistent in the way she transliterates Chinese names. Her earlier book had Hsingkuo: here it is Hsingkuo.

produced the desired mutiny and they killed many Communist leaders in the Fukien region. They fled subsequently into Kuomintang territory west of Kian where they established their own small Communist Party and began turning out one confusing manifesto after another. In one such document Chu Teh was suddenly praised as a noble soul while Mao was branded as a traitor, while in another Mao was praised and Chu denounced.

"Despite all their camouflage, General Chu declared, the Red Army judged by facts, and these facts were clear; the Kuomintang armies took no action whatever against these mutineers. In the end the Tungku peasants began to realise it too, escaped and made their way back to the parent body, where they were accepted, reorganized and reeducated.

"Yet the mutiny had enabled the Kuomintang **Nineteenth Route Army** to occupy Hsingkuo, and General Chang Hwei-chang's 28th Division to occupy Tungku. The partisans and people on Tungku had fought the enemy but their villages had been destroyed and hundreds of people were killed. Finally they fled eastward to the main body of the Red Army. (Ibid., page 286-7. Emphasis added.)

Smedley misses the significance of it being the 19th Route Army that was involved. Or else she never got time to write it up, dying after a surgical operation in 1950 while trying to get a passport that would let her return to China. Regardless, the involvement of this particular unit strengthens my belief that it was indeed some sort of left-wing alternative rather than self-conscious treason.

The 19th Route Army was one of many that was nominally under the command of Chiang Kai-shek and his branch of the Kuomintang. It actually had its own agenda and no loyalty to the man. Most of the dubiously loyal were warlord forces, many of which surrendered largely intact to the Chinese Communists after suffering defeats in the final Chinese Civil War of 1946 to 1949. But the 19th Route Army

was in its intentions a genuine Third Force, which later tried to make a space for itself between the Communists and Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang.

The 19th Route Army had distinguished itself fighting the Japanese in Shanghai in early 1932, as I mentioned earlier. Let down by Chiang and sent away to the Chinese province of Fujian, they rebelled against Chiang in 1933 and formed the short-lived *People's Revolutionary Government of the Republic of China*. They also renamed their army the *People's Revolutionary Army*. (Note that this is similar to the name that the Red Army was later to adopt in its later more moderate phase in North China: the *People's Liberation Army*.)

When the Fujian rebellion happened, the Communist Party refused to seek an alliance. Mao later condemned this as an error, one of many 'leftist' or over-aggressive policies imposed on him by higher party authorities before the Long March.

The whole matter of the A.B. Group and the failed attempt to form a Third Force needs to be investigated by some historian who can read the accounts in Chinese. But I'm not hopeful that this will happen any time soon. Both phases of the Chinese Civil War, 1927-1936 and 1946-1949, get nothing like the attention they deserve from Western sources: and there is even less available in English from Asian sources. The first phase, from which Mao emerged as leader of Chinese Communism, is particularly neglected. Neglected even though I'd see it as the key to understanding everything that has since happened in China. Doubly so since the various Communist Party heritages are becoming increasingly important under President Xi.

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