

Document 11.12: Excerpts from *Red Star Over China*, by Edgar Snow, 1968

For biographical information about Edgar Snow, see A Closer Look at the end of Chapter 12. Red Star Over China was first published in 1938. A second edition followed in 1944.

From "Epilogue, 1944"

Unimaginable hardships accompanied partisan organization at every step. While it is true the Japanese failed to destroy the partisan forces, or to stop their increase, they carried out literally thousands of large- and small-scale punitive expeditions against them. They looted and burned thousands of villages, raped the womenfolk and slaughtered countless civilians, in a terror aimed to wipe out all thought of resistance. The guerrillas always found ways to overcome the demoralizing effects of these tactics, but not without sacrifices as bitter as any endured in Russia. It was true that the Japanese were still unable to control any village much beyond the range of their garrisons along North China's railways and roads, but it was also true that their fortified points had greatly increased and could now be seized only at a heavy cost.

So much for background. How did all this affect American plans to defeat Japan through China?

"After all, you saved the Guomindang," a Chinese intellectual in Chongqing said to me when I returned to China (1942-43) as a war correspondent for the *Saturday Evening Post*. "It is your baby now and you cannot avoid responsibility for its actions."

He meant simply that American money, arms, and economic aid were given to the Guomindang authorities without any conditions concerning policies pursued inside China. American government representatives had several times made it clear to Chongqing that we would disapprove of a renewal of civil strife during the joint war against Japan, but Americans had not gone beyond that nor sought to have the blockade lifted against the partisan areas.

Chongqing established its blockade against the Eighteenth Group Army when Guomindang party leaders became increasingly alarmed by the Communists' success in recovering control of

areas behind the Japanese lines. The Generalissimo described their activity as “illegal occupation of the national territory.” The Guomindang’s War Areas Political and Party Affairs Commission took the position that all the guerrilla administrations were “illegal” and should be abolished to await the re-establishment of the Guomindang system.

In 1940 some Guomindang troops engaged the rear echelon of the New Fourth Army [CCP] while it was moving from its base south of the Yangzi River, near Shanghai, to an area entirely behind the Japanese lines to which it was assigned by the Generalissimo. It was apparently a surprise attack and the partisans were reportedly outnumbered eight to one. The little detachment of about 4,000 was not a combat unit and it was easily encircled and destroyed. General Ye Ding, the commander of the New Fourth Army (who was himself not a Communist), was wounded and taken prisoner, and General Han Ying, the field commander, was killed together with many of his staff, some doctors and nurses of the medical battalions, a number of convalescent wounded soldiers, some cadets, men and women students, and some industrial cooperative workers attached to the army.

The incident failed to liquidate the New Fourth Army, whose main forces were already north of the Yangzi River, engaging Japanese troops there, but it was the effective end of Nationalist-Communist collaboration in the field and the beginning of an open struggle for leadership in the joint war against Japan. The Generalissimo ruled that the incident was caused by the New Fourth’s “insubordination” and thenceforth withdrew all aid not only from that army but also from the Eighth Route.

For some months previous to the tragedy no part of the Eighteenth Group Army had been paid. From this time on they not only received no pay or ammunition but were blockaded by a ring of strong government forces from access to supplies in Free China, which they might have purchased or received as gifts from the people. Ironically enough, the Guomindang troops enforcing this blockade were largely supplied by Soviet Russia. There were two group armies (the Thirty-seventh and Thirty-eighth) engaged exclusively in the blockading enterprise. American officers in 1942 suggested that they were needed in the campaign to recover Burma, but

Chongqing considered their “policing role” in the Northwest of greater importance and there they remained.

All such facts were known to Americans in China, but probably few at home realized that our lend-lease aid went exclusively to the Guomindang authorities. We maintained no consular representation in Yan’an and no military liaison with the partisans. All our supplies flown over the Hump into China—modern bombers and fighters, artillery, transport, and ammunition—supported only the one party of course. Financial aid sent to China by the C.I.O, A.F.L., and Railway Brotherhoods also went exclusively to Guomindang groups.

What could be done about this “internal affair” of China? Our new treaty with China (1943) renounced extraterritoriality rights and restored full sovereignty to the Chinese Government. Could we now tell the present government how to run its business without being branded neo-imperialists? But inevitably the war had already caused us to intervene in support of the Guomindang, in terms of economic and military aid. Was it not merely playing ostrich to pretend that our entire economic help to China did not carry implicit political responsibilities of the gravest kind?

Once Japan was defeated, would Chiang Kai-shek then destroy the Communists and their partisan allies? The Guomindang spent ten fruitless years in the attempt before 1937. Even with the use of American bombers and fighters on his side, the Generalissimo was not likely to secure greater success than the Japanese had had against these experienced guerrilla warriors. It had become a physical impossibility for the Chongqing Government to destroy this opposition in anything short of a long and bloody way, fully backed by Allied troops.

By the summer of 1944 it had thus become manifest that the tiny band of youths who raised the Red flag on the lonely mountain of Jinggangshan far back in 1928 had launched a demonstration which evolved into a crusade which finally rose to the stature of a national movement of such scope that no arbiters of China’s destiny could much longer deny its claims to speak for vast multitudes of people....

On China as the “Key”

SNOW: With the achievement of victory of a Red movement in China, do you think that revolution would occur quickly in other Asiatic or semi-colonial countries, such as Korea, Indochina, the Philippines, and India? Is China at present the “key” to world revolution?

MAO: The Chinese revolution is a key factor in the world situation.... When the Chinese revolution comes into full power the masses of many colonial countries will follow the example of China and win a similar victory of their own. But I emphasize again the seizure of power is not our (immediate) aim. We want to stop civil war, create a people’s democratic government with the Guomintang and other parties, and fight for our independence against Japan.

Bao’an, July 19, 1936

On Land Distribution

SNOW: What is the foremost internal task of the revolution, after the struggle against Japanese imperialism?

MAO: The Chinese revolution, being bourgeois-democratic in character has as its primary task the readjustment of the land problem – the realization of agrarian reform. Some idea of the urgency of rural reform may be secured by referring to figures on the distribution of land in China today. During the Nationalist Revolution I was secretary of the Peasant Committee [department] of the Guomintang and had charge of collecting statistics for areas throughout twenty-one provinces.

Our investigation showed astonishing inequalities. About 770 per cent of the whole rural population was made up of poor peasants, tenants or part-tenants, and of agricultural workers. About 20 per cent was made up of middle peasants tilling their own land. Usurers and landlords were about 10 per cent of the population. Included in the 10 per cent also were rich peasants, exploiters like the militarists, tax collectors, and so forth.

The 10 per cent of the rich, peasants, landlords, and usurers together owned about 70 per cent of the cultivated land. From 12 to 15 per cent was in the hands of middle peasants. The 70 per cent of the poor peasants, tenants and part-tenants, and agricultural workers, owned only from 10 to 15 per cent of the total cultivated land.... The revolution is caused chiefly by two oppressions – the imperialists and that 10 per cent of landlords and Chinese exploiters. So we may say that in our new demands for democracy, land reform, and war against imperialism we *are opposed by less than 10 per cent of the population*. And really not 10 per cent, but probably only about 5 per cent, for not more than that many Chinese will turn tailor to join with Japan in subjugating their own people under the device of the joint “Anti-Red Pact.”

SNOW: Other things in the soviet program having been postponed in the interest of the united front, is it not possible to delay land redistribution also?

MAO: Without confiscating the estates of the landlords, without meeting the main democratic demand of the peasantry, it is impossible to lay the broad mass basis for a successful revolutionary struggle for national liberation. *In order to win the support for the peasants for the national cause it is necessary to satisfy their demand for land....*

Source: Snow, Edgar. *Red Star Over China: The Classic Account of the Birth of Chinese Communism*. New York: Grove Press, 1968. 415–418, 444–445.