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# PROBLEMS

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## New Series, Number 27

### China: Agnes Smedley's Battle Hymn Against Japan

by Gwydion M Williams

Smedley as Stranger In Her Own Land

Chinese Trotskyism

The little-known Trotskyist influence on Khrushchev

Witness at Xian – and Loose Cannon at Xian

A Failed Sexual Revolution at Yen'an

Singing a Battle Hymn of China

Persecution by the Ignorant and Powerful

Death and Unjust Neglect

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# China: Agnes Smedley's Battle Hymn Against Japan

## by Gwydion M Williams

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### A Stranger In Her Own Land

In May 1941, an American woman arrived in California. She had no job and no regular home. She was isolated and unwell. She had once been prominent in China's weak non-Communist left. More than that: she had once been an unofficial voice for the Chinese Communists to the wider world. But she had now quarrelled with both the Communist and major non-Communists and was isolated.

"A timeworn Agnes Smedley, now forty-nine years old, arrived penniless in Los Angeles in late May of 1941...

"Except for a brief visit in 1934, she had been out of the country for twenty-one years."<sup>1</sup>

Agnes Smedley was born in Missouri, raised in Colorado, but found her identity as a woman among radicals in New York. She'd become involved with Hindus who were planning a rebellion against the British Empire during World War One. A rebellion in parallel with Ireland's 1916 Easter Rising, but this Indian effort was small and scattered and has been largely written out of history.<sup>2</sup>

Smedley had also gone way beyond the female norms of her era – a white woman with a Hindu lover. For most Westerners this was unusual and unacceptable until the 1960, or

maybe later.

Imprisoned for her anti-British activities in 1918, Smedley was indicted but never actually charged. The accusations were dropped, but during the early 1920s 'Red Scare' that gripped the USA, Smedley left illegally for Germany. In the Weimar Republic, she flourished as an independent leftist. This included writing the book that made her famous, *Daughter of Earth*. Highly successful at the time, it went out of print but was revived in the 1970s by modern Feminists.

After completing the book and before publication, Smedley moved to China. She did this with the help of the Comintern, since she was relatively safe there as a US citizen. That was in 1928, after Chiang Kai-shek had broken his alliance with the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party. Chiang hadn't dared touch the privileges of powerful foreigners, so citizens of the USA and several other Western nations had extraterritorial status, untouchable by normal Chinese law.

That Smedley went as an independent leftist and not a member of any Communist Party was odd. But remember, the Comintern and the Soviet Union at the time and for many years afterwards believed that China's immediate future lay with left-wing nationalism. They saw no chance of Communism in a land where factory workers were a tiny minority.

Smedley thought otherwise, and was correct. She was a gifted journalist who publicised the original South China Red Area in Jiangxi led by Zhu and Mao. She reported it

<sup>1</sup> MacKinnon, Janice R and Stephen R. *Agnes Smedley: the life and times of an American radical*. University of California Press, 1988. Page 233

<sup>2</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu%E2%80%93Gaman\\_Conspiracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu%E2%80%93Gaman_Conspiracy) for more about this.

in newspapers and featured it along with other Chinese topics in her second book, *Chinese Destinies*. And then wrote another entire book about them; *China's Red Army Marches*.

In the previous issue of this magazine,<sup>3</sup> I mentioned how both books get ignored by Western experts, even though Smedley met men who'd been involved in the fighting and seems to have accurately reported what they told her. Both books are out of print, and the cheap second-hand editions I got a few years back are no longer available. The Chinese Communists should do something about it. They currently take little interest in presenting sympathetic outsider views of their Deep Past to English-language readers.

At the time, Smedley counted. Returning to China from visits to Moscow and the USA in 1934, she found herself targeted:

"Agnes returned to Shanghai in October 23, 1934. Agents of Madam Sun met her boat and spirited her away. To shake off possible pursuers, they bore her through the streets for hours before concealing her in a hospital. Government authorities had not appreciated Agnes's impassioned tales of dynamic, idealistic guerrilla forces triumphing over depraved, mercenary KMT troops. More troubling still was her gift for making accessible what had until then been considered strange and remote histories."<sup>4</sup>

"Despite official efforts to restrict access to Agnes's writings, however, *Chinese Destinies* and *China's Red Army Marches*, her first two volumes on China, were widely available, both in underground English versions and in Samizdat Chinese translations that were passed hand to hand. Their publication made Agnes a legend in Shanghai – and the most talked-about foreigner in China."<sup>5</sup>

"Agnes' extrality [extraterritorial status] afforded her protection from the political excesses of the Nanking government, but Chinese officials were still intent on limiting her influence. That December, they formally banned *China's Red Army Marches* – making it one of only three foreign publications so proscribed. They also had a hand, evidently, in a spate of articles that appeared in the Japanese and Chinese press near the end of 1934 accusing Agnes of being a 'notorious international spy' for India in London and Paris during World War I."<sup>6</sup>

As I said earlier, China needs to publicise its Deep History among English-speakers. The

helpful things said by its friends, and also the nonsense talked by the various foes of Communist China. Smedley had been a conspirator in a small movement of anti-Imperialists from British India. She had been in no position to spy on anyone, particularly not in London or Paris. She had not even left the USA until after the war.

The biography's notes list the accusations as coming from the *Central China Daily News*, which was aligned to Wang Jingwei. He had been a weak leader of the Left Kuomintang in 1927: by the 1930s he had switched to being an admirer of fascism, while also intermittently working with Chiang Kai-shek. During the Sino-Japanese War he defected, initially trying to negotiate peace with the Japanese independently of the government of China. By 1940 he had become an outright puppet, heading a 'Reorganized National Government of the Republic of China' on their behalf. (He died in 1944, and was briefly buried near to Sun Yatsen, the founder of the Kuomintang and major hero to almost all Chinese. Understandably, his tomb was destroyed and his body burnt by the returning Kuomintang.)<sup>7</sup>

### Trotskyism in China

Wang Jingwei was not the only person to make strange alliances. Smedley suspected that some old friends had become enemies willing to work with the most dangerous foes of all left-wing causes:

"During her previous sojourn in Shanghai, the pieces charged, she had worked for the League Against Imperialism in the employ of the Soviet Union. Now, they claimed, she worked with Madam Sun, the CCP, and two representatives of the Communist International 'in connection with an international espionage organization.'

"Much of the information, of course, was true; Agnes suspected Harold Isaacs had provided fodder for the attack. Since his conversion to Trotskyism, Isaacs had become intensely antagonistic. But during the early days of their collaboration, Agnes confessed to Edgar Snow, she had often confided in Isaacs. 'Yes, Isaacs is an Isaac-ist,' she wrote. 'Down here the Japanese secret anti-Communist service are glad to announce among themselves that they are now working with Trotskyists through spies who pretend to the Trotskyists. They are – really, and the Trotskyist gang here hate me so much that they have told everything they know about me to them... Every Communist fears them more than active KMT spies'"<sup>8</sup>

Note that she does not say that the

<sup>3</sup> Problems 26: *Smedley: an American Woman Who Loved China's Red Army*

<sup>4</sup> Price, Ruth. *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*. Oxford University Press 2005. Page 256.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, page 258

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 260-261

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang\\_Jingwei#Death](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Jingwei#Death)

<sup>8</sup> *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, page 261.

Trotskyists were insincere: just that they were being used and had been infiltrated. A similar opinion was held by another Independent Leftist, the famous Chinese writer Lu Xun, best known for *The True Story of Ah Q*. He got a letter from a Trotskyist, saying in part:

"After the failure of the 1927 Revolution, instead of withdrawing in order to prepare for a come-back, the Chinese Communists took to military adventurism. Abandoning work in the cities, they ordered Party members to rise everywhere although the tide of revolution had ebbed, hoping to make Reds out of the peasants to conquer the country. Within seven or eight years hundreds of thousands of brave and useful young people were sacrificed on account of this policy, so that now in the high tide of the nationalist movement there are no revolutionary leaders for the city masses, and the next stage of the revolution has been postponed indefinitely.

"Now the Reds' movement to conquer the country has failed. But the Chinese Communists who blindly take orders from the Moscow bureaucrats have adopted a 'New Policy'... They have put away their own banner and confused the people's mind, making the masses believe that all those bureaucrats, politicians and executioners are national revolutionaries who will resist Japan too. The result can only be to deliver the revolutionary masses into the hands of those executioners for further slaughter. These shameless acts of betrayal on the part of the Stalinists make all Chinese revolutionaries blush for shame."<sup>9</sup>

The actuality was that the Second United Front worked, and allowed Mao's followers to organise millions of Chinese who initially just saw them as the best anti-Japanese force. Similar things happened in many countries in World War Two. Pro-Moscow Communists in the Stalin era became vastly more numerous and important, while Trotskyists remained marginal. (George Orwell estimated there were 500 in Britain in the early 1940s.)

Lu Xun replied to this as follows:

"You consider Stalin and his colleagues bureaucrats, and the proposal of Mao Tsetung and others — 'Let all parties unite to resist Japan' — as a betrayal of the cause of revolution.

"I certainly find this 'confusing'. For do not all the successes of Stalin's Union of Soviet Socialist Republics show the pitifulness of Trotsky's exile, wanderings and failure which 'forced' him in his old age to take money from the enemy? His conditions as an exile now must be rather different from conditions in Siberia before the revolution, for at that time I doubt if anyone so much as offered the prisoners a piece of bread. He may not feel so good, though, because now the Soviet Union has triumphed. Facts are stronger than rhetoric; and no one expected such pitiless irony. Your 'theory' is certainly much loftier than that of Mao Tsetung; yours is high in the sky, while his is down-to-earth. But admirable as is such loftiness, it will unfortunately be just the thing welcomed by the Japanese aggressors. Hence I fear that it will drop down from the sky, and when it does it may land on the filthiest place on earth.

Since the Japanese welcome your lofty theories, I cannot help feeling concern for you when I see your well-printed publications. If someone deliberately spreads a malicious rumour to discredit you, accusing you of accepting money for these publications from the Japanese, how are you to clear yourselves? I say this not to retaliate because some of you formerly joined certain others to accuse me of accepting Russian roubles. No, I would not stoop so low, and I do not believe that you could stoop so low as to take money from the Japanese to attack the proposal of Mao Tsetung and others to unite against Japan. No, this you could not do. But I want to warn you that your lofty theory will not be welcomed by the Chinese people, and that your behaviour runs counter to present-day Chinese people's standards of morality.

My own comment on the original criticism would have been:

*Yes, hundreds of thousands of brave young people died. But it was part of a policy that kept Chinese Communism alive as the main challenger to the Kuomintang. That gave hope of eventual triumph (as actually happened in 1949). Real political activity **always** involves mistakes: success comes from learning from such errors. It is futile to wait for some perfect revolution to happen spontaneously.*

*Calling the achievements of the main leftist forces pointless is to unintentionally do the work of the enemy — who have their own viable alternative in Fascism and similar creeds.*

In the dangerous world of the 1930s, Trotskyist were doing damage to those Leftists who had a reasonable chance of positive achievements. And they have gone on doing damage ever since, including disrupting Moderate Socialist movements whenever they manage to infiltrate them. Remarkably barren of positive achievements since they became a distinct movement in the 1920s, they remain utterly convinced that they are the only True Socialists. Certain that rival movements that seem to be achieving something must be denounced as foes of the True Cause. The actual outcome is that they have done huge damage to all forms of socialism, both the harsh but effective 'Stalinist' Leninism and the softer and also-effective methods of the better Moderate Socialists.

### **A Digression on Global Trotskyism**

The return to prominence of Trotskyism from the 1960s coincides very nicely with the decline of socialism in Western Europe and the USA. The socialist movement undoubtedly needed to re-think what it was, after its successes in the 1940s and 1950s. But Trotskyism pointed everyone in just the wrong direction. The broad outlook should have been that both Leninism and the existing blends of Moderate Socialism had been grand successes, but were now outdated. The Trotskyist message was that these had all been betrayals and disasters, with the Trotskyists the only True Faith. Vast numbers who had been influenced by Trotskyism hung onto the notion that socialism had failed, and turned readily to the New Right. (Which

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lu-xun/1936/06/09.htm>'.

also has renegades from Trotskyism among its leading thinkers.)

But the biggest damage of all was done by a man who'd been briefly a Trotskyist before switching to make a grand career supporting Stalin. That was Nikita Khrushchev, and his Trotskyist links get overlooked. So I'll briefly digress from China and Smedley to document them.

Khrushchev's early Trotskyism is mentioned in passing in Simon Sebag Montefiore's books on Stalin. He makes little of it: I was keen to know more. Via the Wikipedia, I got to an informative biography of Khrushchev by William Taubman:

"It is all too easy to imagine Khrushchev's falling for Stalin's simplified, primer-level Marxism during these years. In fact, however, he briefly joined Trotskyite oppositionists in rejecting the Stalinist line, a grave political error that later placed his career, and even his life, at risk.

"In 1923,' Khrushchev said in his memoirs, 'when I was studying at the workers' training program, I was guilty of Trotskyite wavering... I was distracted by Kharechko, who was a rather well-known Trotskyite... I didn't stop to analyze various tendencies in the ... party; all I knew was this was a man who had fought for the people before the revolution, fought for workers and peasants.'

"Trofim Kharechko was a prominent Bolshevik who had signed the Declaration of Forty-six. Since the issue of internal party democracy (or rather the lack thereof) was hotly contested, Khrushchev must have known what he was doing. He certainly couldn't admit that while Stalin lived, however, and he never did afterwards either."<sup>10</sup>

Looking for more details, I asked around and got an interesting reply on a highly-useful question-and-answer forum called *Quora*:

"Alexander Bunn: 'Dear Mr. Williams. In your article about Leo Trotsky, you ask to let you know about any information regarding Nikita Khrushchev links to Trotsky. In Russian version of Wikipedia Khrushchev article there is direct quote from Lazar Kaganovich memoirs indicating that Nikita Sergeyevich was a Trotskyist. The English version has just a narrative stating same...

"Translation is mine:

"L.M. Kaganovich recalled: 'I've been moving him up since I found him capable. But he was a Trotskyist. And I reported to Stalin that he was a Trotskyist. I said that, when he was elected head of Moscow Committee. Stalin asked: 'How is he now?'. I said, 'He is fighting the Trotskyists. Actively acts against them. He is fighting sincerely'. Stalin, then: 'you will speak at the Conference on behalf of the CENTRAL COMMITTEE, saying that the CENTRAL COMMITTEE trust him'."<sup>11</sup>

Stalin gets denounced for being too suspicious. In the case of Khrushchev, he turned out to have been nothing like suspicious enough. The man

would have remained insignificant if Stalin had not chosen to raise him.

Stalin's 'simplified, primer-level Marxism' was something that could be taught quickly to large numbers of ordinary people. Something which made them highly effective. It allowed for brilliantly successful mass politics. The sophisticated ramblings of post-Khrushchev Marxism have had a blighting effect on every movement that took them seriously. What were once huge Communist Parties in Western Europe have withered and are in terminal decline. Likewise various pro-Moscow nationalist regimes in Africa and the Arab world.

Taubman's book is also inaccurate about the 'Declaration of Forty-six'. It began:

"The extreme seriousness of the situation forces us (in the interests of our party, in the interests of the working class) to tell you openly that continuation of the policy of the majority of the Politburo threatens the entire party with grave misfortune. The economic and financial crisis beginning at the end of July this year, with all the political consequences flowing from it, including those within the party, has mercilessly revealed the inadequacy of the party leadership, both in the economic realm, and especially in the area of inner-party relations."<sup>12</sup>

It was directed against the party majority led then by Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin. It led on to the formation of the United Opposition, with Trotsky as its leader. But this Opposition failed to win over the majority of the party. Everyone agreed that there were problems, but did the Opposition have any idea how to fix them? Their heirs in Global Trotskyism are always unsuccessful and always blame someone else.

Khrushchev dropped overt Trotskyism, but it seems the ideas never left him. His sudden unbalanced denunciation of Stalin left the whole global Communist movement baffled and confused. It never did resolve the matter before its final collapse, simply because there was no logic to Khrushchev's view of Stalin. It was Lenin supported by Trotsky and the other leading Bolsheviks who decided that they should take complete power and criminalise all opposition. Only when he personally found his powers reduced did Trotsky start talking the language of Open Democracy – but without showing any doubts about the earlier creation of a One-Party State.

I'm not saying things should have stayed unchanged. Khrushchev might usefully have got it agreed that Stalin had made errors, as was done for Mao by the post-Mao leadership under Deng. But Deng never doubted that Mao had made Chinese Communism a grand success, after taking over during the Long March at a time when it risked being marginalised. Lenin's work was just as much at risk in the 1920s, and the consequences of failure would have been even more serious. Without Mao, China today would probably be as big a mess as Burma or most of Africa. Without Stalin showing that Leninism could make the Soviet

<sup>10</sup> Taubman, William. *Khrushchev : The Man and His Era*, The Free Press, Simon & Schuster 2003. Page 57.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.quora.com/Did-Stalin-try-to-implement-a-totalitarianism-government/answer/Gwydion-Madawc-Williams/comment/21959174>. My article is on-line as <https://gwydionwilliams.com/history-and-philosophy/why-trotsky-politics-achieved-nothing-solid/>

<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Declaration\\_of\\_46](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Declaration_of_46)

Union vastly richer and more powerful than Tsarist Russia had been, left-wing politics might have been discredited and Fascism would have been the new model.

Up until they found themselves attacked by Fascist governments and reliant on the Soviet Union, the 'capitalist democracies' were friendlier to Fascism than to Moderate Socialism, never mind Communism:

- Britain had a 'National Government' in which the Tories ruled along with 'National Liberal' and 'National Labour', bringing Britain closer to being a one-party state than it had been since Cromwell's time.
- In the USA, Roosevelt's New Deal was dependent on the votes of Southern Democrats dedicated to White Racism and Segregation. The US armed forces were strictly segregated and had clashes with the British over this during World War Two. Britons would mostly accept small number of famous, useful or well-off non-whites.
- Poland as restored to sovereignty by Pilsudski had a lot in common with Fascist Italy and Fascist Spain. It was also hostile to Jews, pressurising them to convert or emigrate.

There were many other cases: home-grown fascisms or movements with similar ideas and values, like Salazar in Portugal. It was Soviet success that caused the rest of the world to copy ideas that were previous held by only the Soviets and by a scattering of left-wing groups with no real power.<sup>13</sup> It was Soviet influence that purged the left of racism and also marginalised left-wing versions of eugenics (which need not be racist, though it quite often is).

The standard anti-Stalin Leninist argument is that Soviet achievements somehow happened *despite* Stalin than because of him. This isn't how real-world organisations work. In almost any big organisation, it is the top hundred or so managers who give a shape and coherence to everything, for better or worse. Sometimes the official Top Man (or occasionally Top Woman) is a figurehead. Sometimes there can be a genuine Collective Leadership, as was true of the classical Roman Republic before its decay. This is also sometimes true in Britain and the USA, but there the system can be shaped or left incoherent by the strength or lack of it of individual Prime Ministers or Presidents.

In the Soviet Union, there was initial collective leadership after Lenin's death. But Stalin had the skills and vision to switch from alliance with Zinoviev & Kamenev to alliance with Bukharin. He then gained supremacy after he and Bukharin split over how to handle a crisis with the peasantry and over the largely-stagnant state of the economy.

Embarrassingly for anti-Stalin Leninism, the Soviet Union before the first Five Year Plan hadn't

improved overall on Tsarist achievements. It impressed Chinese, whose country was vastly poorer than Russia and where the country was split between warlords. It didn't impress many non-Marxist West Europeans or US citizens until Stalin took over and ran the system with great ruthlessness and enormous dynamism. Stalin's system *worked*, and that made all the difference.

Khrushchev was heir to a system that had maybe 50% of the power of the USA. And he made a complete hash of things. He approached reform with a muddled and demoralising ideology. A notion that sin only entered Leninism with Stalin, who played something like the role of the serpent in the *Book of Genesis*.

(There's a book called *Khrushchev Lied* by US professor Grover Furr. It claims that almost all of Khrushchev's accusations in his 'Secret Speech' are half-truths or falsehoods. That the Great Purge involved the entire party leadership, including Khrushchev. I find this very believable.)

Khrushchev's reversal of the verdicts at the 1930s Moscow Trials left the Soviet view of history as an incoherent mess – a mess they never clarified before the final collapse. Half of the oppositionists were re-defined as innocent victims, but the other half were still defined as traitors. Subsequent enemies might also be classed as traitors: Khrushchev used tanks to crush a popular uprising in Hungary, whereas Stalin had been willing to let Yugoslavia go its own way.

When there is no legal opposition, which there had not been since Lenin consolidated the Soviet regime, the distinction between opposition and treason is always hazy. Trotsky himself in the final years before he was murdered was writing fierce denunciations of Stalin for a right-wing British newspaper called the *Daily Express*. You might excuse a left-winger for maybe writing for the *Daily Telegraph*, maybe – it is a serious newspaper with a real concern for hard facts. Writing for the *Daily Express* or *Daily Mail* is something that even a serious right-winger would probably not do.

The Moscow Trials culminated in the official denunciation of Marshall Mikhail Tukhachevsky, a leading figure in the Soviet army. He was one of the few people who might plausibly have overthrown Stalin after Stalin had consolidated his power and popularity in the Party. Tukhachevsky didn't have a public Show Trial: he was tried in secret and shot before most Soviet citizens knew anything about it. He was treated as much too dangerous to be dealt with by normal methods.

Curiously, the same people who think Stalin *should* have been overthrown and replaced are also dogmatically insistent that Tukhachevsky couldn't possibly have been thinking of doing this. They say a lot about the possible creation of false material by the Nazi secret services, but refrain from looking at the man's own views. Don't ask whether he had his own world-vision that was at odds with Stalin's, and much less to modern tastes.

From pro-Soviet sources from the 1930s, I've

<sup>13</sup> <https://gwydionwilliams.com/history-and-philosophy/the-left-redefined-the-normal/>

seen claims that Tukhachevsky's views had quite a lot in common with Fascism – which was something very different from the reactionary values of the White Guards that Tukhachevsky had valiantly fought against in Russia's Civil War. It's quite possible that he had a vision for Russia that he assumed would be compatible with Nazism. That he and others made contacts and got assurances that Germany would keep the peace if Russia fell into turmoil. This would probably have proved a false belief in the long run: but it's an undisputed fact that many people in the 'Capitalist Democracies' took just this view of Hitler before he went to war against them. Where politics was open, there were former leftist who became Fascists, the invention of ex-socialist Mussolini.

I find it significant that there is no English-language biography of Tukhachevsky. Very little except about his military views, where he was undeniably gifted.

Even if Stalin's fears were groundless or excessive, he definitely put the Soviet Union on a footing that allowed for its later triumphs. Suddenly re-casting him as a villain in history made no sense. It has naturally been enormously useful to right-wingers who use it against all socialists, including those who'd been hostile to Stalin.

What Khrushchev should have done would have been to have opened up the question of history, rather than inventing a totally new history and demanding that everyone accepted it. This blunder was compounded by Brezhnev trying to close down the whole matter and leave everything vague.

It's a curious fact that books seeking to justify Stalin could not be published in Russia until after the fall of the system that Stalin had made a grand success. When free debate was finally allowed, the pro-Stalin camp won decisively among ordinary Russians. This bothers the Western experts, whose enthusiasm for free debate and popular choice has a way of wilting when the outcome doesn't suit them.

Things went differently in China. Mao's status was diminished, but he remains honoured. When I first visited China back in 1997, the highest-value banknotes in circulation had him as just the first of four men defined as the 'first generation of leadership'. Other banknotes had other images. This didn't last: currently he stands alone on all notes of the current issue.<sup>14</sup> And China is securely ruled by a managerial elite that is broadly popular, but does not allow opposition parties. A government that cracks down on criticism that is deems excessive. An elite that has also been doing an excellent job in delivering to the people what the vast majority of them actually want. H. G. Wells would probably have approved of them, just as he said of Stalin's Russia, '*I have seen the future and it works*'.

Wishing for something better than the past or

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<sup>14</sup> You can see them at <http://www.liuzhou.co.uk/china/Chinese%20Currency/>.

current working systems of socialism is reasonable enough. Hysterical denials of the power and success of such systems is futile and self-defeating. Denunciation of alternative socialisms as betrayers hurts everyone. (Note that I have called the Trotskyists *ineffective* rather than *insincere*.)

### **Smedley as Agent of Roosevelt**

Back in 1930s China, it wasn't only Leninism that saw friends become enemies. Smedley's return in 1934 was a high point for her. Tragically, her close friendship with Madam Sun (Sun Yat-sen's widow) cooled and then disintegrated. And her special relationship with the Red Army was downgraded.

I said in the previous article that Smedley was probably kept away from the Red Areas by a party leadership that didn't want to give Mao a voice to speak to all China or to the wider world. But with Mao's supporters dominant at the end of the Long March, Smedley could at last have met them. Instead she was passed over:

"Madam Sun's regard for Snow as a respected journalist with excellent media access no doubt also influences her thinking. While Agnes was perhaps the more creative writer, she was well known to be quite Red in her sympathies – more propagandist than journalist. With Snow, it was the other way around. Like Agnes, Snow was sympathetic to the Chinese Communists. He also discretely shared information and participated in the student movement. But Snow's reputation for objectivity gave him a credibility Agnes lacked. Unquestionably, he would be easier to get along with. After their brief, sensitive visit, Madam Sun recommended that the CPC select Snow as the person best suited to meet the Chinese Communists at their Shensi [Shaanxi] base."<sup>15</sup>

Smedley-biographer Ruth Price fails to realise how significant it is to be definite that Madam Sun was behind Edgar Snow's visit to Mao and the new Red Area. She probably got this from Snow's family: but the man himself seems never to have spoken openly about it. When he re-visited China in the early 1970s and also re-issued *Red Star Over China* with notes and commentaries, Madam Sun's position in the new regime was uncertain. The book leaves out her highly significant role.

(It also seems that Snow's book was no longer available to Chinese during Mao's rule. I've not seen Western commentators mention the matter, but when I asked on *Quora*, I was told that it had been banned in 1949, along with much else deemed unsuitable for the new People's China.<sup>16</sup> It had been translated into Chinese in 1938, but became unavailable apart from a 1960s edition confined just to the more trusted Party members. Only in 1979 did it become freely available, with the moderate-sounding Mao of Snow's book suiting the

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<sup>15</sup> *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, page 275

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.quora.com/Was-Edgar-Snows-Red-Star-Over-China-available-to-ordinary-Chinese-during-Mao-rule-And-has-it-ever-been-officially-translated-into-Chinese>

post-Mao leadership.)

Back in the mid-1930s, Smedley's role among China's left sharply declined, quite apart from her being scooped by Edgar Snow. The once-close relationship between her and Madam Sun disintegrated – and Madam Sun counted for vastly more in 'Third-Force' circles. Smedley also antagonised Mao in several ways, including helping cause the failure of his marriage. By 1941, she was an outcast in China, which she'd tried to make her adopted home. Coming back to the USA, she was very much a stranger there.

But then Smedley's luck turned. The Roosevelt administration wanted to push a reluctant USA into war with both Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany. Smedley fitted the anti-Japanese agenda. She was able to write *Battle Hymn of China*, which appeared in 1943. It gave a vivid picture of an abused and heroic China – very useful for the war effort.

"Probably no more than twenty non-Communists in America had much familiarity with the Chinese Communists... One of the very few persons now in the United States who had real up-to-date contact was Agnes Smedley. Therefore her initial appearances in southern California were opportune and welcome to a variety of political circles. In her talks, she effectively projected an image of a working alliance between the Chinese Communists and Nationalists as they waged war against a common Japanese enemy."<sup>17</sup>

In May 1941, before Japan unwisely humiliated the USA by their attack on Pearl Harbour, a lot of people in the USA had felt neutral. Many still saw Chiang as the pro-Russian radical he had once been. And there was widespread sympathy for both Nazi Germany and for Fascism in general. Famous song-writer Cole-Porter's song '*You're the Top*' did apparently at one time include '*you're Mussolini*' among the admirable things that the beloved was compared to in the 1934 musical *Anything Goes*.<sup>18</sup> Lots of other important men and women unambiguously praised Fascist Italy.

By 1943, many things had changed. The USA and the Soviet Union were allies, along with the British Empire under Churchill. In China, Mao and Chiang Kai-shek were officially allies in the anti-Japanese war, though both Mao and Zhu De as commander-in-chief stayed well away from parts of China where Chiang Kai-shek had real power. Liaison was left to Zhou Enlai, who was less at risk. Chiang before the official alliance had offered rewards for the death of all the Red leaders, but that for Zhou was only 40% of that for Mao or Zhu.<sup>19</sup> Zhou also had some security from having been a teacher to many of the top Kuomintang generals in the Whampoa Military Academy before the 1927 split. Among Chinese, it was normal to view a teacher as an additional parent and someone you remained under an obligation to.

By 1943, Chinese Communists and Kuomintang

were already at odds again. But Smedley restrained herself in criticism of the Kuomintang, an essential element in the broad anti-Fascist alliance fighting a World War that had merged with the Sino-Japanese War that began in 1937. They were tying down large number of Japanese troops who would have been dangerous elsewhere, including possibly an attack on the Soviet Union. But she does give a brief history of both herself and China:

"From the day I set foot on Chinese soil, I began gradually to realise that two paths lay before me. I could protect myself from the flood of abandoned humanity by building around myself a protective wall of coldness and indifference, even of hostility. I could learn to curse and strike out at those who molested me; or I could stand in the middle of the stream of life and let it strike me full force – risking robbery, disease, even death. For a long time I chose the latter way; then experience taught me to vary it by protecting myself to a certain extent. In my last years in China I again changed and took the stream full force.

"Some people called me an idealist, others a fool; some called me both. Within my heart was some vague conviction that love and understanding begot love and understanding. For a long time I did not understand that most Chinese believe that all foreigners are rich. Nor did I realize how well dressed and well fed I seemed to the Chinese poor. To them, I was nothing but a source of money. Once, when I fell while crossing a ditch in Peiping [Beijing] and lay unconscious, a crowd of Chinese, including a policeman, gathered around me, staring curiously – perhaps watching to see how a foreigner died. No one offered to help, until by chance a student came by; he directed a ricksha coolie [sic] to take me to a hospital. Never had I felt so alone and deserted."<sup>20</sup>

This was in 1928, when Chinese society had largely broken down. Smedley felt that only the Communists or perhaps a left-wing coalition including Communists could fix it. She expected nothing from Chiang Kai-shek's majority faction of the Kuomintang, and was almost certainly correct. Their later success on Taiwan was based on a society modernised with ruthless efficiency by the Japanese. (They ruled it from 1895, having being awarded it after the First Sino-Japanese War.) The Kuomintang were something very different while still ruling the mainland: also they and other Asian successes would have been unlikely to have received vast US aid had there been no Red China threat. Would not have had considerable freedom to be trade-protectionist and state-interventionist. The USA was also much more tolerant of socialist and nationalist regimes back then, accepting the need to sign up everyone possible to the US side for the Cold War. This was also a time when the USA would have denied that it was still capitalist: the Mixed Economy was seen as the new normal.<sup>21</sup>

Had the USA adopted in the 1950s the policies

<sup>17</sup> MacKinnon & MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley*, page 235

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.strangehistory.net/2015/10/23/mussolini-and-cole-porter/>

<sup>19</sup> Problems 23: *China: Nurturing Red Stars*

<sup>20</sup> Smedley, Agnes. *Battle Hymn of China*. Victor Gollancz Ltd. 1944. Page 28.

<sup>21</sup> *23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism* is useful defence of older anti-Communist norms by South Korean economist Ha-Joon Chang.

initiated by Ronald Reagan and accepted by Bill Clinton, non-Communist Asia would have remained poor. The Maoist vision of World Revolution might well have been realised.

Smedley in 1943 still despised the Kuomintang, and from time to time said so:

"Somewhere in the heaps of propaganda literature I had read that the Kuomintang had 39,000 member. I asked an official if this referred to the whole country or only Nanking. He looked uneasy and answered evasively. The fact was that the Kuomintang had only 39,000 members out of a population of 450,000,000 people, that it had become, in other words, a small closed corporation of government officials and their subordinates."<sup>22</sup>

That's about one party member per 11,000 citizens, whereas the British Conservative Party has one in 435.<sup>23</sup> The Kuomintang did expand later, making membership compulsory for some government employees. But it was always detached from ordinary Chinese.

Smedley saw that China needed to change, and did later change under Mao. Not having any responsibility to actually produce such changes in a complex and dangerous world, she could recognise this while still appreciating as individuals some of the people who were the main problem:

"The patricians of Peiping [Beijing] were a group of men and a few women who had inherited the finest elements of Chinese culture and gleaned the best from the universities of America and England. Few were rich, most of them sprang from landed gentry of moderate means. They were gracious, charming and keen-witted... Though some had been influenced by Christian philosophy, few were Christians and all rejected the Christian idea that man is born evil. They spoke of science and education as the best means towards good ends. They resembled the patricians of ancient Greece; and, **like ancient Greece, their society rested on the backs of men not far removed from slavery.**

"In China, as in classic Greece, 'family women' never associated with men as friends or comrades. Only a few girl students dared become actresses, though many were learning to walk openly in the streets with men friends. **In China, as in Greece, no man of education did physical labour. Theirs was the realm of intellect, and they lost face by physical work.**"<sup>24</sup>

Though Smedley doesn't say it, this is an exact explanation of why the standard Marxist formulas failed in China. The people Smedley describes were part of a vast class that occupied the same economic position as the bourgeoisie in Europe. But the relationship between politics and economics is more complex than Marx had supposed – though the simple vision of the *Communist Manifesto* retains a lot of truth. West Europeans had gained from Christianity a willingness for men with book-learning to also do

physical labour. And when they tried to think about the wider world, their ideas were contradictory. They got a slew of variants on Christianity from Roman Catholicism and various versions of Protestantism, none of them particularly true to the Bible itself. Then there was the very different thinking of Classical Greece and Rome, supposedly reconciled with Christianity by Thomas Aquinas and other theologians, but in fact still unassimilated.<sup>25</sup> But for Chinese, the doctrines of Confucius had been validly though imperfectly implemented in the real world by the Chinese state under various dynasties. In as far as Taoism and Buddhism were alternatives, they mostly encouraged quiet withdrawal from the world.

Chinese who tried to reconcile traditional Chinese philosophy with Western knowledge found it impossible. They had a choice between becoming corrupt cynics, remaining elegantly ineffective or opting for Marxism.

For the ruling Kuomintang, falsehood and fantasy became the norm. Everything was personal. In connection with false stories about Madam Sun Yat-sen, Smedley said:

"My resentment had nothing to do with Madam Sun's personality, for I had never regarded her as sacred. Her ability and knowledge were said to be limited, but she was a woman of integrity and unblemished character. She had even gone into exile rather than permit her name to be misused by the Kuomintang. Both Chinese and Japanese of feudal outlook, I found, often used personal attacks to discredit either women or political movements."<sup>26</sup>

This, I think, reflects the cooling of their former friendship. But Smedley also never forgot which side she was on. And she too was targeted:

"A little German spy, Bernhard, apparently found himself in need of money; so he sat himself down and manufactured a 'diary' of an alleged trip he had made into the Soviet regions of Kiangsi Province [Jiangxi] to attend a Soviet Congress. A foreign newspaper in Tientsin [Tianjin] began to publish it. One diary entry 'revealed' that I had gone to the Soviet Congress 'with a group of Chinese students', taken a case of whisky with me, lived with students in the Soviet capital and caroused drunkenly every night. When the Congress opened, it blithely continued, I had appeared stark naked on the platform, wearing only a red cap, and had sung the International."<sup>27</sup>

The German spy must have picked up ideas from somewhere. Edgar Snow also reported lurid stories told by the Kuomintang of sexual licence in the Red areas, when the reality was the reverse. The Chinese Communists took a broadly puritan attitude: the norm among radical reformers who *successfully* take on poverty and ignorance.

Of course things were much looser in Shanghai.

<sup>22</sup> *Battle Hymn of China*, page 47

<sup>23</sup> 149,800 members in a UK population of 65,102,385, according to the Wiki as at 29<sup>th</sup> July 2016.

<sup>24</sup> *Battle Hymn of China*, pages 40-41. Emphasis added.

<sup>25</sup> For more on this, see Problems 21: *China: Why a sophisticated Empire could not modernise.*

<https://gwydionwilliams.com/42-china/traditional-china-resisted-modernisation/>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, page 47

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, page 74-5

It's not impossible that Smedley did something of the sort among leftists there. She had an attitude in the 1920s and 1930s that took another 30 or 40 years to become the norm: she felt she had the right to do what she please with her own body.

It wasn't just Smedley's reputation that was attacked. Despite being a foreigner, she faced some physical risk:

"Murder was an order of the day in China. Anyone could get an enemy killed by paying a sum to thugs. Tu Yuehseng [Du Yuesheng], leader of the Green Gang of Shanghai had accumulated a fortune from such work – not to mention the opium traffic and 'protection tribute' paid by every Chinese business house."<sup>28</sup>

Since the Kuomintang were in 1943 part of the global anti-fascist alliance, she refrains from mentioning that Du Yuesheng and the Green Gang were extremely close to Chiang Kai-shek. She does however explain how she was threatened:

"I saw two Chinese pass my house repeatedly. Experience enable me to recognise these as members of the Green Gang. Notwithstanding the popular notion that 'all Chinese and babies look alike', Chinese types are of course as distinct as those of any national group. And the Chinese thus is a very distinct type."<sup>29</sup>

The notion of all Chinese looking alike was still around when I was a child, when British people rarely saw Chinese or other East Asians. It has vanished since then. The popularity of Kung Fu films may have helped: the only useful role of an absurdly unrealistic *genre*.

In the grim reality of 1930s China, Smedley tried to do something about the gangsters and other suspicious neighbours:

"When it became plain that the gangsters and the White Russians were there to stay, I went to the American Court and told the special district attorney... He informed me that the Shanghai police had made three futile attempts to have me arrested. Since I lived in the French Concession, he advised me to write a letter to the French Consul General about the gangsters and the detectives.

"I wrote a stinging letter. The next morning a lovely creature in white, with a blond waxed moustache and a dainty walking-stick, called on me. In a high, singing voice he introduced himself as representing the Political Department of the French police. This fairy-like creature draped himself across a chair and sang out:

"Madam, I have called to tell you that the men you call spies and gangsters are unknown to us! I have come to offer you a good French detective to accompany you wherever you go. We desire only your comfort and safety.'

"I need none of your detectives to protect me from your spies and thugs!' I exploded. 'Please turn on the street light in front of my house and call off your dogs. If you don't I'll create an international scandal that will make the French Concession stink even more than it already does...

"Those are your men, and the French Concession smells to high heaven of gangsters and opium and

prostitution and White Russian thugs and whores!'

"The fantastic creature rose on its hind legs, bowed, and cried: 'Adieu, Madam, adieu!'

"He walked off, swaying elegantly, one hand on his hips.

"To my amazement, the street light was turned on that night and the 'art shop' folded up and vanished. Once more, I realized that as an American I had some protection. But the Chinese still had none."<sup>30</sup>

Presumably they were trying to intimidate her out of her work for the Chinese left, which would have become impossible with a French detective assigned to her. It would also have been another 'nice little earner' for a corrupt police-force. She might have backed down and had a comfortable existence as a journalistic sycophant. Instead she took chances and survived as an honest voice.

This incident also shows why moderate reform was entirely impossible in China under the 'Blue Republic'. On paper it was an 'open society': but if you looked like succeeding you would be destroyed. It wasn't a regime that was repressive but progressive, of the sort that the Kuomintang later achieved on Taiwan. It was hopelessly corrupt and intertwined with gangsterism.

Gangsters can't run a society: they can only live off it. Without an efficient state to curb them, they parasitize everything productive and reduce the total wealth of the society. The warlords failed to control them – there were indeed no sharp lines between warlords, bandits and gangsters. The Kuomintang had the possibility of being something more, but under Chiang Kai-shek they took the easy and fatal path of working with gangsters and warlords and crushing their own radicals.

They also had no clear idea of what to do about the Chinese Communists. Mostly they told lies:

"At the end of one six-month period I compiled official statistics and found that half a million Red soldiers had been reportedly slain, yet official releases still claimed that the Red Army consisted only of 'bandit remnants' fleeing from their pursuers. Chu Teh [Zhu De], Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army, and Mao Tze-tung, Secretary General of the Communist Party, had been reported killed a dozen times. A month following their 'deaths', new rewards would be placed on their heads." (Ibid., page 57.)

Mao was never Secretary General. He was Chairman of the Soviet Republic from 1931 to 1937, when it officially vanished during the Second Communist-Kuomintang Alliance. Zhang Wentian was Secretary General of the Party from 1935, when Mao helped overthrow the existing leadership at the Zunyi Conference. Mao's power grew gradually, but he acted as the man in charge when he met outsiders like Edgar Snow and Agnes Smedley. This position was formalised in 1943, when the post of Secretary General of the Party was abolished and Mao became Party Chairman.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., page 72

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., page 72

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., page 73-4

## Witness Against the Beast in Xian

Smedley managed to be in Xian when the Xian Incident occurred, changing China forever. Chinese military officers, including those who'd been driven out of Manchuria by the Japanese, had been sent to fight the Red Army. Instead they secretly made peace with it, and openly dissented from Chiang Kai-shek's policies. Smedley knew something of what was happening:

"There was but one place [in China] where Blue Shirt [Chinese Fascist] gunmen were not a menace – the north-west under the Young Marshal, Chang Hsueh-liang [Zhang Xueliang]. Many changes had taken place in the character of the Young Marshal since the time he had been a Manchurian war-lord. The occupation of Abyssinia had destroyed his admiration for Italian Fascism, and under the influence of young men on his staff, he had become a democrat. He had conquered the opium habit and was trying to rid himself of the feudal and militaristic influences of his youth. The National Salvation movement, banned in other parts of China, was protected in his territory... Though under orders from the Government to continue the extermination of the Red Army after its arrival in the far north-west, neither he nor his troops relished fighting their own countrymen while the Japanese were occupying their native Manchuria...

"The Red Army representative, unofficially on the Young Marshal's staff, arranged for me to rest and work in a temple at Lintung [Lintong], some fifteen miles from Sian [Xian]. This was the centre of the great north-western region which had cradled the Chinese race, in which great dynasties had arisen out of the ruins of others and then themselves decayed and been overgrown. There I hoped to regain my health and write another book." (Ibid., p 96-7.)

Ethiopia, then known as Abyssinia, was the final independent survival of Traditional Africa. Italian Fascism had been seen as positive by some anti-colonialists, but it turned out that Mussolini was keen to have his own empire. But note that Mussolini was only definitely aligned with Nazi Germany with an agreement made in October 1936. This implicitly put them on the side of Japan against Kuomintang China, since Hitler had already made that choice and ended German military aid to the Kuomintang. This was later formalised when Italy in 1937 joined the 'Anti-Comintern Pact' made between Germany and Japan in November 1936

The Young Marshal may have correctly guessed that a Fascist future would hold nothing good for even right-wing Chinese. That the whole of China would be awarded to Japan. The Xian Incident happened in December 1936.

Edgar Snow in *Red Star Over China* says that before the Xian Incident, there was a real danger of Kuomintang China joining the 'Anti-Comintern Pact'. I've not got another source for this, but there were certainly many admirers of fascism among the Kuomintang. Most notable was Wang Jingwei, second only in status to Chiang and his likely replacement if Chiang had not survived the Xian Incident. And as I explained earlier, Wang Jingwei later tried playing his own game with Imperial Japan. He ended up as their outright puppet.

A popular book in English about the Xian Incident is badly needed. It is another thing the Chinese government could sensibly sponsor, maybe with a English-speaking author who can also read Chinese, or perhaps a team. They need not be pro-Communist, just anti-Fascist, and *everyone* nowadays is anti-Fascist. The facts would largely speak for themselves, and there ought to be some interesting material from Kuomintang and Western newspapers of the time.

As for Smedley being there: I'd assume the Chinese Communists were not *only* concerned about her welfare. She was there as a spare in case something went wrong with Edgar Snow's visit, which she was not told about. The two of them knew each other, and Snow's mission was happening while Smedley was resting at Lintong. But there was no contact till later.

The book that Smedley was working on would have been called *Chronicles of the Red Army*. It would have been a detailed account of the Long March. It seems also that the Comintern, which had been funding Smedley's work in China, no longer supported her.<sup>31</sup> The Chinese Communists decided to help her instead. But the book she was working on was never completed. Mao made her hand over her notes and sources later on when she was in Yen-an. Probably he didn't trust her after her behaviour in the Xian Incident, which I detail later. He also probably knew that Edgar Snow would be including an account of the Long March in his planned book. But I'm curious as to what happened to Smedley's own unfinished writings about the Long March. Some professional historian should try finding them. With luck there would be enough for an interesting new book.

In the Xian Incident itself, events were unexpectedly dramatic. Chiang Kai-shek flew to Xian, planning to make the dissident generals get back to their anti-Communist war. This was seriously over-bold: the dissident generals arrested him. They demanded he stop fighting the Chinese Communists and instead fight the Japanese. Chiang had allowed the Japanese to keep Manchuria and push beyond into North China.

The danger was that with Chiang arrested, the Kuomintang government would be taken over by people ready to simply submit to the Japanese. Chiang had at least been stalling.

Smedley was there, and saw it all. Her refuge at 'Lintung' was chosen to house Chiang Kai-shek and to host an Anti-Red Military Conference. More accurately, she had been relaxing at Huaqing Hot Springs in Lintong County.<sup>32</sup> This resort was famous for the romantic love story of Tang Dynasty Emperor Xuanzong and his concubine Yang Guifei. A rather grim romance, since the Emperor was forced to have Concubine Yang executed while

<sup>31</sup> Price, Ruth. *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*. Oxford University Press 2005. Page 280

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/attraction/shaanxi/xian/huaqing.htm>

fleeing a rebellion that loyalist troops blamed on the corruption of high-placed relatives of Concubine Yang. Smedley never mentions the story, and seems to have had very little interest in China's Deep History or traditions.

Smedley was one of many displaced by the take-over of Huaqing Hot Springs by Chiang's people. She moved to a guest house in Xian,<sup>33</sup> where she saw events unfolding. At first she misunderstood: she'd been warned about a possible take-over by Chiang's supporters and thought this was it. The anti-Chiang rebellious forces didn't have the discipline of their Communist allies, so the take-over was combined with looting, including Smedley's hotel. She herself was robbed of a fountain pen and a pencil, and the soldiers also stole a woollen blanket from the hotel bed.

Smedley soon learned that the looters were officially on the side of Chinese patriotism and that Chiang Kai-shek had been taken prisoner. The generals holding him put forward a progressive anti-Japanese political agenda:

"The next afternoon witnessed the first of many great mass meetings, and on the 16th Marshall Chang [Zhang Xueliang] spoke at one called by the National Salvation Union. He reviewed the record of Japanese invasion, the Government's actions, and his many controversies with the Generalissimo over a policy which, he pointed out, 'had been a violation of the will of the people'...

"Political prisoners were released, among them three hundred captive Red Army soldiers, fifty-four Red Army women and thirty-three Red Army children. Of the released soldiers, nearly a hundred were sick with fever or had infected wounds. Although I knew only first-aid, I attempted to take care of them, trying meanwhile to secure hospital space for the worst cases and medical care for all...

"The Red Army soldiers were a revelation to me. They were from the Szechuen [Sichuan] Red Army, all poor peasants between the ages of fifteen and fifty. They reminded me of descriptions in books about the Peasants' War in Germany... When I first went among them, they stared at me suspiciously. To them I was a well-dressed 'foreign devil'.

"On the day following the uprising, I was filled with a strange sense of watching history in the making. An airplane took off for the north-west.. brought the first representatives of the Red Army and the central Committee of the Communist Party."<sup>34</sup>

The reference to the '*Peasants' War in Germany*' was probably based on Engels's book about it. He said a lot about the Primitive Communism of some of those who fought in Germany's destructive Thirty Years War. Surprisingly, he failed to make the connection in articles he wrote about the Chinese Taiping: articles published under Marx's name.<sup>35</sup>

In Xian 1936, Smedley found she had a useful

role in the new order:

"A National Salvation newspaper appeared on the second day of the uprising... To combat reports from the Nanking radio that Generalissimo Chiang had been killed, that the Red Army had occupied Sian, and that there was pillage and rape, one of the newspaper editors began to make broadcasts in Chinese, while I undertook to make them in English...

"My talks annoyed the Nanking Government, and months later I heard from American newspaper correspondents that American consular officials in Nanking and Shanghai had even announced a determination to deport me. In an interview with the correspondent of the *New York Times* a Nanking spokesman declared that my talks 'strongly advocated the united-front ideas and other projects conflicting with established Government policies'. The spokesman said nothing about the American Y.M.C.A. secretary who was broadcasting wildly distorted reports from Nanking. I was at least telling the truth."<sup>36</sup>

It's interesting that US officials immediately decided to deport Smedley, when she became important enough to notice. The Kuomintang government could almost certainly have got this done earlier, had they made a major effort. They didn't bother.

Smedley in Xian was playing a role that the Chinese Communists had probably intended for her. But relationships had also become strained in the weak but intricate Shanghai 'Third Force' world between Chiang Kai-shek and Mao. As I said earlier, Smedley's former friendship with Madam Sun had turned sour. Madam Sun may have asked for her to be moved to somewhere where she could do no harm and might do some good.

In this context, I remembered something from Chang and Halliday's mostly-silly *Mao, the Unknown Story*. Madam Sun apparently wrote a letter complaining about Smedley to Wang Ming. They describe him as "the head of the CCP delegation in Moscow".<sup>37</sup> In fact he was the senior representative of the Party to the Comintern, based in Moscow but theoretically the controlling body for all the world's Communist Parties, including that of the Soviet Union. Obviously the reality by then was Soviet domination. But Wang Ming had a very high position in global communism, being an Executive Commissioner of the Comintern and member of the Presidium. Chang and Halliday seem unable to believe that a Chinese in that era could have had anything except a fairly lowly role.

They are equally silly about Madam Sun, saying that she was a Russian agent and describing Wang Ming as her 'controller'. Madam Sun was one of the two strongest surviving leaders in the weak middle ground between Chiang Kai-shek and Chinese Communism (the other being General Feng Yuxiang). She had stuck to Sun Yat-sen's policy of anti-Imperialism nationalism and an alliance with Moscow, something that became quite

<sup>33</sup> *Battle Hymn of China*, page 100

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, page 105-6

<sup>35</sup> See Problems 21: *China: Why a sophisticated Empire could not modernise*. <https://gwydionwilliams.com/42-china/traditional-china-resisted-modernisation/>

<sup>36</sup> *Battle Hymn of China*, page 106

<sup>37</sup> Chang, Juan and Halliday, Jon. *Mao: the Unknown Story*. Jonathan Cape 2005. Note to page 140.

common (though mostly unsuccessful) in Africa and Asia after World War Two. By 1936, both she and Moscow were agreed that the way forward was a broad anti-Japanese coalition. Moscow, at least, wanted it to include Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang had the loyalty of the largest collection of armies in China, armies that still had much of the efficiency they'd gained from Moscow's help before 1927. I'd assume that Madam Sun also saw the vast advantages of a coalition built around Chiang Kai-shek. She maybe also had some regard for him as her brother-in-law: someone she could talk to and sometimes influence.

Smedley was disruptive at a time of great political complexity, and at a time when Madam Sun was in the process of deploying Edgar Snow to raise the profile of Mao and Chinese Communism within China and in the wider world. Getting the Chinese Communists to move Smedley to a quiet place near Xian would have made sense. But the problem is, Chang and Halliday date the communication to 26<sup>th</sup> January 1937. By then, Smedley had moved from Xian to Yenan and was Mao's problem rather than Madam Sun's. If the date had been 1936 rather than 1937, it would make a lot more sense. It is something that a regular historian with access to archives could very usefully look into.

Regardless of this, I suspect that the actual capture of Chiang was unwelcome to Stalin and the Comintern, and probably also to Madam Sun. The idea may have been for the Generals of the North-East to openly rebel and form their own regional alliance with the Communists. But they would also express a willingness to return to obedience if Chiang would opt for active resistance to Japan. On this basis, Chiang's actual capture was a dangerous deviation from Moscow's plans.

I'm also puzzled why someone as experienced in dirty warlord politics as Chiang could have *allowed* himself to be captured. Though it was overtly an unexpected success by soldiers loyal to generals he had no reason to trust, I've a feeling there must have been some covert betrayal by people Chiang did trust. We know that in the final Civil War, 1946 to 1949, there were conversions to the Communist cause by 'insiders', as well as defections by warlords whom Chiang would never have trusted. It might have begun much earlier. Or alternatively, Chiang's capture could have been aided by people secretly working for the Japanese, playing a complex game in the hope of getting Chiang killed or removed from politics. If that had been the case, they would certainly not have wanted it known afterwards. The actual outcome was the exact opposite of what they'd have hoped for.

Chiang's capture threw everything in China into uncertainty. Many different outcomes were possible. Looking back in 1943, Smedley gives one view of this:

"Dangerous news affecting the future of China began to reach us. The first of these reports concerned Wang Ching-wei [Wang Jingwei], former political head of the Chinese government and its ruling party. Wang Ching-wei

had been living in Germany since a young officer of the 19th Route Army had tried to kill him. When Wang heard of the Sian Incident, he rushed to Berlin for a secret conference with Hitler, then took an airplane for China, obviously planning to take over the government."<sup>38</sup>

Wang by 1943 was a Japanese puppet and discredited. In 1936, there may have been others who preferred losing Chiang Kai-shek to fighting the Japanese. And the Japanese knew it:

"Japanese military commanders had also held secret conferences in north China and had warned the Central Government to crush the attempt of the north-western armies to form a united front. General Ho Ying-ching, Minister of War, who for years had been an associate of Wang Ching-wei, began to mass troops at Tungkwan [Tongguan], the mountain pass leading to Shensi Province. [Shaanxi, which had Xian as its capital.] Under the pretext that he was seeking the release of Generalissimo Chiang, he threatened civil war. I wrote a speech warning against civil war, and before broadcasting it submitted it to the Manchurian and Red Army representatives. In it, I compared General Ho Ying-ching and his clique with Wu San-kwei [Wu Sangu], the Chinese General who betrayed the Ming Dynasty and allowed the Manchus to invade and subject China in the seventeenth century.

"Marshal Chang Hsueh-liang [Zhang Xueliang] talked each day with Generalissimo Chiang, urging the end of civil war and advising resistance to the nation's enemy. The Young Marshal had read the Generalissimo's diary and, I was told, was convinced that the Generalissimo really intended to resist the Japanese eventually."<sup>39</sup>

To me, Chiang's release shows the merits of keeping a diary that makes you look like a hero. I don't believe he put his real thoughts there. All along, he had put his own power ahead of China's best interests. As did most warlords, but there were exceptions, most notably Feng Yuxiang. Still, he was essential if China was to resist Japan.

"In the meantime the official Soviet Russian newspaper, *Izvestia*, by publishing an article charging that the Sian Incident was a Japanese plot, virtually warned the Chinese Communists to release Generalissimo Chiang. Perhaps the Soviet Government considered Generalissimo Chiang preferable to Wang Ching-wei, who had openly allied himself with Hitler and Japan. But at the time a wave of cynical resentment against the Soviet Union swept through Sian."<sup>40</sup>

Other sources confirm that Stalin demanded Chiang's release. This angered Mao, but he and Zhou Enlai obeyed. Communist influence was used to help get Chiang freed after he made a hazy commitment to unity against Japan. It remained hazy until the Japanese militarists occupying parts of North China allowed a minor incident near Beijing to escalate into a full-scale invasion. (One of many examples of excess aggression and lousy judgement by those military officers.)

With hindsight, Moscow getting Chiang set free

<sup>38</sup> *Battle Hymn of China*, page 106-7

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, page 106-7

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, page 107

was the right thing to do. Stalin by a series of tricky manoeuvres got Britain and the USA fighting both Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, and dependent on him as their main ally. If you consider the state of the world in 1936, it would have been more natural for the British Empire and the USA to have stood back and let Nazi Germany crush the Soviet Union and other leftist forces. Britain had stayed neutral in Imperial Japan's attempt to conquer China. Many in the USA felt the same, with Japan getting war materials right up until Pearl Harbour.

Helped by foolish aggressiveness by Hitler and by the aggressive and incoherent leadership of Imperial Japan, Stalin managed to get his various enemies fighting each other. For this he is bitterly criticised by leftists who have never achieved anything positive, and probably never will. People who remain convinced that there is some vast hidden reservoir of left-wing power that could easily be tapped were it not for the mysterious wickedness of their rivals on the left. The reality is that no one did better than Stalin and Mao in turning left-wing potential into actual and effective power. Power that was able to crush the gigantic power of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

With the benefit of hindsight, there is no obvious reason why Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan should not have been able to reshape the future according to their own highly unpleasant version of Modernism. Many people at the time expected it. My reckoning is that we were very lucky to escape such a future.

The Anglo centre-right have successfully sold a ridiculous story: the British Empire terrified of a gigantic fascist beast, making compromises out of weakness and fear. The reality was that the British Empire had plenty of ways to make life hard for Japan, but did nothing until Japan attacked it. The reality was that the alliance of Britain, France and Poland was on paper stronger than Nazi Germany. Even Fascist Italy held back until it became clear that Nazi Germany had won an utterly unexpected victory. Imperial Japan was even more seriously under-estimated. And Hitler made a monumental blunder in declaring war on the USA after Pearl Harbour, when there was a sporting chance that the USA would have stayed out of the European war and concentrated on smashing Japan. Roosevelt could not declare war on Germany: only Congress could do this. But in the event, Congress found that war had already been declared on the USA by Germany and Italy. It had little choice but to declare war in return. Roosevelt was then free to concentrate on the war in Europe and let the war against Japan be run as a secondary front (helped greatly by a lucky victory at the Battle of Midway). Hitler gained the advantage of being able to freely attack US ships sending arms to Britain. But he should have been able to reckon that this was far too small a gain for the potential risks. Risks that became decisively real over the next few years.

(Some people may wonder why I speak of Imperial Japan having incoherent leadership. Wasn't Tojo the Big Boss? Well no, he was just

one among many with a viewpoint of aggressive nationalism. He had risen within the army, and in 1935 was made head of the Manchurian section of the Kempeitai. Kempeitai were officially military police, but had branched out into many other activities, including policing the navy and spying. Their role was closer to that of the Nazi's Gestapo.<sup>41</sup> And in this position, Tojo played a role in defeating an attempt by much more politicised military officers to create something closer to European Fascism with the 'February 26 Incident'. He was rewarded by being made Chief of Staff of the Kwangtung Army, Japan's army in Manchuria. His continued rise made him Army Minister in 1940 and Prime Minister in 1941. He was an enthusiast for the war against China, but had doubts about the wisdom of a war against the USA. But unlike Hitler and Mussolini, he and other Japanese leaders had little choice except to wage war or else make large concessions in the face of US power. The USA was forbidding oil supplies that Japan could not do without. Tojo was Prime Minister when Japan attacked the USA, but he never had anything like the personal authority of Hitler or Mussolini. {Though it is moot if he'd have managed Japan's war any better if he had.}}

### **Smedley as Loose Cannon**

As I said earlier, Smedley had come to Xian after quarrels in the world of Shanghai leftism. She had been a leading figure, close to Madam Sun, who carried on the pro-Moscow policies of Sun Yat-sen:

"Smedley had met Mme. Sun Yat-sen in Moscow in November of 1928, when she was on her way to China. In 1929 the two women met again in Shanghai, and within a year Smedley was helping Mme. Sun with correspondence and writing her speeches, especially in regard to the League Against Imperialism... By September of 1929, Smedley felt free to write on the flyleaf of a copy of *Daughter of Earth*, 'To Mme. Sun Yat-sen, whom I respect and love without reserve as a revolutionary who keeps the faith.'<sup>42</sup>

This still applied in 1934, but then fell apart:

"As her Shanghai world began to unravel in the spring of 1936, Smedley's most serious problem was the breakdown in her relations with Mme. Sun, who had been a key figure in her life since 1929... She was ... angry that Smedley sometimes described herself publicly as Mme. Sun's 'associate' or 'secretary'. Mme. Sun, a very private person who wished to avoid being identified with her followers, resented this deeply...

"Mme. Sun soon cut off relations with Smedley entirely, and eventually issued a public statement that Smedley had never been her secretary.

"The estrangement was probably inevitable. Although Smedley and Mme. Sun were both women of action who agreed politically and communicated perfectly in English, Mme. Sun was genteel, emotionally restrained, and taciturn, whereas Smedley was coarse, tempestuous and

<sup>41</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kempeitai>

<sup>42</sup> MacKinnon & MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley*. Page 154

outspoken. Even at the best of times, they probably were never intimate; the clash in style and personality was too great...

"By midsummer Smedley decided she had to leave Shanghai. She was suffocating politically, alienating herself from her remaining friends, and falling into poor health again. Characteristically, her next move was based on an earlier friendship. Liu Ding, the Red Army veteran who she had sheltered a few months before, was now in Xi'an, the biggest city in northwest China, working closely with the Manchurian warlord Zhang Xueliang. When Liu wrote inviting her to come to Xi'an, she accepted immediately. In Xi'an, she could rest, write, and enjoy a more progressive political atmosphere. And there was another attraction: the new base of the Red Army was only thirty-five miles away."<sup>43</sup>

But as I said, Edgar Snow was chosen instead. The politics of the matter were complex:

"During this period [the period of the Long March] the leftists with whom Smedley associated in Shanghai became divided. For example, within the League of Left Wing writers, by late 1935 one group was in contact via intermediaries with Mao in the northwest; but another group, probably the larger one, was receiving directives from Mao's antagonist, Wang Ming, the Chinese Communist Party's man in Moscow in 1935. In early 1936, most Shanghai Communists were still following Moscow's lead: they consistently downplayed the issue of Japanese imperialism in China in favour of promoting class struggle within China and protecting the Soviet Union internationally. But in the spring of 1935, at about the time the Seventh Congress of the Comintern was meeting in Moscow, the Chinese Communist Party had changed its line and called for a united front with all parties and classes against the Japanese."<sup>44</sup>

The Seventh Congress of the Comintern officially endorsed the Popular Front strategy that had already begun before it. It rejected the notion of a 'Third Period' from the Sixth Congress, in which the world was seen as ready for more revolutions. The view then was that the First Period was the Russian Revolution and some failed revolutions elsewhere. The Second Period had been capitalist consolidation. The Third Period was a new crisis – but in practice it had resulted in victories for fascism.

Note also that in Leninist language, a Popular Front is something different from a United Front. A United Front involves Communists working with non-revolutionary organisations and individuals to advance working-class interests. A Popular Front means working with anyone anti-fascist, regardless of their other views. The anti-Japanese alliance in China should have been called a Popular Front. But the term United Front gets used instead.

The Xian Incident was aimed at a Popular Front for China – but would that include Chiang Kai-shek? Smedley was in a position to influence the matter. What she did was something she chose not to mention later in *Battle Hymn of China*:

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pages 168-9

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., page 164.

"Smedley began making forty-minute broadcasts in English every evening from Zhang Xueliang's headquarters. She would summarise major developments of the day in Xi'an and interview key players in the drama, such as Marshal Zhang and General Yang. When her programs were picked up in Shanghai, as intended, they caused considerable stir. Except for the official Guomintang [Kuomintang] communiqués emanating from Nanjing, which were hostile to Zhang and Yang as well as to the Communists, Smedley's reports were the only daily news coming out of Xi'an."<sup>45</sup>

Actually they were the only reports *in English*. The rebels had a radio station and used it, including broadcasts in various foreign languages. And Smedley proved herself to be a 'loose cannon', going for a trial and probable execution for Chiang Kai-shek. This would have been very emotionally satisfying, but politically foolish. The Chinese Communist leadership took a different line, though perhaps only under orders from Stalin:

"Until Chou En-lai's party arrived [Zhou Enlai], the CCP liaison office in Sian [Xian], where Agnes friend Liu Ding worked, was to refrain from expressing any concrete views on the matter beyond resistance to Japan. Although it would be virtually the last occasion on which Stalin exercised great influence over the course of the Chinese Communist movement, Chou En-Lai still preferred waiting to speak until he received the Soviet leader's blessing...

"Liu Ding now called on Agnes... [to try] handling English-language broadcasting at the radio station they had commandeered. (Others would report in French, German, Russian, and Japanese.) The CCP had specifically instructed its liaison office in Sian to refrain from expressing any concrete views on the situation until Chou En-lai's party arrived. Agnes, however, did not feel bound by such constraints.

"In her first dispatch for the radio station... Agnes reported that 'Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, tottering dictator of China, has been arrested as a traitor to his country... The arrest represents the cumulative effect of Chiang Kai-shek's ten-year traitorous betraying, counterrevolutionary policy towards China... Chiang became an obstacle in the path of anti-Japanese war; he had to be removed.'

"Immediately there was a problem. In a telegram whose contents appeared in *Izvestia*, *Pravda*, and elsewhere, Stalin put the CCP on notice that he viewed Chiang Kai-shek's kidnapping as a Japanese plot aimed at creating confusion and civil war in China... In Stalin's opinion, what China needed was a united national front – which in his view the Young Marshal [Zhang Xueliang] lacked the stature to direct. That left Chiang Kai-shek as probably the only person who could lead China in a war against the Japanese. For that reason, Stalin felt that the CCP should do its utmost to effect a peaceful settlement and secure Chiang's release."<sup>46</sup>

I explained earlier why I felt that Stalin was correct in his reading of the power-politics. Both Zhang Xueliang and his father had accepted

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., page 177

<sup>46</sup> Price, Ruth. *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*. Oxford University Press 2005. Pages 286-7

Japanese dominion while ruling Manchuria. Zhang's father was assassinated and Zhang himself driven out because the Japanese were greedy and unrealistic. They had the fault that you often find in a colonial elite: a vast amount of knowledge, but a massive failure of understanding. They tried to rule Manchuria through the insignificant Pu Yi, last Emperor of the Manchu dynasty. They overlooked two key matters:

1. Han migration, officially encouraged in the late 19th century, had swamped the original Manchu population. (Such settlers had previously been kept out: but Russian expansion in Siberia led to a change in policy.)
2. Fallen dynasties were felt to have exhausted their original 'Mandate of Heaven' for those Chinese who thought politically. They were treated politely, but not viewed as serious candidates for a restoration. Only one true restoration ever happened: the Eastern Han, which happened after a usurpation within a dynasty that had still been fairly strong.

It would have been a smart move for Japan to have offered Zhang a limited return to his former domain if he'd dispose of Chiang. Smarter than the Japanese were capable of, as it turned out. But how was Stalin to know that in a live situation?

Nor was a 'Popular Front' without Chiang Kai-shek likely to achieve much. Zhang's father Zhang Zuolin had been a bandit who did well enough to get control of Manchuria. He was loosely aligned with the warlords of the Beiyang Army and took part in their wars, including an unsuccessful war against the Kuomintang armies of the Northern Expedition. But as a warlord, he was ready to switch over to the winner. It may have been this that led the Japanese to assassinate Zhang Zuolin.

Zhang Xueliang as eldest son succeeded him, but it's moot if he'd inherited his father's military skills. If he'd had Chiang Kai-shek executed and attempted to lead an anti-Japanese front, he would have had no natural allies beyond Yang Hucheng, his partner in the Xian Incident. China might have fragmented again, allowing the Japanese to extend their power without a major war. Leaving them free to attack the Soviet Union from the east when the Nazis attacked it from the west. It was Soviet troops moved west that gave the Germans their main setbacks in the first winter of the Soviet-German war. Moved after Stalin decided that the Japanese were not going to attack him. He kept peace with Japan until the fall of Hitler, when the USA asked him to join the anti-Japanese war.

Smedley failed to see the bigger picture. She had an unrealistic belief in the power of revolutionary forces:

"Agnes was livid. How could Moscow not see that the Chinese Revolution had finally come? And if they did, how dare they betray China in this way? No, she decided, she would not be silent, she would not allow the Soviets to get away with this unchallenged... Over the next few days, Agnes used her on-air platform to attack Moscow's position in blistering terms – oblivious, or indifferent, to the furor she

might provoke in official Communist and Comintern circles." (Ibid., page 287).

"CCP political leaders, who were actively struggling to make the rest of the Chinese Communists (and the Chinese people) believe that they could work with Chiang, did not appreciate Agnes's plainspoken denunciation of their position." (Ibid., page 290.)

Despite this, Smedley managed to get herself smuggled into Yen-an, the Communist Party's capital since the Xian Incident. (The warlords who'd staged it had quietly withdrawn and given the city to the Red Army.) There, she found that Mao was not at all pleased with her:

"As retribution for her lack of discipline, Mao informed Agnes that her book on the Long March had been scuttled; he ordered her to return the mass of historical documents, maps, and interview transcripts in her keeping. A 'research committee' in Yen-an, he informed her, would write the book instead. Agnes reluctantly agreed to terminate the project. 'As for the Long Walk (sic),' she wrote Snow soon after her encounter with Mao, 'I can do nothing. There's a lot of that here but someone tells me its publication would hurt the good feelings of some people.'<sup>47</sup>

The Ruth Price biography says a lot about the American Communist Party repudiating Smedley after her Xian stand. I rather doubt it bothered her, since she had never joined them and maybe had a good understanding of their weaknesses. But she must have learned that Mao was in actual charge in the Red Area. Known that she had gone against his decision, even if it had been imposed by Stalin. That must have influenced her attitudes: her much-reported first impression of Mao:

"On the same memorial night that I first arrived in Yen-an and met General Chu Teh [Zhu De], I was able to call on Mao Tze-tung, because he worked by night and slept by day. Calling on him at midnight, I pushed back a padded cotton drape across a door in a mountain cave, and stepped into a dark cavern. Directly in the centre of this darkness stood a tall candle on a rough-hewn table. Its glow fell on piles of books and papers and touched the low earthen ceiling above. A man's figure was standing with one hand on the table; his face, turned towards the door, was in shadow...

"The tall, forbidding figure lumbered towards us and a high-pitched voice greeted us. Then two hands grasped mine; they were as long and sensitive as a woman's. Without speaking we stared at each other. His dark, inscrutable face was long, the forehead broad and high, the mouth feminine. Whatever else he might be, he was an aesthete. I was in fact repelled by the feminine in him and by the gloom of the setting. An instinctive hostility sprang up inside me, and I became so occupied trying to master it that I heard hardly a word of what followed."<sup>48</sup>

Smedley managed to repair her relationship with Mao. He was more successful than anyone else in gaining some control over her – though I'll detail later how she still made trouble. Their interactions would make an extremely good drama, maybe

<sup>47</sup> Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, page 304-5

<sup>48</sup> *Battle Hymn of China*, page 121-2

called *Daughter of Earth, Son of China*.

For a time there was a smooth friendship, as there had earlier been between Smedley and Madam Sun. Mao was interested in what she could tell him of the world beyond China:

"Mao was 'like a dear brother,' she wrote Snow, 'a damned lovable sort,' who 'possessed all the self-confidence and decisiveness of a profoundly masculine man'. He had more in common with Lenin than with Stalin, she thought – more political, less of an organizer – but even his archenemy here, the Comintern adviser Otto Braun, conceded Mao's genius at strategy."<sup>49</sup>

"What I now remember of Mao Tze-tung was the following months of precious friendship: they both confirmed and contradicted his inscrutability. The sinister quality I had felt so strongly in him proved to be a spiritual isolation. As Chu Teh was loved, Mao Tze-tung was respected. The few who came to know him best had affection for him, but his spirit dwelt within himself, isolating him..."

"In him was none of the humility of Chu. Despite that feminine quality in him, he was stubborn as a mule, and a steel rod of pride and determination ran through his nature. I had the impression that he would wait and watch for years, but eventually have his way..."

"Mao was known as the theoretician. But his theories were rooted in Chinese history and in experience on the battlefield. **Most Chinese Communists think in terms of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and some take pride in their ability to quote chapter and verse of these or lecture on them for three or four hours. Mao could do this too, but seldom attempted it.** His lectures... were like his conversations, based on Chinese life and history. Hundreds of students who poured into Yanan had been accustomed to drawing their mental nourishment only from the Soviet Union or from a few writers in Germany or other countries. Mao, however, spoke to them of their own country and people, their native history and literature."<sup>50</sup>

Those Chinese who superficially imitated European ideas missed the most important feature of Europe – *originality*. Mao played the leading role in making Chinese Communists into an efficient Chinese version of modern values: one which did not rely on shallow imitations of foreign models. And this was also noticed by visitors not at all sympathetic to Communism:

"The foreign newspaper men who reached Yanan felt remarkably at ease. None of the formality and dissimulation of official life existed among the Communists. Speaking of them, one newspaper man made a remark of a kind I was later to hear again and again from other foreign correspondents. He said they were 'not Chinese, but new men'.<sup>51</sup>

"Journalists never returned from the Red Army without feeling that they had been among modern men, men much like themselves."<sup>52</sup>

Writing in 1943, Smedley had figured out why the Chinese Communists were going to be winners:

<sup>49</sup> Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, page 309

<sup>50</sup> *Battle Hymn of China*, page 122. Emphasis added.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, page 129

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, page 130

"I spent considerable time with a [non-Communist] People's Mobilization Committee in Taiyuan. The efforts of the Taiyuan committee had been frustrated by officials who thought of the war only as a conflict between armies. If the common people should be trained and armed, they thought, they would indeed fight the Japanese, but afterwards they might refuse to lay down their arms and return to pre-war conditions."<sup>53</sup>

Mobilisation of 'the people' was normal in the USA. It was prevented in China by Chiang Kai-shek's branch of the Kuomintang. In the USA, it had been a rich elite that included slave-owners which had originally mobilised 'the people' against London. They kept control and learned how 'the people' could be usefully manipulated. (So much so that a majority of the poor have since the days of Ronald Reagan voted vast wealth to the richest 1% and increasing hardship for themselves.)

It was also an elite that mobilised 'the people' in the French Revolution. The main difference was that the bourgeoisie who tried ruling in France had no experience of government. In France, more radical elements were briefly dominant, but failed with the fall of Robespierre. In China, the Communist Party stood alone in having fully absorbed modern values. Were unique in being able to mobilise vast numbers of ordinary uneducated people for those value.

To repeat what I quoted earlier:

"The patricians of Peiping [Beijing] were a group of men and a few women who had inherited the finest elements of Chinese culture and gleaned the best from the universities of America and England. Few were rich, most of them sprang from landed gentry of moderate means. They were gracious, charming and keen-witted... They spoke of science and education as the best means towards good ends. They resembled the patricians of ancient Greece; and, like ancient Greece, their society rested on the backs of men not far removed from slavery."<sup>54</sup>

Smedley seems not to have noticed that this cut right across the Marxist vision of history. For Marx and Engels, history had proceeded from a Slave Society through Feudalism with serfs and now Capitalism with wage workers. The natural next step would be Socialism with wage workers in control, and then Communism with voluntary work and free supply of goods. They later added an earlier stage, Primitive Communism, and also an 'Asiatic Mode of Production' that they saw as an abortive development from Primitive Communism.

Such a schema is much too simplistic. If Britain's Industrial Revolution of 1760-1830 established modern capitalism, it did so in a society where serfdom had long vanished. Had been in decline from the later Middle Ages. A land where most remnants of feudalism had been removed by the Tudors centuries earlier, while the clan-based society of the Scottish Highlands had been violently uprooted after their failed rebellion in 1745. Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* described both

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, page 136

<sup>54</sup> *Battle Hymn of China*, pages 40-41

India and China as on a level with Europe: he even described China as richer than any part of Europe, though also having much worse poverty at the bottom of the society. Adam Smith also made the deep insight that China was static, not much different from what Marco Polo had described, while Europe was fast advancing.

(The New Right have shown no interest at all in these remarks by one of their heroes. They'd be enormously useful if the aim were to assimilate China to the Anglo hegemony on an equal basis. But I doubt this has ever been a sincere desire. However much China tried adjusting to Anglo values, they'd face the same sort of prejudice that Japan is still burdened by. The Anglo New Right have a strong cultural chauvinism, and racism is far from dead. People of other colours and religions are no longer completely excluded, but there is still a large bias against them. In the USA, the Republicans as dominated by Trump are openly anti-Muslim. They continue the strategy invented by Richard Nixon: gain the votes of former Southern Democrats by subtly pandering to racism while pretending it is all about individualism.)

While Marx's formulas point you towards the truth, they are much less than the complete truth. In China, slavery had been marginalised more than 2000 years ago. Serfdom had never been important and may not even have existed. Most of what might be called a Middle Class or Bourgeoisie was wholly contented with the system. It was ambitious to rise into the ranks of the scholarship and forget how the original wealth had been made. Enough of them achieved this to keep the rest contented. Enough 'upgrades' to prevent the sort of class antagonism that developed in Europe. Imperial China had points in common with the USA and Europe since the 1980s, where many of the Middle Class and even some workers want to *be* millionaires rather than wishing to abolish or overthrow them.

Agnes Smedley saw some of this, but only some. She was to make a disastrous attempt to introduce the Chinese Communists to views on sex and marriage that were still 30 or 40 years away from becoming the norm in Europe. That China today is slowly assimilating, but only after several decades of radical transformation

### **A Failed Sexual Revolution at Yen'an**

*Battle Hymn of China* says little about Smedley's work at Yen'an. Understandably, since it had ended badly. Smedley was writing a book that downplayed internal Chinese conflict while they were all still fighting for survival against Japan.

She also fails to mention some other useful and uncontroversial things she did. For details one must look to her biographers:

"Characteristically, Smedley did not restrict herself to interviewing and writing but threw herself into several other projects at once. Her international appeals to bring supplies and doctors to Yan'an were responsible in part for enticing Norman Bethune, the celebrated Canadian

surgeon, Communist, and Spanish Civil War hero, to come to northwestern China... She even mounted a birth-control campaign but had to give up quickly when neighbouring villages, thinking the blue-eyed foreigner was offering them a potion of miraculous powers, drank the lemon-based douche she had imported from Shanghai. Much more successful was Smedley's anti-rat crusade, accompanied by much propaganda about the importance of sanitation. At first many scoffed at her Western 'obsession' with rats, but they fell silent when Mao Zedong threw the full weight of his authority behind her campaign. Before long, rat traps imported from Shanghai and Beijing were having an impact on Yan'an's ancient rat population.

"Smedley was pursuing all these activities during the six-month lull in fighting before the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45 – probably the most relaxed period in the thirty-year history of the Communist Party's climb to power. Mao and his comrades were in a mood to experiment, even with Western social and cultural forms."<sup>55</sup>

Regarding the douche, I'm surprised Smedley didn't get a Chinese friend to mime the proper use of it to an all-female audience. She did have a positive image, the more so since she was from the USA. Edgar Snow says somewhere that in the 1930s, Chinese nationalists of all shades took a friendly view of the USA. The USA was seen as a genuine foe of European Imperialism, which up to a point they were. They held the Philippines as a colony, having crushed local nationalism, but did at least plan to have an independent country once its citizens had been thoroughly Americanised – a schema that has so far succeeded. The USA then also had a quasi-socialist government with Roosevelt's New Deal. The Chinese Communists could be fairly relaxed when US culture was not the culture of a dangerous enemy.

(China in the last few years has been tightening up after a limited relaxation. The was only to be expected, since the West has showed a determined incompetence in trying to restructure every vulnerable-looking regime, no matter how often this produces disaster.)

In 1937, all sorts of interesting possibilities existed:

"In February, Mao, Zhu De, Zhou Enlai and others had encouraged Smedley in her efforts to introduce a new pastime: social dancing, Western style. Smedley was convinced that the grim survivors of the Long March needed to learn to relax and play. She also thought dancing might help break down the rigid social code imposed by the wives of leading cadres...

"Smedley was playing with dynamite but didn't seem to know it. Doubtless her own staunchly Western feminist views about marriage and freedom between the sexes blinded her. But the dancing parties were creating an explosive atmosphere in the caves of Yan'an. Increasingly Smedley and her beautiful companion and interpreter, Lily Wu, came under sharp criticism from women comrades of Yan'an." (Ibid., page 187.)

Smedley was being a proper anarchist. This led her to a collision with the women who were to

<sup>55</sup> *Agnes Smedley*, MacKinnon & MacKinnon. Page 186

actually transform China, on the basis of a radical puritanism that could be assimilated by ordinary women. Methods that worked in a very poor country where male attitudes were chauvinist and where many women accepted it. Smedley was trying to leap over several stages of development. Naturally it ended badly:

"Smedley had long believed that marriage was an oppressive institution for all women. The women veterans, however, considered monogamous marriage a great victory for Chinese women – a cultural advance to be protected and strengthened. They were not ready to tolerate the introduction of a 'free-love' system; this had been tried earlier in the Jiangxi soviet and had victimised many women."<sup>56</sup>

This is the only mention I've seen of free love having been tried in the Zhu-Mao Red Area. The biography does have a source for it,<sup>57</sup> so maybe it's yet another thing that the standard Western histories have missed. Or maybe not. It was definitely not the rule at Yen-an. There, the male leaders liked her but their wives thought otherwise:

"Agnes's relations with the wives of the leading cadres were another matter. Within the Red Army, leaders did not deny that men had sexual needs, but they expected military training and numerous cultural activities that went on from reveille to taps to absorb the energies of the soldiers. Those who were single were expected to remain celibate. Marries couples, who were found almost exclusively among the leaders, were expected to be faithful to their spouses. Flirtations and romantic entanglements were strictly taboo. One American visitor likened the atmosphere in Yen-an to Boy Scout camp.

"It was not that Agnes ... thought loosely about sexual matters', Snow later explained. But she had, after all, come of sexual age in Greenwich Village, and was an outspoken champion of free love in the sense that she considered it fitting and healthful to pursue one's desire."<sup>58</sup>

Many of these women were peasant radicals. Some had little education beyond what the Red Army had given them. They risked being dumped in favour of more educated and modern women among the fans of Chinese Communism who came to Yen-an. This perhaps happened in the case of Mao, with Smedley playing a role:

"The spouses of Yen-an's leaders had not endured the hardships they had known on the Long March so that their husbands could begin experimenting with the young women who had begun streaming into the area as anti-Communist constraints loosened...

"Agnes disdained the mentality of these 'feudal minded' females, as she called them. The most offensive of them, in her opinion, was Mao's wife, Ho Tzu-ch'en [He Zizhen], a very subservient 'domestic' type who had been Mao's secretary before they married and who Agnes felt lacked the necessary qualifications to be a revolutionary leader's

wife."<sup>59</sup>

Here again, Smedley had little sense of what was practical. In her earlier book about the Red Army, she had described how Mao and his army had been living in their southern Red Area:

"Bloody, scarred, covered with lice, their hair grown long and matted, helping, along their sick and wounded, Mao's Partisan force had marched and fought in their bare feet over the valleys and hills of northern Hunan and Kiangsi."<sup>60</sup>

Mao at that time had been separated from his first wife, Yang Kaihui. She'd been the daughter of a left-wing village school teacher who'd got a job in Beijing and for a time had been Mao's teacher. It is unlikely she'd have had the physical toughness to survive the life that Mao later adopted, or that Mao would have allowed her to try. She worked instead as an underground member of the Communist Party. Sadly, she was caught and was executed after refusing to repudiate either her husband or her beliefs. A woman called He Zizhen replaced her. She, like Zhu De's final wife, came from the extremely tough peasantry of the Red Areas:

"The wives, who were mostly from peasant backgrounds, had had little experience with Western women, let alone one as unconventional as Agnes... None was more concerned than Chu Teh's wife, K'ang K'e-ching [Kang Keqing]. Although nothing of a sexual nature evidently transpired between Agnes and Chu, K'ang K'e-ching did not like her husband spending such long periods of time alone with the female writer...

"Now that she and Mao were getting along, he often visited her cave... with her neighbour Lily Wu [Wu Lili] acting as their interpreter... Though he had never been out of China, he was extremely interested in foreign ways, and since he and Agnes were the same age, he felt comfortable interrogating her on subjects that included her love life...

"According to Agnes's confidant Edgar Snow, Mao had read Byron, Keats, and Shelley in translation, and he asked Agnes whether she herself had ever experienced the kind of romantic love of which the poets wrote... Agnes, Snow reported, 'was surprised at [Mao's] childish curiosity... He seemed to feel that somehow he had missed out on something...

"Compared to the other women in Yen-an, Snow would write that 'Lily seemed a brilliant fairy-tail princess'... Most of the single men, including Agnes's doctor friend George Hatem, had already proposed to her. Others sent presents and followed her around'...

"It was soon apparent to Agnes that some of the romantic questions Mao was asking were actually directed at Lily. During discussions, Mao would compose poems that she was in a better position to appreciate than Agnes."<sup>61</sup>

"Agnes considered it part of the feudal-mindedness she found so maddening that the women insisted on viewing social dancing as 'a kind of public sexual intercourse', and

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., page 192

<sup>57</sup> The source given is *The Sexual Revolution in the Kiangsi Soviet*, in *China Quarterly* 59, pages 477-90.

<sup>58</sup> *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, by Price. Pages 309-10

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., page 311

<sup>60</sup> Smedley, Agnes. *China's Red Army Marches*. International Publishers, New York, 1934. Page 69.

<sup>61</sup> *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, pages 312-313

she displayed little patience with them."<sup>62</sup>

This led to a tremendous row, with Agnes making no attempt to keep the peace or understand another woman's point of view:

"Agnes heard the fuss, threw on some clothes and went next door. There she found Mao's wife beating her husband with a long-handled flashlight. Mao, still in his uniform, sat on a stool. He made no attempt to stop her... When Mao's wife had exhausted herself, Mao rose and ordered her to be quiet. 'There's nothing shameful in the relationship between comrade Wu and myself. We were just talking'...

"Outraged, Ho Tzu-ch'en [He Zizhen] turned on the terrified Lily. 'Dance-hall bitch!' Snow said she screeched as she scratched Lily's face and pulled her hair. 'You'd probably take up with any man. You've even fooled the Chairman.' The bleeding Lily hid behind Agnes, who became the next target of Ho Tzu-ch'en's rage...

'Imperialist! You're the cause of all this,' Ho shouted, and struck Agnes with her flashlight. Agnes responded with a blow that laid Mao's wife on the ground. Mortified, Ho demanded her husband explain what kind of person – Communist or otherwise – allowed a 'foreign devil' to abuse his wife without rising to her defence, to which Mao responded that it was she who had provoked the attack, by 'acting like a rich woman in a bad American movie'.<sup>63</sup>

The upshot was that Mao separated from and later divorced He Zizhen. Lily Wu was banished from Yen-an and sent with other women to join a flying squadron of propagandists for the army. Smedley's own position was more difficult:

"To prove to the Chinese leaders that she was not the individualistic rebel they thought, Agnes impulsively decided to join the CCP. She would not be the first American to join the Chinese Party; George Hatem was already a member. When she laid her case before Mao, Chu Teh, and Chou En-lai, though, they knew it would not work; it could not be enough for her to support many but not all of their goals. For you to be in Party, the Party had to be your life. Agnes would have to give up everything, including her personal autonomy... The Communist leaders advised her that while she still had a contribution to make, it was better for all concerned if she continued to work outside the Party." (Ibid., page 316-7.)

Smedley was indirectly responsible for the rise of Jiang Qing, though they probably never met. Born Li Shumeng,<sup>64</sup> she had a successful career as a Shanghai actress under the name Lan Ping. She also risked her life by joining the underground Communist Party. She made her way to Yen-an after the Xian Incident, to become Mao's third and final wife. Mao also had to agree that she would keep a low profile. After 1949, she played a role just in cultural matters until her sudden spectacular emergence during the Cultural Revolution. She seems to have thoroughly assimilated the Radical

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., page 314

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., page 315

<sup>64</sup> For her as for everyone else, I omit the diacritical marks that few English readers understand. Implemented for computers by special characters that often transform into garbage on the web.

Puritan outlook of the other wives of the Communist leaders.

Incidentally, I've a suspicion that the Cultural Revolution may indeed have been intended as just that. A modest effort confined to matters of culture, started by Mao at a time when he has lost control of economic policies following the failure of the Great Leap Forward. It became something more when it turned out that young people educated since 1949 had a gigantic enthusiasm for the official doctrine. Were also willing to mistrust the actual officials who were implementing it.

It is notable that the Red Guard upsurge happened at about the same time as rebellions by young people in Western Europe and the USA. They too had a gigantic enthusiasm for the official doctrine of 'Freedom'. They too mistrusted establishment figures who were not allowing Freedom as it might have been. And the Western rebels did indeed greatly alter and expand the standard understanding of Freedom in the West.<sup>65</sup>

A majority of the West's 1960s rebels also turned out to be 'Coolhearts'. People who felt that there were no such thing as morals and that all government was bad government. Most of them were assimilated easily enough to the Free Market doctrines of Reagan and Thatcher. These were 'conservatives' whose periods of power saw the crumbling of conventional respectable social values, though Thatcher intended just the opposite. Meantime in China, it seems that a lot of former Red Guards moved easily enough to Deng's notion of replacing state power with market forces rather than radical enthusiasm. Took readily to a replacement of Radical Puritanism with a mild copy of the new social and sexual values of the West.

### **Smedley With the Red Army**

To get back to China in the 1930s. Mao had made Smedley leave Yen-an, though only after the war with Japan had started:

"Agnes had already observed the iron will that lay beneath Mao's gentle manner. Still, the quiet fury with which he demanded she leave at once, bad back or not, rattled her." (The Lives of Agnes Smedley, page 319)

She became a correspondent attached to the Red Army. This was the basis for a 1938 book called *China Fights Back: An American Woman With the Eighth Route Army*. It was not a success, and I found it the least valuable of her books. But the same material was included in the much better book that she wrote in the USA: *Battle Hymn of China*. That was her proper role. Mao was right to insist she leave Yen-an and be useful now that he was busy with the developing war.

"In *Battle Hymn of China* (1943), one of the best works of war reporting to have come out of World War II, Smedley chronicled her eighteen-month experience in great detail... Determined to arouse American sympathy for the struggle of the whole Chinese people against the Japanese

<sup>65</sup> See <https://gwydionwilliams.com/history-and-philosophy/the-left-redefined-the-normal/>

invaders, she deliberately emphasized unity of purpose between the Communists and the Guomindang. Her attacks on the Guomindang, for example, were muted...

"From the historian's point of view, one of Battle Hymn's great strengths is its description of the social transformation that took place in the Chinese countryside as the result of the war. Through Smedley's eyes we see how peasant women were being organized to take an active role in military and social life, how basic literacy grew through mass education campaigns, and how democratic practices were introduced into village politics as an integral part of mobilizing against the Japanese. It was largely because of these changes that Chiang Kai-shek was unable to regain control of the Chinese countryside after the war."<sup>66</sup>

Functional democracy was new to China. Occasional provincial and national-level elections had occurred. Initially only the rich had votes: later there was a wider franchise. But this had no meaning to most Chinese. Given a free choice after World War Two, they might well have elected the Chinese Communists. The Kuomintang didn't dare risk it: instead they organised their own elections that excluded any substantial opponents.

It was the Chinese Communists who introduced basic democracy. People were brought into the modern world under the guidance of a Leninist party that could keep the process coherent. The folly of doing it otherwise has been amply shown in Iraq, where the US allowed open elections and then were astonished when the 'wrong' people got elected. Appalled when this government proved hopelessly sectarian and drove the Sunni minority into bitter opposition, resulting in the rise of Daesh (ISIS). Western observers were equally baffled when the 'Arab Spring' showed that pro-Western elements in Egypt were at most 10% of the voters, with 37.5% for the Muslim Brotherhood and 27.8 for a harder-line Islamic party.

In China, the Chinese Communists kept control and imposed a progressive agenda that might or might not have been the choice of the majority. They did allow real choice at a village level, provided that there was no overt opposition to party rule. US readers would have failed to realise how radical this was in Chinese terms. In the USA, the exploiters had adapted to democracy and popular education. (Though most of them seem to dislike it and seek every excuse to cut it.)

In China, the rulers mostly had no idea what to do with the popular will except to repress it:

"The spectre of civil war had never been laid, even after the Japanese invasion. The ruling class, primarily the landlords, viewed with terror the growth of the [communist] Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies because these mobilized, educated, and armed the common people. Landlords who had fled to the far west, or to the port cities before the Japanese, saw their peasants in arms, standing their ground and fighting. Could such men be expected to lay down their guns after the war had ended and return to the old conditions? Certainly not!

"Let it be clear that the Chinese Communists always

declared that socialism could not be introduced until China had passed through the democratic stage. However, they never confused a private capitalism, with its tendency to concentrate economic power in the hands of the few, with democracy. They taught their troops and the people that all Chinese must unite and march forward together; and when they said forward they meant forward. That they made mistakes and were often as intransigent as Jesuits and capitalists cannot be denied. But as they preached, so did they practice. No men were more prepared to die for their convictions than they. Guns in their hands, they stood at the front with the people, and it was difficult to see just where their forces ended and the people began. Much later, in Chungking [Chonqing, wartime capital of the Kuomintang government], I heard a high-placed official exclaim: 'what amazes me is the number of Communist Party members who have been killed at the front!'"<sup>67</sup>

The Communist forces became two armies that pretended to be obeying a Kuomintang Central Government, in which the Communists had a nominal place and no real power. The 'Eighth Route Army' was the new name for Mao's Red Army, mostly a unification of the various armies that had escaped from the southern Red Areas. The 'New Fourth Army' was build around tough guerrilla fighters who had been left behind in South China to carry on an underground fight.

Mao's mode of warfare is commonly called 'guerrilla warfare'. But the Chinese Communist definition is more complex. There are three modes:

1. Guerrilla Warfare: the armed forces are largely hidden and operate in small units.
2. Mobile Warfare: large armies do not attempt to hold fixed lines and let the enemy come deep into their territory until they can be attacked suddenly.
3. Positional Warfare: normal warfare in which fixed lines are defended.

Most of the time, Mao was fighting Mobile Warfare, while also organising guerrilla forces to help. This continued till late in the Civil War of 1946-49, when elements of what was by then the People's Liberation Army were strong enough to switch to Positional Warfare. Against the Japanese, the Communists never tried Positional Warfare. They mostly opted for Guerrilla Warfare rather than Mobile Warfare:

"The New Fourth Army had taken shape in 1938 from guerrilla units operating in the hills of the lower Yangzi River valley<sup>68</sup>... The army was recruited and led by Communist veterans of the Long March, and by the fall of 1938 it had over 12,000 uniformed men. Split into four detachments, the main body operated south of the Yangzi...

"Because Chiang Kai-shek insisted that the commander of the New Fourth Army could not be a Communist, a compromise was made; the leader would be Ye Ting, a former Communist who was now on good terms with

<sup>66</sup> MacKinnon & MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley*, p212-3

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pages 257-8

<sup>68</sup> Yangzi is a valid alternative spelling of the Chinese name usually transliterated as Yangtze.

Chiang. But because Ye was kept busy commuting back and forth between Yunling, Nanchang, and Chongqing, the real power lay with his strong-minded Communist vice-commander and political commissar, Xiang Ying. Xiang had been a major figure in the Red Army and the Communist Party since the Jiangxi soviet of the early 1930s. Politically he was allied to the more doctrinaire, Moscow-trained, 'Bolshevik' faction led by Wang Ming and Bo Gu, which rigidly supported the united-front line. Owing to his earnest pursuit of the united front, Xiang Ying's relations with Guomindang counterparts in the Fifth War Zone were often better than those of his commander, Ye Ting.

"Throughout 1938 and 1939 the New Fourth Army managed to become enough of a nuisance to attract Japanese air attacks and mop-up campaigns – which was precisely what Chiang Kai-shek had hoped for. A major reason for the New Fourth Army's resilience was its medical corps. Smedley worked closely with this corps from the very beginning, and her role in its success is now officially acknowledged in Beijing...

"Most of [Medical Corps director] Dr. Shen's doctors and nurses were from big cities like Shanghai and Hong Kong and felt uneasy in the countryside, as well as being terribly frightened by the Japanese bombing raids. Smedley seemed much less concerned about both, and often risked her life to help the wounded during bombing attacks."<sup>69</sup>

I haven't been able to find out much about Xiang Ying, who sounds like another of the many men (no women) who at one time were alternatives to Mao. The best I found was on the Wiki.

"As the result of their catastrophic defeat [fighting the 5<sup>th</sup> Encirclement Campaign], Xiang Ying was removed from his post of the chairman of the communist central military committee, and replaced by Zhou Enlai. Xiang Ying was put in charge of 20,000 soldiers that were assigned to stay behind in Jiangxi Soviet to continue the fight against the nationalists, after the communist main force consisted of more than 80,000 had broken out...

"As a result of another huge blunder committed by Xiang Ying, the Chinese Red Army stayed behind [sic] was soon annihilated by the superior nationalist force, Xiang was barely able to escape with his own life, while many of his comrades were killed."<sup>70</sup>

This may be unfair to him. For certain, he was the surviving leader of those who were left behind when the party leadership left the Jiangxi Red Areas on the Long March. Another leader, Mao's brother Mao Zetan, was killed by Kuomintang in April 1935. This happened during the time of Mao Zedong's rise to power after the Zunyi Conference of January 1935. It's interesting to wonder what might have happened if this brother of Mao had been lived, or the other brother who was executed in Xinjiang when the local warlord switched allegiance to global Fascism. In any event, Xiang emerged as the effective leader of this New Fourth Army – a name which looked back to the Communist-Dominated Fourth Army of the

Kuomintang forces in the Northern Expedition of 1926-7. But trouble lay ahead:

"In early January of 1941, events in China changed Smedley's plans about returning to the interior. In southern Anhui province, fighting broke out between the New Fourth Army and Guomindang forces. The New Fourth Army units defending the Yunling headquarters south of the Yangzi were destroyed, the commander, Ye Ting, was arrested, and Xiang Ying was killed. This was the first major combat between Communist and Nationalist units since the united front had been declared in 1937. With the New Fourth Army Incident, as this engagement was dubbed, relations between the two sides broke down...

"The cumulative effect of the Incident... convinced Smedley that for the time being she could no longer be of much use in China. She decided it might be best to return to the United States, regain her health, write a book, and work to influence public opinion there in favour of China's war effort."<sup>71</sup>

This was early in 1941. The USA was brought into the war by the Pearl Harbour attacks in December 1941. But as I mentioned earlier, Smedley was useful to those who had earlier wanted a war with Japan. They took care of her.

As for Xiang Ying, he had been slow to obey orders to move north of the Yangtze. This in no way justified waging war on him, or attacking his headquarters with its vitally-needed medical staff.

Xiang might have been a major figure had he lived longer. Again, the best account I could find of his death was on the Wiki:

"When the Japanese invaded in July 1937, a united front (the Second United Front) was declared between Nationalists and Communists, and Xiang's guerrillas became the nucleus of a legitimate fighting force: the New Fourth Army. This army operated behind Japanese lines, and was subject to orders coming from both the Communist leadership in Yan'an, and the Nationalist leadership, which had moved inland from Nanjing to Chongqing.

"Contradictory orders from these groups led to confusion, and eventually the New Fourth Army Incident, in which Xiang was killed in an assault on the army by the Nationalist forces. He was killed by a member of his own staff, Liu Houzong for the gold resources of the New Fourth Army. Xiang had carried the gold on his own person in the aftermath of the incident. After Liu killed Xiang and two other officers, he absconded with the gold and surrendered to the Nationalists, who promptly accepted the gold and jailed him. He was later freed, but his fate beyond 1949 is unknown.

"The incident was a result of either mistrust or disobedience, or both, between the two parties that would lead to the resumption of full-scale civil war once the Japanese began a full retreat out of China's interior in the summer of 1945, prior to their surrender later that year. Some historians have argued that Xiang was the victim of the indecision of Mao Zedong. Mao's supporters argued that Xiang's misunderstanding of the potential threats posed by the Nationalists, along with his own ambitions, led

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p213-4

<sup>70</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jiangxi%E2%80%933\\_Soviet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jiangxi%E2%80%933_Soviet)

<sup>71</sup> MacKinnon & MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley*. p228-9

to his demise.<sup>72</sup>

Note that in China, it was quite normal for armies to do as they pleased and ignore their nominal superiors. And in any circumstances, attacking an allied force is an appalling thing to do. It was a sign that the Kuomintang were now pinning their hopes on the USA entering the war and destroying Japan. This feeling strengthened after Japan attacked the USA and they were committed to all-out war. The Kuomintang used some of their best troops to blockade the Communist base at Yen-an. They offended US military men like General Joseph Stilwell, who had been expecting all-out commitment to the joint war-effort. (You can find details in Barbara Tuchman's book *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-45*.)

Smedley herself talked of Kuomintang faults, but also hoped for a compromise future for China, as I'll detail later. But there was a matter from Smedley's past life that later caught up with her.

### **The Matter of Sorge**

In *Problems 26*, I explained how Smedley in 1930-1932 had been the helper and lover of a Soviet intelligence agent called Richard Sorge:

"Sorge was clever enough to keep his masquerade confined to the political area. He operated on the excellent principle that that fewer lies one tells or lives, the fewer chances of being caught. Even though he had a police record for underground Communist activity in Germany, he used his real name, Richard Sorge... among his German friends [he] did not pretend to be a convinced Nazi, although he joined the Nazi Party, a necessity for his cover [as a journalist]."<sup>73</sup>

"Sorge, who spoke English well, posed as an American reporter named Johnson. He made an exception of Agnes Smedley, who was much too intelligent to accept him as a fellow American and who as a journalist would encounter him in the course of business.

"When Sorge landed in Shanghai, he had only two assets: his credentials as a newspaperman and the name of this woman, who had been in Shanghai since May 1929...

"The only person in China upon whom I knew I could depend was Agnes Smedley, of whom I had first heard in Europe," said Sorge. "I solicited her aid in establishing my group in Shanghai and particularly in selecting Chinese co-workers... She was used in Shanghai by me as a direct member of my group."<sup>74</sup>

I dare say he was happy to name her because the Japanese already knew her as a bitter enemy. And in *Problems 26*, I also wondered if Sorge ever told Smedley his real name. I'd overlooked the following, which supports the notion:

"Hard at work and completely isolated, Agnes appeared to miss the wire service story that May [1941] reporting that the Japanese Ministry of Justice had arrested Richard

Sorge in Tokyo ... along with ... Ozaki Hotsumi."<sup>75</sup>

If she knew Sorge only as Johnson, or if he gave her a false German name, there was no way Smedley would have made the connection with a man she'd not seen since 1932. She had known Ozaki under his real name, but I doubt he was ever very important to her. Regardless, she missed the link. But others made it:

"In the spring of 1943, Agnes's name appeared in a German newspaper article in connection with the Shanghai phase of Sorge's ring. On August 13, U.S. Army Intelligence opened a file on her in relation to the case."<sup>76</sup>

In China, Sorge was only really a spy when acting under his own name and pretending to be a right-winger. This – and his wounds as a real war veteran – let him get secrets from German officers helping Chiang Kai-shek's anti-Communist war. In the role of 'Johnson', where Smedley helped him, they were collecting facts that Moscow wanted to know from open sources.

Smedley was also in contact with the underground Chinese Communists, as was entirely obvious from her published works. Sorge must have kept his friendship with Smedley secret from anyone who supposed he was a genuine right-winger: that's the probably why he created the Johnson identity:

"No one in Shanghai, except for the tiny band of [Soviet Military Intelligence] Fourth Bureau agents, knew who Sorge really was. He had two other identities, one completely phoney, one corresponding to his legal cover. Chinese collaborators knew him as Mr Johnson, an American journalist, and assumed he was working for the Comintern. Then there was Dr Sorge, the writer of articles like 'The soy-bean harvest in Manchuria', 'Good Sesame Harvest in China' and 'China's Growing Peanut Exports...

"This was the persona the German community knew and came to respect. Richard found his most valuable sources were among the fifty German officers advising Chiang Kai-shek's armies. As a war veteran, he could approach such men with confidence. The limp from his war would was an obvious testimonial...

"Chiang Kai-shek's German military advisors, several of whom Richard had befriended, held that one Japanese soldier was worth between five and ten Chinese. It was not valour in combat but superior discipline, organisation and military equipment that gave the Japanese forces the overwhelming advantage."<sup>77</sup>

The two roles should have been kept separate

"In prison, Sorge had confessed that in China, Agnes had been his most valued assistant, that she had introduced him to many of the people he used in his ring and provided her home in the French Concession as a rendezvous for members. He said he had forwarded information Agnes had collected, including material on American activities in China and the effect of Sino-American relations on the tense Sino-Japanese situation, to Moscow, where he said

<sup>72</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiang\\_Ying](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiang_Ying) as at 16/08/06

<sup>73</sup> Prange, Gordon W. *Target Tokyo: The Story of the Sorge Spy Ring*. McGraw-Hill 1984. Page xiv

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, page 22

<sup>75</sup> Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*. Page 356

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, page 365

<sup>77</sup> Whyment, Robert. *Stalin's Spy: Richard Sorge and the Tokyo Espionage Ring*. I.B. Taurus 2006. Pages 34-35

he had 'registered her with Comintern headquarters.'"<sup>78</sup>

In *Problems 26*, I described how Smedley was helped to establish herself in China by the Comintern, despite having not wished to join the Communist Parties of either the USA or Germany. She may not have told 'Johnson' about her Comintern link. Given the dangers of the lives they were living, each may have held back secrets.

Smedley anyway had other concerns besides a man she had not seen for years. Having grown sick and weak from her efforts in China, Smedley returned from China to the USA in 1941. She wrote *Battle Hymn of China*, and she did fund-raising for China during its resistance to Japan.

Smedley was out of China during the Second Civil War, when the seemingly weaker Communist forces steadily destroyed or absorbed their enemies:

"Now that China's Communist leaders had forgiven her, Agnes considered returning to that country, where, she said, she had known 'spiritual exultation' and passed what she recalled as the best years of her life... But when friends in Shanghai urged Agnes to come at once, she demurred, saying she doubted the State Department would give her a passport, or the Chinese Embassy issue her a visa." (Ibid., page 377)

It seems to me that there were other reasons. She would have lacked the protection as a US citizen that existed before the war. The Shanghai French Concession had been signed over in 1943 by the Vichy government to Japan's puppet government in China. The British-run Shanghai International Settlement had been occupied by the Japanese after Pearl Harbour, and had also been legally signed over in 1943 by Britain to Chiang Kai-shek's government. Had she tried to get back to Shanghai before 1949, the Kuomintang government might have laid a trap, letting her in and then finding a pretext to arrest her once she was there. Her own books had made it clear she'd been in contact with the Communist underground back in the 1920s. There were also her Xian broadcasts calling for Chiang Kai-shek to be put on trial. He was not a forgiving man: one of the generals who'd arrested him was murdered along with his family shortly before Chiang fled the mainland. The other, Zhang Xueliang, was kept a prisoner until 1975. Released by Chiang's son and successor after Chiang's death.

The Sorge connection may also have mattered. He had confessed a lot of what he'd done. Even supposing he had never told Smedley that he had spied on German officers helping Chiang Kai-shek's anti-Communist campaign, she could have been plausibly charged with this. She was later smeared with the connection in the USA, though formal proceedings were always carefully avoided, which is normal legal trickery. She definitely had reasons to wait.

Meantime, what did she want?

## Seeking a Third Way for China

In *Battle Hymn of China*, Smedley had been sympathetic to progressive non-Communist Chinese seeking real improvements in China. She also saw the problems. Writing of a visit to a Kuomintang army in 1939, she says:

"The young commander and the soldiers could not conceal their excitement, and again I realised what a tremendous thing it was for a Chinese army to have a foreign visitor. They fought in a world that not only had abandoned them, but supplied their enemy with the means for their destruction. They watched the skies for signs of international help, and to them I must have seemed like the first harbinger of spring."<sup>79</sup>

This contrasts with the Chinese Communists, who expected little from the outside world and carried on fine without it. The Kuomintang forces fought well for as long as they saw their task as being to hold out until the war widened. But they disgusted those US citizens who saw them close up by relaxing once Japan was at war with the USA. The leaders assumed that the USA would now win the war for them.<sup>80</sup>

Even their best was none too good:

"The Szechuen [Sichuan] armies were considered the most backward in China, and the Fiftieth Army was one of them. But the war had made great changes in it, and it was now a mixture in which the old and the new struggled for mastery. Instinctive racial patriotism and the most backward practices and concepts mingled with the highest principles of modern humanity and half-digested ideas of democracy and socialism. The war was teaching it to modernise – or perish.

"General Kwo Shuen-chi represented the modern tendencies, and some of the younger officers followed him by forming study clubs and subscribing to magazines and books. He was one of the most progressive and social-minded of nationalist commanders, but was impeded at every step by reactionary and corrupt staff officers who spend their leisure in gambling and smoking opium or mere lethargy. It was an open secret that the trucks of this Army carried opium from far-way Szechuen Province to the lower Yangtze River Valley... The Magistrate of Kingsien had previously told me that he dared not search Szechuen soldiers passing through his district lest his men be shot...

"The wives of the officers were educated women, some of them university graduates, for an officer in China can claim the most elegant. Despite all their kindness and graciousness, I still could not help observing that they were healthy women who had studied in ease, married officers with property, then put their minds on ice. They did no work in the Army, but spent their days in idle gossip and mah-jongg gambling." (Ibid., pages 200-201.)

Very much like the elder generation of Westernised Chinese women in Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club*. I've read it and liked it. And I must admit that it didn't occurred to me at the time to ask why those women had done nothing useful for their own cause once they were securely with

<sup>78</sup> Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*. Page 375

<sup>79</sup> *Battle Hymn of China*, page 199

<sup>80</sup> See especially *Two Kinds of Time* by Graham Peck

their own people. They had suffered – the central matter is one woman who had to abandon twin babies with the remote hope that someone would care for them. But the idea of being useful seems to have been outside the scope of their thinking. They could assimilate to US values. Presumably their children grew up with standard US attitudes absorbed at school. But they were part of a class that was wholly unable to cope with the task of modernising China by their own efforts.

The undisciplined middle ground in China was weak, but it was Smedley's natural home. She never ceased to be anarchic and distrustful of authority. But she recognised that the Communists were a vital part of the war effort:

"Sometimes Government spokesmen charged that the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies did not fight, but merely sought to 'stir up the people'. The Japanese who fought those armies knew better. I saw dozens of hospitals filled with wounded Communist soldiers, but perhaps the government thought there were too few...

"General Chu Teh... issued a report to the nation on July 7, 1942... the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies had in 1941-2 engaged more than twenty-four Japanese divisions, or 44 per cent of the total Japanese armed forces in China. In that same period the Eighth Route army had suffered casualties of 23,034 dead and 40,813 wounded, the New Fourth 6,755 dead and 10,856 wounded. How fierce the fighting had been was indicated in the revelation that these armies had lost seventy-five of their highest officers.

"General Chu estimated that in that year the Eighth Route had killed and wounded more than 24,000 Japanese and puppets. The two armies together had captured a total of 38,985, together with quantities of guns, ammunition, and other supplies. The New Fourth alone had taken 15,721 new rifles, 301 light and heavy machine-guns, and much other material, including clothing, food, and medicine. The Communists had literally lived off the Japanese."<sup>81</sup>

Lots of neutral observers confirmed the militancy and efficiency of the Communist forces. US pilots who crashed in Japanese-occupied territory found themselves rescued by underground resistance forces that were run by Communists.

Western-orientated Chinese had also not been treated well by the West. Up until Pearl Harbour, Japan had been freely supplied by US businesses. As one Kuomintang general put it back then:

"China expects the United States to declare a total embargo on materials of war to Japan. I believe the American people are sympathetic to China and are especially opposed to indiscriminate Japanese bombing of defenceless cities. But their will is totally subordinated to the private profits of a few business men. This is a terrible thing. The Japanese murderers were without a sword. America gave them the sword." (Ibid., page 279.)

Japan actually made of its own weapons, which were as good as the USA equivalents in the early stages of the war. (They suffered later because they lacked the spare resources to try developing improved versions.) But Japan was dependent on raw materials from the USA. President Roosevelt

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., page 259

was doing his best, but Congress limited what he could do. Only in July 1941 did the USA stop supplying oil to Japan: a major cause of the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941.

If the USA was unhelpful, ordinary Chinese needed to modernise their thinking. From the Wikipedia, I found the interesting case of a warlord called Yan Xishan, who ruled Shanxi province from 1911 to 1949. He tried to do something similar to what Mao later carried through successfully:

"Believing that no single ideology existed to unify the Chinese people at the time that he came to power, Yan attempted to generate an ideal ideology himself, and once boasted that he had succeeded in creating a comprehensive system of belief that embodied the best features of 'militarism, nationalism, anarchism, democracy, capitalism, communism, individualism, imperialism, universalism, paternalism, and utopianism'. Much of Yan's attempts to spread his ideology were through a network of semi-religious organizations known as 'Heart-Washing Societies'.<sup>82</sup>

I'm strongly reminded of the Communist's Thought Reform, also known as Brain-Washing. But Yan's 'Heart-Washing' was just an aspiration:

"When the threat of Chinese Communists became a significant threat to Yan's rule, Yan defended the Communists as courageous and self-sacrificing fanatics who were different from common bandits (contrary to Kuomintang propaganda) and whose challenge must be met by social and economic reforms that alleviated the conditions responsible for communism.

"Like Marx, Yan wanted to eliminate what he saw as unearned profit by restructuring Shanxi's economy to reward only those who worked. Unlike Marx, Yan reinterpreted Communism to correct what he believed was Marxism's chief flaw: the inevitability of class warfare...

"In spite of his efforts, Yan did not succeed in making Yan Xishan Thought widely popular in Shanxi, and most of his subjects refused to believe that his true objectives differed substantially from those of past regimes. Yan himself blamed the failure of his ideology to become popular on the faults of his officials, charging that they abused their power and failed to explain his ideas to the common people. In general, the officials of Shanxi misappropriated funds intended to be used for propaganda, attempted to explain Yan's ideas in language too sophisticated for the common people, and often behaved in a dictatorial manner that discredited Yan's ideology and failed to generate popular enthusiasm for Yan's regime."<sup>83</sup>

You can avoid class warfare only if the bulk of the ruling class chooses not to fight radical reforms. This was partly true for the 'Free World' from the 1940s to 1960s, when many of the ruling class were demoralised and scared. But in the USA, they had come close to stifling the New Deal in the late 1930s. They might have done so without the Second World War. And the New Right nowadays tend to say that the New Deal was an error and that

<sup>82</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yan\\_Xishan#Yan\\_Xishan\\_Thought](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yan_Xishan#Yan_Xishan_Thought)

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

the Great Slump would have cured itself if left alone. George Soros, then little known, did sensibly urge a Marshall Plan for Russia after the Soviet collapse, copying policies which had successfully restored Western Europe. Policies that defeated the extremely powerful Communist movements of Italy and France. But the people in charge thought they knew better, and presumably still do. Now that Russia has rejected them, they are perfectly confident that this is an outbreak of evil for which they are in no way responsible.

(At the time of writing, they seem to be applying the same 'wisdom' to Turkey. The main issues are not economic, nor even the growth of hard-line Islamic social policies. The trigger for the attempted coup, which the USA noticeably failed to condemn until it had clearly failed, was probably Turkey starting to withdraw from the failed attempts to overthrow President Assad in Syria.)

For pre-Communist China, Smedley has some examples of how tough moderate reform actually was. How far success depended on the crude and effective methods of the Chinese Communists:

"Tsai, heir to some salt mines... was a capitalist, but he had been educated in Peiping [Beijing] and had become imbued with modern thought. While the old merchants in the Chamber of Commerce... formed the puppet government for the Japanese, Tsai called upon the miners from his own and other mines to fight the enemy. A few hundred of his workers followed him. They were given guns salvaged by the people, and Tsai used his fortune to finance them. Eventually the young capitalist became the Communist commander of the 5th Guerrilla Regiment, and I frequently saw him striding about in a captured Japanese coat, sharing the same fate as everyone else...

"The salt-mine tunnels round Yingchen were so low that only children could work them, and even they could hardly stand upright while working. Many began to work at the age of seven or eight, and spent their lives digging salt...

"Because of this slave existence, the bodies and minds of the salt-miners were undeveloped. They followed Tsai against the Japanese because he was the owner who clothed and fed them – to them it was only another kind of work. Once, in the early months after Hankow fell, they demanded higher wages, refusing to fight if he did not pay. He explained that all his wealth was being used to support them and other guerrilla units, but they did not understand. If they could get more money elsewhere, why not, they thought. So the first months had been filled with confusion and despair, whole companies of salt-mine guerrillas going over to the Japanese or their puppets, then later coming back to bargain with Tsai.

"But most of them eventually remained with the guerrillas. By the time I arrived in the region they had become a pillar of resistance, and wherever any new guerrilla unit needed backbone, units of salt-miners were sent to stiffen it. I watched them curiously. The casual, uncomplicated spirit which distinguishes men who have enjoyed a normal childhood and youth was a stranger to them. They were grey and grim. They did not know how to play. They had learned to sing – but only fierce songs of

revolution."<sup>84</sup>

Pro-Western Chinese also found that the West didn't accept them as even potential equals:

"I could well understand the anti-foreign feeling. For three long years the Chinese armies had been regarded with contempt by many foreigners. China, they said, couldn't fight: its general were rotten; its soldiers illiterate coolies or mere boys; the care of the wounded an abomination. Some charges were true, some untrue, but almost all were based on a lack of appreciation of the fearful burdens under which China staggered." (Ibid., page 347-8).

"It was the overseas Chinese upon whom China depended for its chief medical supplies and ambulances, and in comparison with such aid the help of my own country was infinitesimal... One high Chinese official in the Army Medical Service told me that America had indeed recently given China a million dollars to buy quinine, but that American business men had demanded that the purchase be made through them. Accordingly they bought the quinine in Java, shipped it to America, re-packed it, and then shipped it back to China; in the end the Chinese received about \$300,000 worth of quinine!"<sup>85</sup>

Such things still happen. I heard of a case where 'medical aid' to Somalia was a bunch of US textbooks about cosmetic surgery. Entirely useless to the Somalis, but a nice little subsidy to the US publisher from whom they'd have been purchased. Note that publishers usually produce more copies of a book than they expect to sell full-price, because once production is set up, the unit cost of extra books is rather less. Mostly they get sold at a discount, but here they were wastefully purchased with money intended for the needy.

Chinese in general had low status in the 1930s and 1940s, even when Western-educated:

"My affection for Dr Lim was very deep and my admiration even deeper. His education and culture were, as I have said, the best that British liberalism had to offer, but he was lonely in his own country and a stranger in England or America. One evening he told me how he had once set out for America to attend a scientific congress. Missing him, his colleagues had sought him on Ellis Island. They had found him in the immigration pen with a 'Deloused' button pinned on his coat. (Ibid., page 350.)

There was a lesser but major under-estimation of the Japanese. The local officials of the British Empire had been expecting to hold Hong Kong:

"British authorities estimated that their forces would be able to fight for about three months; the more optimistic expected that British naval support would have come up from Singapore by then." (Ibid., p358.)

Hong Kong was attacked at the same time as Pearl Harbour, and fell in just over two weeks. Singapore itself fell in just over a week, after the Japanese had occupied the Malayan Peninsula. Singapore had a baffling lack of defences against an attack from the landward side. None of this was anticipated when Smedley was in Hong Kong.

"I heard British officers make contemptuous references to

<sup>84</sup> *Battle Hymn of China*, page 331-2

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., page 348

the Chinese as a 'third-rate Power'; when the Japanese fought the British 'they would learn what real fighting meant'. There were a few hundred Chinese in the Hong Kong Volunteer Corps, fine men, but British soldiers refused to bathe in the same pool with them. Not only this, but the British had not considered it worth while to negotiate with the Chinese government over a joint defence of Hong Kong." (Ibid., page 359.)

While offended by corruption and racism, Smedley always sought the middle ground:

"At talks Smedley was frequently harassed by American Communist Party members who considered her too generous in her treatment of President Roosevelt and the Guomindang. In a July 24 letter to Malcolm Cowley she responded angrily:

"The truth is that the Chinese Communist Party represent the most democratic force in China, that they fight for their country, that they have considered any peace talks [with Japan] as national treason. But they are not the only progressive force, and their armies are not the only fighting armies of China. I used to think they were. I support them for their social policy – bringing China out of feudalism to elementary democracy...

"I am what I always was – a real American democrat of the original brand of democracy, yet demanding that it be extended to economic democracy'."<sup>86</sup>

This was in line with what Mao was saying at the time. It may have been his sincere intention, ruined by blind Cold War hostility from the USA. By the time his armies took Beijing in January 1949, he had little need of non-Communist forces other than the various warlords. These warlords mostly surrendered to ensure their personal position in the new China. But Mao included 14 near-powerless non-Communist parties when he proclaimed his new government in October 1949. He delayed for negotiations with Third Force elements, even after his armies captured the Kuomintang capital Nanking in April, ending any real chance of a north-south split in China. He might have steered a middle course, but the USA instead had a bout of anti-left hysteria and refused to recognise People's China until the early 1970s. Nixon was probably ready to make peace then, because he knew the original rejection had been based on a pack of lies. Part of a cunningly generated anti-left hysteria that he had been deeply involved in.

Smedley was one of many who saw that something new had started in China. That it was not a simple extension of Soviet practice. Another was Evans Fordyce Carlson, a US Marine who gave the Chinese phrase 'gung ho' its present English meaning:

"Carlson had been a close friend of Smedley's since 1937 when he arrived as a Marine Intelligence Officer at Zhu De's Eighth Route Army headquarters with a letter of introduction from Edgar Snow. Carlson, a devoutly religious man, had shocked his superiors with reports not only that the Communists were fighting a war of liberation but that their conduct towards the people was 'truly Christian'. Warned by the navy that if he said another word

in this vein he would be court-martialed, Carlson resigned in 1938. He wrote a book about his experiences, *Twin Stars over China* (1939) [actually *Twin Stars Of China*], and lectured across America... urging US opposition to Japanese expansion in the Pacific. On the eve of Pearl Harbour, most likely through his connection to President Roosevelt (he had been F.D.R.'s bodyguard), Carlson reenlisted in the Marines to form an experimental battalion of volunteers to be trained in the techniques of guerrilla warfare on the model of Zhu De's guerrilla units in north China. One of 'Carlson Raiders' was Roosevelt's son Jimmy. The military were reluctant to allow Carlson to implement his unorthodox method of using political indoctrination in the ideals of democracy as a key component of military strategy, but in 1941, he had the political backing of the president for his experiment."<sup>87</sup>

At that time, most of the centre-right were sympathetic to fascism. Churchill was merely being loose-lipped when he said:

"If I had been an Italian I am sure that I should have been wholeheartedly with you [Mussolini] from the start to finish in your triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism. But in England we have not had to fight this danger in the same deadly form...

"The great mass of people love their country and are proud of its flag and history. They do not regard these as incompatible with a progressive advance towards social justice and economic betterment."<sup>88</sup>

Churchill took a different view of Hitler, because he knew that Italy was not a threat and was inclined to be a British ally. He realised that Germany with recovered strength and strong nationalism would again be a threat to Britain's global hegemony. Chamberlain was not so different, but mistakenly thought that Hitler was willing to compromise. Churchill therefore took over and soon made a deal with the Soviet Union. Accepted that it should have Poland and other chunks of Eastern Europe as part of a general imperial carve-up.

Smedley remained an open anti-imperialist, which during the war was fine in the USA. Only later did they switch and tolerate lingering imperialism as useful during the Cold War.

"In her speeches Smedley... pointed out why the Japanese were so quickly chalking up victories in Southeast Asia and why in some places they were being welcomed as liberators. 'The canker at the heart of our civilisation is being exposed. This canker is the assumption that white people are superior and destined to rule the colored races. The Japanese are smashing that conviction – drowning it in our own blood, while appealing to subjected Asiatic people to grasp the historic opportunity to drive out the white man.'

"She pointed out that the Burmese, for example, were actively helping the Japanese in order to rid themselves of white men's rule. She also cited the infamous case of a popular Bengali nationalist and former mayor of Calcutta, Subas Chandra Bose... Smedley, who had known Bose, pointed out that he had a large following in Bengal, which

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p238-9.

<sup>88</sup> *The Times*, 21st January, 1927. See also <https://gwydionwilliams.com/44-fascism-and-world-war-2/why-churchill-admired-mussolini/>

<sup>86</sup> MacKinnon & MacKinnon, Agnes Smedley., page 237

borders Burma, this making it vulnerable – perhaps the next domino to fall after the Japanese conquest of Burma. Smedley was careful to explain, however, that most Indian nationalists, Gandhi and Nehru in particular, saw nothing to be gained by exchanging British chains for Japanese ones.

"Smedley concluded most of her speeches by arguing that the only effective response to Japanese propaganda appeals to race hatred was to give full support and aid to China as an equal."<sup>89</sup>

Subas Chandra Bose had formed a pro-Japanese Indian Legion. He found many recruits among Indian troops captured by the Japanese while fighting for the British Empire. (Though a majority of India troops did stay loyal, at least to the extent of not changing sides. Many units were heroic in battle.) Bose seemingly died shortly before the end of the war, though some people believe this was faked. He remains a popular hero in the Republic of India, sometimes placed level with Gandhi and Nehru.

In Burma, there was the Burma National Army led by Aung San, which switched sides during the war when it became clear that the Japanese were not serious about liberating their fellow Asians. He was assassinated in 1947, with the British suspected. His daughter Aung San Suu Kyi is currently a major figure in Burmese politics.

In the middle of the war, there were reasons to hope for better attitudes from the USA in future:

"Smedley left California in a buoyant mood, optimistic about her prospects and excited by what she had seen of wartime America. The contrast between conditions in 1934 and 1942 was striking. The war had brought women into the work force and produced nearly full employment for men. For ordinary people such as her relatives in San Diego, the standard of living was appreciably higher. Social changes that in 1934 she had seen as obtainable only by revolutionary means – racial integration, economic independence for women, and political enfranchisement of unions, for example – seemed to be taking place peacefully in 1942..."

"As in 1928, when Smedley left Europe to take up the fight against colonialism in China, her mission as a propagandist in America was a self-appointed one. She saw herself as representing 'progressive' elements in China, and by this she certainly meant the Communist leadership in Yan'an, especially such coalition-minded leaders as Zhou Enlai. But she made her own independent analysis of the Chinese situation... In *Battle Hymn of China*, the 'progressives' she championed included Dr. Robert K. Lin, Guangxi warlord generals, and independent urban intellectuals, as well as the Communists. She hoped that civil war might be avoided in postwar China and thought that this was possible if the right kind of American influence were exercised on Chiang Kai-shek."<sup>90</sup>

"Because of the war, a spirit of bipartisanship prevailed in foreign policy. Former political opponents now agreed that since Japan was proving a much more formidable enemy than expected, an international effort was needed to

preserve a united front in China. And with Germany poised to invade Britain, Russia was desperately needed as an ally against Nazi Germany, no matter what conservatives or liberals thought of Stalin's purges of the 1930s."<sup>91</sup>

By 1943, US politics were shifting:

"[Smedley wrote that] 'many big business and Army men think there should be peace with Japan... [because], they say, China may go Communist, and together with the Soviet Union 'menace' the world. They consider Japan a bulwark against Communism and they also say that Japan was America's best customer before the war began...'

"Smedley had also been worried for months about Chiang Kai-shek's increasingly effective China lobby... 'Madam Chiang Kai-shek remains in a hospital in New York here, and she brought a whole regiment of men with her, it seems, and all of them are busily engaged in trying to drive out of official and newspaper positions every American in this country who speaks favorably of the democratic forces inside China. They work through Henry Luce, millionaire and powerful owner of *Life*, *Time*, and *Fortune*, and head of China Relief.'" (Ibid., page 260-1.)

The 'China lobby' was a bizarre phenomenon. US aid to Chiang Kai-shek was laundered and recycled to buy influence in Washington. They managed to distort US policy to China for more than two decades.

Smedley knew better, but was ignored:

"Many American scholars and journalists with expert knowledge of China sided neither with the Guomindang nor with the Communists. Their sympathies lay with a group of Chinese intellectuals, many of whom they knew personally, who had organised a new party, the Democratic League... In [Smedley's] view, the Democratic League had no hope of success: its independent intellectuals, many of whom were her friends as well, simply had no military or mass support."<sup>92</sup>

Smedley warned that the Chinese Communists were in principle independent, but would get tough if compromise failed:

"Chinese Communists are Chinese, rooted in the soil of their country. They have used Marxism as method of understanding their history and culture. They indeed aim at a socialist system of society, but this does not mean they will follow Soviet Russia, or America, or any other country. All they think and do is, and will be, influenced by their own history, culture, and needs. If they are forced, by a combination of Chinese and American reactionaries, to create a totalitarian system that denies civil rights to people, that will not be their fault. They may be forced to fight for their lives and the lives of their people, against all opposition. But from what I know of them, they would prefer it otherwise. They have believed in the power of persuasion." (Ibid., page 308.)

### **The Great Road and Luding Bridge**

Failing to convince the USA, Smedley returned to writing *The Great Road*, her unfinished biography of Zhu De. I covered this in *Problems 26*. But I left out his account of the famous Battle of Luding

<sup>89</sup> MacKinnon & MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley*, page 241

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., page 246-7.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., page 255

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., page 305

Bridge, which fits better here.

Zhu De is often identified as one of a Han Chinese group called Hakka. Smedley's biography says otherwise. His family did have a Hakka friend called the Old Weaver. He told them of the Hakka-led Taiping Rebellion. Told them of the loss of the last Taiping army on the wild fringes of Sichuan:

"On dark nights, when there is no moon, you can still hear the spirits of our Taiping dead wailing at the Ta Tu River crossing and over the town where they were slaughtered. They will wail until they are avenged. Then their spirits will rest." (*The Great Road*, page 27.)<sup>93</sup>

Surprisingly, Smedley does not explicitly link this with the later successful capture of Luding Bridge, which the Red Army needed to cross the 'Ta Tu' river, Tatu in *Red Star Over China* and Dadu River in the current transliteration. What we read in *The Great Road* is a first draft: she may have intended to recall Zhu's early feelings when she described the crossing but forgot while writing that section. She had noted links between the two movements:

"It was no accident that the Chinese Red Army, founded by Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung... not only assiduously studied the Taiping Revolution in order to learn from its mistakes, but even adopted many of its rules and tactics."<sup>94</sup>

The Red Army during the Long March found itself in a similar position. Zhu noticed this:

On the night the First Army vanguard reached the bluffs of the Dadu, Zhu De sat by a campfire and told a tale that he had heard a score of times as a boy in his poor Sichuan home... an old weaver came by to weave into blankets the coarse cotton thread Zhu De's mother spun. The old man had been a Taiping warrior."<sup>95</sup>

Zhu gave Smedley much the same account as Edgar Snow does in *Red Star Over China*. But he refers to it as Lutinchiao (or Smedley transcribed it so). He describes the bridge as having 'about twenty heavy iron chains': there are 9 main chains and two pairs of lesser chains as handholds.

A Red Army division had earlier crossed the river by boat, but boats were far too slow to get the entire army across. This division was going to try to capture the bridge from the far side, but the enemy might at any time have blown it up. Zhu sent units from the main army to take the bridge, even though much of the planking that normally rested on the chains had been removed:

"For about two hundred yards there was nothing but iron chains swaying over the roaring torrent five hundred feet below...

"Whole units volunteered, but first honors went to a platoon commanded by Ma-Ta-chiu. Then a second platoon was chosen. The men of both platoons strapped their guns, swords, and hand grenades on their backs, and Platoon Commander Ma-Ta-chiu stepped out, grasped one

of the chains, and began swinging, hand over hand, towards the north bank. The platoon political director followed, and after him the men. As they swung along, Red army machine guns laid down a protecting screen of fire and the Engineering Corps began bringing up tree trunks and laying the bridge flooring.

"The army watched breathlessly as the men swung along the bridge chains. Ma-Ta-chiu was the first to be shot into the wild torrent below. Then another man and another. The others pushed along, but just before they reached the flooring at the north bridgehead they saw enemy soldiers dumping cans of kerosene on the planks and setting them on fire. Watching the sheet of flame spread, some men hesitated, but the platoon political leader at last sprang down on the flooring before the flames reached his feet, calling on the others to follow. They came and crouches on the planks releasing their hand grenades and unbuckling their swords.

"They ran through the flames and threw their hand grenades in the midst of the enemy. More and more men followed, the flames lapping at their clothing... The bridge became a mass of running men with rifles ready, tramping out the flames as they ran. The enemy retreated to their second line of defences, but Lin Piao's division appeared suddenly in their rear and the battle ended.

"The battle of Lutinchiao lasted just one hour. Seventeen men were killed, many scorched and wounded, and a few severely burned. A staff officer who was with Chu and Mao while the bridge was being crossed told me that Chu made no sound, no sign, but stood like a man turned to stone. He knew that the fate of the Red Army was being decided at that moment, that twentieth-century Chinese workers and peasants were succeeding where other Chinese warriors in past history had failed...

"By late afternoon when the enemy began bombing the bridge and village, General Chu ordered a withdrawal. That night he spoke at a memorial mass meeting.

"General Chu told his audience that seventeen heroes had sacrificed their lives to pave the way for the enemy's advance to Moukung where the Red Army was to meet the Fourth Front Red Army and proceed to north China to fight the Japanese.

"May 30, 1935, he said, was an historic day. It was the tenth anniversary of the massacre of Chinese students and workers at Shanghai by British Imperialism. And seventy-two years before, in May, [Taiping general] Shih Ta-kai had attempted his crossing of the Ta Tu River."<sup>96</sup>

Chang and Halliday in *Mao, the Unknown Story* claim that the battle was invented by Mao. But Snow talked to many people beside Mao. His account of the Long March comes after his English translation of Mao's account of his life. Mao gives only a short summary of events on the Long March:

"Some day someone will write the full epic of this exciting expedition. Meanwhile, as an epilogue, I offer a free translation of a classical poem about this 6,000-mile excursion written by Chairman Mao Tse-tung – a rebel who could write verse as well as lead a crusade;

"The Red Army, never fearing the challenging Long March,  
"Looked lightly on the many peaks and rivers,

<sup>93</sup> Smedley, Agnes. *The Great Road: The Life and Times of Chu Teh*. Monthly Review Press 1956.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., page 29.

<sup>95</sup> Salisbury, Harrison E. *The Long March: The Untold Story*. McGraw Hill 1987. Pages 220-221.

<sup>96</sup> *The Great Road*, pages 321-2

"Wu Meng's range rose, lowered, rippled,  
"And green-tiered were the rounded steps of Wu Meng  
"Warm-beating the Gold Sand River's waves against the rocks,  
"And cold the iron-chain spans of Tatu's bridge,  
"A thousand joyous li of freshening snow on Min Shan  
"And then, the last pass vanquished, Three Armies smiled."<sup>97</sup>

To the best of my knowledge, the sixth line of the poem is Mao's only reference to the incident. Snow in his trip to the Red Area before the Xian Incident didn't meet Zhu: Zhu had been separated from Mao and most of the other leaders at a later stage of the Long March and did not rejoin till after Snow had left. But before that, Zhu had plenty of time to pass on his view of the crossing and the Taiping connection to other commanders officers whom Snow would have talked to. Probably Peng Dehuai, to whom Snow gave more space in his book than anyone except Mao. Peng's view would have come from Zhu. The importance placed on the incident was their doing, not Mao's.

Chang and Halliday include *The Great Road* in their bibliography and reference it a few times. They ignore Zhu's account as told to Smedley, which is typical of their 'cowboy scholarship'. (What would you expect from a pig except a grunt? Or a hiss, from a swan?) What's much more surprising is that almost everyone else also ignores it. Smedley is quoting the man in overall command, and he includes the detail that Platoon Commander Ma-Ta-chiu led the attack and was the first casualty. No English account takes notice.

You could also question the need for the highly dangerous attack across a half-demolished bridge. The division that had already crossed the river by boat could most likely have done the job on its own. On the other hand, I'd reckon that any commander in such a position would have tried to force the crossing. It would have been risky to wait for an isolated unit that was out of communication and might have been delayed or even destroyed.

### **The Bitter End**

Smedley had tried to make a friendship between the USA and China. She ended up being sacrificed to the vanity of General Douglas MacArthur. He'd been given vast powers over defeated Japan. He found himself in tune with the values of Imperial Japan, in as far as it had ceased to be a danger to the USA. He did do a good job in restoring Japan to strength. But he apparently took over many of their values, including the notion that he could conquer and reshape China.

In the Korean War, MacArthur may have ignored Chinese warnings and done nothing about their troop-build-up, because he wanted an excuse to extend the war to China. President Truman in 1951 was alarmed enough about what MacArthur might do to accept the political fall-out by replacing him and bringing him home. Truman probably saved the USA from a war that would have been

much bigger and more painful than their later Vietnam War. Might well have lost the USA the entire Cold War, if things had gone that way.

In the new world after World War Two, Smedley's accurate assessment of Kuomintang weakness stood in the way of any such ambition. Smedley was one of many China experts who were targeted and smeared. But this took time:

"In May of 1947 the Albany office of the F.B.I. announced that after watching Smedley for over three years they had found nothing illegal about her activities, and thus notified headquarters."<sup>98</sup>

But MacArthur's people had not given up:

"On January 1 and 2, 1948, the *Chicago Tribune* carried a two-part news story, datelined Tokyo, which had been leaked to the reporter Walter Simmons by General MacArthur's intelligence chief, General Charles Willoughby. The story began: 'Details of the most successful Communist espionage ring ever exposed, whose operation probably helped precipitate World War II, have been pieced together by the Tribune from once top-secret Japanese documents' Certainly the way the story was 'pieced together' gave it a sensational slant that neatly coincided with the prevalent conservative view that the American media had been infiltrated by persons sympathetic to Moscow. One of the two reporters named ... was Agnes Smedley."<sup>99</sup>

I can't see how even extreme anti-Communists could think that Sorge '*probably helped precipitate World War II*'. It did not involved the Japanese until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour merged it with their war against China. Sorge was able to advise the Soviet Union that Japan was probably going to strike against the USA and the Western powers rather than the Soviet Union, but this was anyway widely suspected. And the US-Japanese war might have remained separate from the war between the unlikely alliance of the British Empire and the Soviet Union, had it not been for Hitler's rash decision to then declare war on the USA.

There were problems with smearing Agnes Smedley, since she was definitely not a spy in the USA. She had not joined Sorge in Japan, where she was a known enemy. It's unlikely she even knew he was there until well after he was caught.

"The F.B.I. was anxious to make a breakthrough in the Smedley case. Privately, Hoover was concerned about the lack of concrete evidence. In April of 1948, after receiving from the army copies of Willoughby's details sixty-four-page report about the Sorge spy ring and Agnes Smedley's role, he seemed unconvinced and commented in a memo to a bureau chief: 'It is readily apparent that the author of the report was involved with motives to the detriment of the facts regarding the operation of the Sorge group.' Moreover, Hoover saw little evidence as yet of a connection between the Sorge group in the Far East and Soviet espionage in the United States."<sup>100</sup>

Smedley meantime worked for peace in China:

<sup>97</sup> Snow, Edgar. *Red Star Over China*, Revised Edition, Penguin Books 1972., page 238

<sup>98</sup> MacKinnon & MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley*, page 310

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, page 318

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, page 322

"Sharing the podium with her were the singer Paul Robeson and the former warlord Feng Yuxiang, an old political opponent of Chiang Kai-shek's who had come to the United States to sell himself to Washington as a viable alternative to Chiang. By supporting Feng, Smedley and the Committee for a Democratic Far Eastern Policy hoped to encourage the formation of some kind of new coalition with the Communists that could end the civil war. But Feng was rebuffed in Washington and afterwards stormed off to seek aid from Moscow. (He died in a ship fire while crossing the Black Sea.)" (Ibid., page 322-3.)

Had the USA flung its support behind Feng, Chinese history might have gone very differently. And his suspicious death might have happened because someone in the Soviet state apparatus saw him as a danger. Or it could have been a gesture to conciliate Chiang, whom Moscow had always been oddly protective of. Feng was a member of the still-powerful Beiyang group of warlords. He also had credibility as a man who had dared fight the Japanese before Chiang did.

Smedley meantime scored a small victory:

"Finally, on February 18 [1949], the army apologised publicly and retracted its charges against Smedley. The *Times* reported:

"The Army acknowledged publicly tonight that it had made a 'faux pas' in releasing a 'philosophical' report of Communist spying in Japan and China, and said it had no proof to back charges that Miss Smedley, U.S. author, had been a member of the alleged spy ring." (Ibid., page 327.)

Despite this, the smears worked:

"Smedley recognised that she was irrevocably labelled in the public eye as a pro-Soviet fellow traveller and suspected Communist spy. The sad truth was that in 1949 Smedley's strongest tie to an Eastern bloc country was not to Russia, but to Yugoslavia. Since the middle of 1948, Yugoslavia under Marshal Tito had broken defiantly with the Warsaw Pact and Moscow's leadership. Smedley's sympathies with the Communist-led Yugoslav guerrilla movement dated back to her friendship and admiration for Dr. Borcic in Hankou in 1938. In public addresses in the 1940s she often drew parallels between the Yugoslav and Chinese Communist movements (a comparison that finally won scholarly acceptance in the 1960s)." (Ibid., page 335)

The US government could punish her without the need to formally charge her with anything. They didn't even need to get specific about what she'd done that merited punishment. She was a Cold War enemy, and they managed to demoralise her. Having taken refuge in Britain and needing a major operation, she had a depressed attitude that may well have contributed to her death the next day:

"I expect to pass thru the operation, yet I have little interest. American Fascism, and what is in reality my exile, has caused this serious situation. I see no hope in sight for myself or for the U.S.A. I will be here for three weeks, then must recuperate someplace. I have longed for China but my passport confines me to England, France, and Italy. It expires in October. I prefer death to returning to the U.S.A. So I enter the operation in a very dark frame of mind. In case I do not recover, I bid you an affectionate farewell'...

"As a precaution, Smedley also wrote a few letters of a more formal nature, spelling out what should be done with

her royalties and her possessions in case of her death...

"I don't expect to die under the operation before me, but in case I do, I'd like to inform you of a few things... I own no property... I do not recall the exact terms of my will, but I think I left \$1,000 of my Government Bonds to my little niece, Mary Smedley. All income from my books, everywhere, all to go to General Zhu De, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army of China, to do with as he wishes ... Which means the building of a strong and free China.

"By the terms of my will, I have asked specifically that my body be cremated and my ashes sent to General Zhu De to be buried in China... I wish for the simplest possible funeral, and the cheapest that can be had in these islands [Britain]. I do not believe in wasting money on such things.

"I am not a Christian and therefore wish no kind of religious rites over my body – absolutely none. I have had but one loyalty, one faith, and that was to the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, and within that framework, to the Chinese revolution as it has now materialized."<sup>101</sup>

I'm puzzled at her using the current form of Zhu De's name rather than the one she'd used in her books. Maybe she'd decided it was more accurate. *The Great Road* might have been her best book, if she'd had the time to finish and polish it.

Tragically, Agnes Smedley died the day after her operation. She stuck to her principles to the end:

"By the time Smedley came under attack by General MacArthur's staff, she knew quite well that she could save herself personally if she would publicly denounce the Soviet Union and the American Communist Party. But as much as she hated some of the policies of the Soviet Union and despised the arrogance of many American Communists, she could not bring herself to do this. To Smedley, the Cold War rhetoric of the late 1940s seemed a reworking of the old British anti-Bolshevik propaganda of the late 1920s, a smokescreen designed to mask the building of a new American empire. Smedley was not convinced in 1950 that colonialism had been dealt a mortal blow."<sup>102</sup>

She had another option: her old link with India, where she had an important friend:

"In the summer of 1947, India achieved independence and Jawaharlal Nehru, once dismissed as a visionary and an idealist, became prime minister. Over the years, he had stayed in contact with Agnes, and how invited her to come to India and serve as an advisor to his government. She turned him down. While she hoped his voice and principles would be heard in the postwar world, she said, she preferred to return to China before America began imprisoning tens of thousands of leftists and liberals, including herself."<sup>103</sup>

Smedley stayed where she felt most useful – trying to tell the truth about China in defiance of those determined to misunderstand. Had the US not been so hostile, Mao might have stayed much more moderate and been content with less radical changes. Life would certainly have been more pleasant for Western-connected Chinese in

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., page 344-5.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., page 349

<sup>103</sup> Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*. Page 381

mainland China. But it did not happen:

"For MacArthur's people in Tokyo, the fact that Agnes had provided information to the Soviet Union made her an intelligence agent and a spy – the two terms, to them, being interchangeable. If the material she offered Sorge was nonsecret, she had clearly operated secretly and attended meetings at which secret material was discussed."<sup>104</sup>

"It made no attempt to capture her heartfelt intentions. MacArthur and his 'little fascist' (as MacArthur affectionately referred to his intelligence chief) did not care. They recognised the potential propaganda value of their document in convincing Americans that 'traitors' like Agnes were causing the country to lose the war against Communism in Asia. As Willoughby would explain, 'The importance of the Sorge case, while discovered in Japan' was 'its ancillary relation to Shanghai and the conspiracy to destroy Chiang Kai-shek and convert China into a Satellite Communist State.'" (Ibid., page 383. Emphasis added.)

They issued a press release entitled *Agnes Smedley, American Soviet Spy*:

"This American, Miss Agnes Smedley... has been one of the most energetic workers for the Soviet cause in China for the past twenty odd years. She was one of the early perpetrators, if not the originator, of the hoax that the Chinese Communists were not really Communists at all, but only local agrarian revolutionists innocent of any Soviet connections... Miss Smedley, in her five books and innumerable articles, other Communist writers, and numerous liberal innocents, have continued to spread this story." (Ibid., page 393.)

This official statement accurate only about the number of her books – the sixth and last was published only after her death. *Daughter of Earth* had nothing about China. And if they'd said 'in books including China's Red Army Marches, she tried pretending the Reds were not Red', even the most dedicated anti-Communist might have doubted. In fact all four of her published China books were clear that this was a hard-line Marxist movement and part of global Communism.

Note also that the Sorge connection seems to have been dropped. There was no evidence that she knew of his actual spying, which was anyway against Germans and Japanese. They'd have risked ridicule if they tried bringing her to a trial. But they could still harass her:

"Agnes applied for a passport in August 1949. Ruth Shipley, the fiercely anti-Communist head of the State Department's passport division, was not inclined to oblige her..."

"When the Chinese People's Republic was formally proclaimed in October 1949, its leaders officially invited Agnes to return and conveyed... two thousand dollars towards the cost of her journey. Until she had a passport, of course, Agnes could not sail to England, much less China..."

"Near the close of the month, Shipley granted Agnes a passport... Restricted to one year instead of the usual two, the document was valid for travel in France, Italy, and the British Isles only." (Ibid., p406.)

I can't help wondering why she didn't ask Nehru to give her Indian citizenship. Britain had recognised People's China in January 1950, whereas the USA delayed till the early 1970s. So once in Britain, she could have legally gone to China as an Indian citizen. But it didn't happen. Sick and harassed, she died on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1950.

*The Great Road*, Smedley's unfinished biography of Zhu De, appeared only several years after her death. Edgar Snow as her literary executor found Western publishers rejecting it. He edited a Japanese translation published in 1955, which had modest success. It was published in English in 1956 by *Monthly Review Press*, an independent Marxist publisher, but it did poorly.<sup>105</sup> It remains the only major English-language biography of a military commander who played a major role in Chinese history. In China, it is regarded as a classic. A Chinese translation sold millions.<sup>106</sup>

I explained earlier how Smedley's reputation as a Feminist was revived in the 1970s. Deservedly so – but she was one of many in her era. (Most of them at least as pro-Soviet as Smedley.) But as a sympathetic observer of China, Smedley was unique. Someone who got as close to the leading Chinese Communists as any outsider ever managed. She remains unjustly neglected.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., page 382.

<sup>105</sup> Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, pages 420-421

<sup>106</sup> MacKinnon & MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley*, page 185.