

Red Star, Blue Eyes: Reexamining American Journalists in Yan'an

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“We can’t have a foreign devil telling people in the outer world that us [sic] Reds don’t know etiquette.”¹ Traveler Edgar Snow overhears this from an old peasant woman in 1936, while traveling within the Communist Chinese countryside. She butchers one of her six chickens and prepares a feast for this rare guest, who stays the night on the way to other peasant holdings in the mountainous, difficult terrain. Although Snow mainly worked as a journalist and correspondent throughout his career, this statement attributes and suggests more significance to his accomplishments. Travelers in early China have influenced the reading of Eastern and Western history. Distinct communities of historians in both hemispheres hold a twofold, diverging view of the same travels. The American historiography concentrates in uncovering biases and ideological influences of these writings. In contrast, new Chinese scholarship of American journalism in Yan’an integrates travel writings directly into the fabric of Red China’s history. In utilizing Western journalists as records of the Party’s earliest days, contemporary historians use American records to bolster the legitimacy of Communist Chinese history and ideology.

Braving harsh conditions of mountainous China and acting against rumors of Communist “bandits”, writers such as Snow and Agnes Smedley, among others, wrote compelling accounts from the early Yan’an years. Snow’s *Red Star over China*, written in 1936, compiled in 1937, and published in 1938, paves this frontier of American accounts. Smedley’s writings followed soon after Snow’s, most notably *China Fights Back*, a 1938 account that detailed her experiences with the Eighth Route Communist army. She also wrote a 1943 memoir, entitled *Battle Hymn of China*, an autobiographical account of her experiences from 1936 to 1941. *Battle Hymn of China*, encompasses life in Yan’an and her own perspectives of Red Chinese leaders. Generations after their departures from Yan’an, Chinese historians are beginning to reflect and find use for American travel writings. Snow’s journey was among the first of American journalists. Even then, many members of Red Chinese society already understood the significance of their new visitor and what he would chronicle. From his experiences and interviews with Communists from leaders to rank-and-file members, Snow published a 1938 account titled *Red Star over China*.

1 Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York, 1938) 241.

Both Western and Communist historians read this book, which is considered one of many first perspectives inside Red China. But while Western historiography seeks to criticize the ideologies of American travelers, Communist Chinese historiography adapts it to encompass Communist Chinese ideology.

Upon examining the historical annals of Communist China, some Chinese historians consistently painted the Yan'an years with a rose-tinted brush. Ideologically, they strived to uphold the concrete goals of opposing a Japanese foe, with little internal complications and relative ideological solidarity. This patriotic, jingoistic portrayal certainly coincides with the underdog image of the party at the time. Within this time period, the compound was small and struggling, yet solid in its foundation. Within the introduction to *Red Star*, John K. Fairbank writes:

In 1936 the Chinese Communists had just completed their escape...They were ready to tell their story to the outside world. Snow had the capacity to report it. Readers of the book today...should be aware of this combination of factors.²

Red China's story, one of a struggling underdog fleeing the monolithic Guomindang government, was not received in America, save for a small group of communist-sympathetic journalists. In modern readings, these journalists are depicted and analyzed differently in American and Chinese sources due to their controversial ideologies. Their experiences not only included vivid descriptions of life within Communist China, but also provided insight into the thought processes of early leaders. Interviews with figures such as Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong, and Zhu De provide insights into early party strategy and goals. American travel accounts provided some of the Western World's first foundations into understanding Red China.

While their stories remain, the nature of the legacy of these leftist journalists is a subject of contention even within the ebbing environment of a Post-Cold War world. Examining the impact of American Journalists in early Communist China, I will discuss these travelers' and journalists' views of Yan'an, focusing on the writings of Edgar Snow and Agnes Smedley. I will also address the context of their writings from American and Chinese perspectives. While the education and influences of Snow and Smedley are mostly Western, their careers have earned them both places in Chinese and American history. Because of this dual presence, two distinct historiographical images of America and China emerge. Each tells its own story about the same events. While the

² John K. Fairbank, Introduction, *Red Star Over China* (Random House, New York, 1938) 11.

American historiography seeks to unravel partially romanticized views of Red China that Snow and Smedley write about, the opposite happens in Chinese readings. Within contemporary Chinese criticism of Western journalists, travelers are almost canonized and lauded for their long-standing friendships and loyalty to the fledgling Red China. Because the Yan'an base was small and struggling to garner recognition, its leaders found a channel for their perspective through Western travelers. Red Chinese had a story to tell. American journalists searched for that story within Yan'an mountains. The resulting writings emerge from the union of Chinese perspectives and American journalism. This somewhat idealized, sympathetic setting of Red China would prompt criticism from contemporary American scholars and acclaim from their Chinese colleagues.

The Landscape of Early Red China

Americans such as Snow and Smedley were the first Western eyes inside the Yan'an Camp, which was the culmination of a long, bitter march across the Chinese countryside. Although much had been written on China, Red China was mostly shrouded in mystery. Yan'an, a pariah in both geography and policy, was largely unexplored territory for the Western World, save for the Soviet Comintern bureau. During the Yan'an period defined by the Communists, the rest of China was centered on Nanjing, where the Guomindang (KMT), made its base. Striving to rebound from the previous decade of "humiliation", Chiang Kai-Shek, leader of KMT, and the nationalist leaders wanted a clean-faced China to step onto the global stage.³ While the KMT gained Western concessions in Shandong and along the Yangzi and managed a weak relationship with isolationist America, Communist China was more isolated in its relations. Its leaders' relations with governmental organizations were virtually limited to the Russian Comintern, and even then, Red China's development only served as an example to potential communist countries. From the perspective of military leader Zhu De in 1937, there were no radio communications, supplies, or political direction, with only mail correspondence with the Soviet Union.⁴ Despite this subdued influence from Communist Russia, Red China was beginning to operate on a philosophy of its own. As Leader Liu Shaoqi said to reporter Anna Louise Strong, Mao Zedong "has not only applied Marxism to new conditions, but has given it new development. He has created a Chinese or Asiatic form of Marxism."⁵ Indeed, Mao's interpretation of Marxism deviated from its Russian incarnation. These

³ Diana Lary, *China's Republic*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007) 85.

⁴ Philip J. Jaffe Papers Box 13, folder 2, 24 (Interviews with Communists).

grandiose ideals placed Red China, an emerging state with a new ideology, at the heart of world matters in the minds of Communist Chinese leaders, despite what other political and geographical limitations may have been attributed to the Yan'an commune. Although early thinkers had large plans for the future, there were many limitations before the plans could start to hatch.

Yan'an and Mao's chief concern in the beginnings of Red China was the looming threat of the Japanese empire. Throughout the Yan'an period, the Communist Party leadership assessed the impact of revolutionary "anti-imperialism" to areas inside and outside of China.⁶ Because they had much at stake in gaining momentum throughout China, Chinese Communists found that Western journalists were a key platform to spreading ideology overseas. Based on efforts of Party leaders, there was a sense of openness towards clarifying main points of ideology. Western journalists were warmly received, and encouraged to report on news of the Eighth Route Communist Army.⁷ With limitations from domestic and international sources, writers and journalists were an invaluable medium of communication for the party facilitating the circulation of information. Through these accounts of travel and meetings with military, peasants, and leaders, these journalists pieced together images of both China and America in a dynamic, changing era. As Scholar John K. Fairbank phrased in the introduction to *Red Star*, "the remarkable thing about Red Star was that it not only gave the first connected history of Mao and his colleagues, but it also gave a prospect of the future of this little-known movement which was to prove disastrously prophetic."⁸ Indeed, the communist movements of China became notable, in time. Yet, Snow was able to get the stories when no one was paying attention, a fact that made his work notable decades later. While Western scholars scrutinize Snow's background and the influences of his writing, contemporary Chinese historians focus on his contributions to general Chinese history. "Snow was the first to bravely test the waters," writes historian Zhao Aiping. "An almost magnetic force drew others after him into Yan'an." Indeed, by 1944 a 21-journalist group had formed specifically for the purpose of reporting Red China's anti-Japan efforts⁹. As an explorer of this new ground

5 Stephen M. Goldstein, "The Chinese Revolution and the Colonial Areas: The View from Yanan, 1937-41," *The China Quarterly*, no. 75 (1978) 597.

6 *Ibid.*, 594.

7 Wang Xiaolan, "抗战时期中国共产党人与外国记者的交往" kangzhan shiqi Zhongguogongchandang ren yu wai guo jizhe de jiaowang, *党史文汇 dangshi wenhui* 25, vol. 8 (2005) 26.

8 Fairbank, *Red Star Over China* 13.

9 Zhao Aiping, "外国记者眼中的延安" zhongguo jizhe yanzhong de Yan'an, *文史精华 wenshijinghua* (1999) 43.

in China, Snow was able to break ground from the perspective of all viewers of his personal history. To the Communist Chinese, his exploration the Red frontier would prove beneficial to their public relations to the rest of the world.

New Hands of China

Within the years of Snow and Smedley's travels, not only China itself but also the face of the westerner in China was changing. Historian Jerry Israel observes: "The days of the 'old China hand'—of big investments, missionary business ties, and gunboat diplomacy—were coming to an end. Gradually, a set of "new China hands", many of them born in the twentieth century, were emerging."¹⁰ It is important to note that aside from their attributes, the new China hands also had a key difference in the audience of their writings. These new hands would bring sympathetic perspectives on China that would be reflected in the ideas of their Chinese and American readers.

Certainly Edgar Snow can be characterized as a 'new hand' at the time of *Red Star's* publication. Thirty two years old and still a green correspondent, Snow viewed China and the communist presence with a fresh outlook and a distinctive personal style in writing. Unlike many old China hands, he "spoke Chinese—to speak it at all was surprising in a day when most foreign newsmen in China were based in Treaty Ports and got their news from English-speaking representatives of the National Government and warlords, and from the foreign diplomats."¹¹ The lessened language barrier enabled Snow to write concisely, interview, and translate with greater efficiency than his predecessors. In addition to greater linguistic experiences, his approach to chronicling his travels distanced him from the role of a missionary, religious or secular, which sought to explicitly push an agenda on Red policymakers. True to the archetype of the "new China hand," Snow set out into communist territories despite rumors and stereotypes of communists simmering below the surface of Isolationist America. Although it is tempting to simply categorize Snow as just another cog within a system of new westerners in China, it is important to note that his work broke ground into Red China, showing its people to America for the first time.

During the same years of *Red Star over China's* publication, writers such as Carl Crow and his portrait of port-city Shanghai, *400 Million Customers Served*

10 Jerry Israel, "Mao's Mr. America: Edgar Snow's Images of China," *Pacific Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (1978) 110.

11 John S. Service, "Edgar Snow: Some Personal Reminiscences" *The China Quarterly* 50 (1972) 210.

equaled if not surpassed Snow's account in notoriety.¹² Interviews conducted in *Red Star* still impact the Chinese Communist Party. Of particularly considerable value are the early interviews he conducted with Mao Zedong, who spent his early years living as a leader of many Yan'an fugitives. The meticulously-recorded dialogue serves as a key chronicle of the Party's earliest days.¹³ Snow's writings encompass a collection of first encounters with Red China for many Americans and international readers.

Snow had never identified himself as communist, but fellow reporter and traveler Smedley was adamant to declare herself one. Described in a review by Helen Foster Snow as "a tortured psyche" whose work in China "transformed sickness into valuable productivity," in China her books are considered invaluable primary sources to readers of feminist and Chinese studies¹⁴. Notable amongst her experiences are her years spent with the Red Army. Where Snow specialized in gathering information about Red China's political operation, Smedley saw firsthand how its military worked. Snow and Smedley differed in politics, but they did associate and communicate with one another throughout their lifetimes. Although her views were more radical than Snow, Smedley defended the former's writing and acknowledged his work in her own publications. Both wrote on subjects unpopular to an America that was growing wary and afraid of Communists. And yet, they kept writing. To understand Snow and Smedley's writings, one must ask and investigate their writing influences. To view their publications from the desks of American and Chinese historians is to investigate two aspects of American travelers' influences.

What motivated these journalists to write? The answer to this deceptively simple question drives a line between American and Chinese historical approaches, weaving a sociopolitical background upon which the primary sources can be examined. While writing their place in the histories of America and China, Snow, Smedley, and other leftist travelers were affected by a Western approach and grew as Eastern thinkers. In parallel to the dualistic nature of their writings, two schools of historians study their legacies, separated by the barriers of information and political ideology. In considering the backgrounds of Snow and Smedley, American scholarship considers far more

12 Israel, "Mao's Mr. America: Edgar Snow's Images of China," 107.

13 Nicolas R. Clifford, "White China, Red China: Lighting out for the Territory with Edgar Snow," *New England Review* 18, no. 2 (1997) 103.

14 Helen Foster Snow, "Review: *China Correspondent* by Agnes Smedley" *The China Quarterly* 103 (1985), 523.

nuances and biases of these travelers. Chinese historiography proves more selective, picking and choosing aspects of American journalists to integrate.

Rereading Edgar Snow: Two Histories

In this divided, complex landscape of China, different journalists represented and took with them a diverse picture of America. Snow was one of the first to break ground in the region. He “represented middle America,” wrote Helen Foster Snow, his first wife and fellow American correspondent. She assured officials that they were non-communists, at least by official association. Therefore the initial free, easy, secular viewpoint ultimately characterizes his forays into China. He writes from a distinct perspective from missionary eyes of years past, representative of a progressive America before isolationist policy.¹⁵ And yet Snow was seasoned in other ways, and became disillusioned by his experiences within the KMT-controlled Republic of China. In 1936, he found student activists disenchanted and disillusioned, frustrated with the lack of resistance potential within the Chinese people.¹⁶ He found that China faced the coming storm of Japan-Chinese conflict, and gained interest in the formation of a resistance movement in Yan’an. Attempting to involve himself by gaining Red Chinese perspectives, Snow set his course for Red China. “In doing so,” writes Thomas S. Bernard in a biography, “Snow would find himself even more caught up in the events he recorded.”¹⁷ In translating not only language but also culture and politics for readers abroad, his writings would later be pulled into historical prominence, partially at the doing of Red Chinese he observes.

Red Star is largely a young man’s book. Although Snow authored it at thirty-two, he had built considerable experiences in China, despite his biases against KMT politics. “It is very much to the credit of Edgar Snow that this book has stood the test of time on [two] counts—as a historical record and as an indicator of a trend,” writes renowned sinologist John K. Fairbank in the introduction to *Red Star*.¹⁸ Snow’s language skills, honed by years of working within China, aided him immensely as he traveled in Yan’an. He spoke Chinese fluently and was able to translate his interviews, in a manner that was more “effective than elegant,” giving his writing an easy, relatable style. This practical mindset led him to acquaint himself with various communists within and

15 Israel, “Mao’s Mr. America: Edgar Snow’s Images of China” 111.

16 Thomas S. Bernard, *Season of High Adventure: Edgar Snow in China* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996) 125.

17 *Ibid.*, 126.

18 Fairbank, *Red Star Over China* 13.

outside of Yan'An when other newsmen of his time worked with translators out of treaty port offices.¹⁹ Snow's lifestyle of active journalism and effective language characterized him as an active player in Chinese travel writing. And yet, he expressed a relatable anxiety to readers about entering the Communist compound. "Against a torrent of horror stories about Red atrocities that had for many years filled the vernacular and foreign press," Snow wrote, "I had little to cheer me on my way." It is with this tentative sense that he introduced the readers to his accounts, taking them into the sense of unease he found.²⁰ Later in his narrative, Snow would be surprised and emboldened by his discoveries and would introduce the world to the earliest days of Mao Zedong.

In order to understand the lens through which Snow views Mao, it is important to reconsider his role up to the point of entry into Yan'an. Biographer Thomas Bernard describes it as a model medium to convey Mao's past and present:

As a trustworthy but non-communist Western journalist, Snow appeared ideally suited to bring out the Reds' story. He had broad access to the bourgeois media in China and the West as well as extraterritorial protection for what he wrote. Not only would his reports carry more weight than those by an avowed communist, but the very fact of his independence from Communist ties made him more likely to grasp the broader implications of the message Mao wished to convey. Thus Snow... would now become the 'medium,' in his later words, 'through whom [Mao] had his first chance, after years of blockade, to speak to the cities of China, from which the Reds had long been isolated.'²¹

Snow's stance as a non-communist only served to benefit his authenticity as a historical source for Red Chinese scholars. Much to their benefit, there was a sense of frankness to Snow's descriptions of the 'Soviet Strong Man,' as he deemed Mao. He saw the opportunity in describing and interviewing the chairman, who he admired personally and had befriended in their meetings. "The Role of his personality in the movement was clearly intense," he finds on first impressions.²² He emphasized Mao's likeability, geniality and work ethic in early days before beginning to chronicle one of the first Western-penned biographies of the leader. To Mao and the Chinese then and in contemporary days, Snow was an integral part of making Chinese history, and his distance as an American was a trait that would make him all the more trustworthy to readers abroad.

19 Service, "Edgar Snow: Some personal reminiscences" 210.

20 Snow, *Red Star Over China* 39.

21 Bernard, *Season of High Adventure* 131.

22 Snow, *Red Star Over China*, 93.

Because he fit the bill for an ideal communist medium of news so well, Communist historians today use Snow as a basis for western “friendship” in the Yan’an era. This friendship is called into question from some western biographies of snow. Although Communists today praise him as an icon of western “friendship”, Red Chinese did not necessarily always consider Snow a close friend. Within most years in the Mao era, Red Star was circulated only in within the inner circles of the Party (内部).²³ In this secretive circulation, Snow never received royalties for the book’s sales. It is important to consider the revisionism of biographical details in Chinese readings of Snow, for the praise he is given is relatively recent. The distancing of Mao and Snow within their later lives is omitted in the Chinese history of Snow in China. In considering Chinese readings alongside Western scholarship, sociopolitical factors begin to arise. Although the primary texts examined are identical, both communities observe are one and the same, the ideas they gleaned differ as much as White and Red China.

Rereading Smedley: Rejection and Revision

Agnes Smedley’s life, career, and legacy are intricately linked to her support of communist movements and philosophy. Her early career encompassed activism within India and Europe, and she became notorious in America’s government based on her sympathies. It was in 1928 that her illustrious career in China began. As she crossed the Soviet-Manchurian border, she found profoundness in the poverty that she began to observe.²⁴ The work that she would do in year to come would be beyond her own expectations. Her peculiar history with the Red Chinese also factored significantly into the unique historiography of American travelers by Red scholars. Not only are Smedley’s writings read with revisionism in mind, but so too is her oscillating life and experiences within the Chinese Communist Party.

Battle Hymn of China was published in 1943. Its contents spanned the years 1936 to 1941. Within the enclosed map, the reader is able to glimpse one China, the sun emblem of the United Front at the corners, and recall that this is an account written before the dividing Civil War. And yet, Smedley strived to find the cracks in this united China, the seams in which it would eventually be pulled apart. “Chinese law read well on paper,” she observed, “but it was worth no more than its weight in bribes. For a penniless Chinese there was no justice

23 Bernard, *Season of High Adventure* 185-186.

24 Janice R. McKinnon & Stephen R. McKinnon, *Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of An American Radical* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1988) 134.

at all.”²⁵ Compared to Snow, Smedley was ill-equipped to write on the Chinese, her speech broken and rough. However, what Smedley lacked in technical skill in Chinese, she made up in personality and appeal. Expats and Chinese alike were drawn to her characteristic boldness even in her earlier days working in China. Eventually she amassed the title of “White Empress,” tracing a path throughout China, Hong Kong, and beyond in her years in Asia.²⁶ How Smedley gained accountability in her personal relationships, which also played part in her compelling accounts, is through her dynamic personality. She embroiled herself within her story and shows a sense of bravado, with experiences at the fronts of the Red Army. In working as a member of the unit that was the Chinese Army, Smedley had Chinese military influences in her correspondence back to the West.

Smedley’s first impressions of Zhu De, a key figure in her own stories, described the man as the “father and mother” to the fighters under his command, his “generous mouth spread in a broad grin of welcome.” Humanization is a key goal of hers stylistically, working against American perceptions of communists as bandits and guerillas.²⁷ Within weeks, though, she was acquainted with the general and conceived the idea of writing the biography of the military commander, echoing Snow’s actions of biographically chronicling lives of leaders. Her friendships with early Communist leaders were lasting, remembering Zhu De and Zhou Enlai in her writings, which are used by the Party as a historical chronicle.

Smedley’s views of Mao Zedong were distinct from Snow’s biographical approach. In contrast to Snow’s partiality towards the charisma that the young leader had, Smedley feels unease when she first meets the future Chairman. As she approaches him within the cave complex of Yan’an, “an instinctive hostility sprang up inside me and I became so occupied with trying to master it that I heard hardly a word of what followed.”²⁸ This uneasy impression of Mao continues with her discussion of his philosophical leanings:

Every other Communist leader might be compared with someone of another nationality or time, but not Mao Zedong. People said this was because he was purely Chinese and had never traveled or studied abroad. . . . But his theories were rooted in Chinese history and in experience on the battlefield. Most Chinese Communists

25 Agnes Smedley, *Battle Hymn of China* (Alfred Knopf, New York, 1943) 98.

26 Gao Cui, “史沫特莱的中国情愫”, *shimodelai de zhongguo qingsu 中国共产党新闻 zhongguo gongchandang xingwen*, (2007)

<<http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/68742/70423/70424/5825815.html>> 1.

27 Smedley, *Battle Hymn of China*, 164.

28 *Ibid.*, 169.

could think in terms of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Mao could do this too, but seldom attempted it.²⁹

Perhaps Smedley's directness, in contrast to Snow's more distanced observations, characterized Mao differently. In reading his expressions and behavior, she seems to find a sinister side to the future chairman where Snow does not. Her perspective as a writer focuses on military campaign over philosophical and political dealings. Given this context, it is natural that Smedley personally favors the commander Zhu De over the future Chairman Mao. Yet, if Snow's writing is somewhat prophetic in nature, then Smedley's passage above also can be said to hold some water. Mao indeed deviates in philosophy from Stalin, and does so more noticeably in the coming years of Chinese Communist history.

Smedley's directness did not permeate all aspects of her life in Yan'an. Biographers Janice and Stephen McKinnon wrote that she was "playing with dynamite, and she didn't seem to know it", blinded partially by her Westernized, feminist views on marriage and relationships.³⁰ Smedley was very socially active, and, due to her restless personality, worked several jobs within the Yan'an compound. She soon drew negative attention from many of the wives of the commanders and leaders she interviewed. In remarking on several square dance lessons that she had been attempting to teach, Smedley wrote: "I acquired a very bad reputation among the women of Yen-an [sic], who thought I was corrupting the army; so bad did it become that I once refused to give another dancing lesson to Zhu De."³¹ While there were exceptions, Smedley was not an accepted or popular figure within Yan'an. In fact, her biography presents some details to suggest otherwise, including her ultimate rejection by the Communist party. After her departure from Yan'an, she settled in Hankou, and described her difficulties and others' perceptions of her circumstances.

In the following passage from *Battle Hymn*, Smedley recounts her difficult early days after following the Army at its frontlines. "Because I had always fought the terror and advocated civil rights for the people," muses Smedley, "I was a paid Communist Agent. On the other hand the Communists believed that all foreigners automatically had means of earning not only a living but a luxurious living."³² This melancholy tone was brought on not only from her days without finding employment, but also ideological distance from the

29 Ibid., 169.

30 McKinnon & McKinnon, *Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of An American Radical* 187.

31 Smedley, *Battle Hymn Of China* 171.

32 Ibid., 206.

Chinese Communist Party. She was relatively isolated from the central action, that her passion for reporting war and revolution was subdued and limited by city life.³³ Even within the pages of *Battle Hymn*, she is reluctant to reveal aspects of her personal life; aspects that scholars like Clifford are able to glean from her selectivity of subjects. A rift between her and Mme. Sun Yat-Sen was a central aspect to Smedley's social conflicts, stemming from her support of a KMT-leaning doctor.³⁴ Smedley was sent packing across other cities, distanced from social circles and individuals that were once her allies. This was seldom revealed in correspondence or publications, and the difficulties neglected by Chinese historiography.

Like Snow, Smedley had a public persona to retain, and it is this persona that Chinese scholars have memorialized. After the events of Hankou, she recovered her prolific pace of work and continued to write throughout her career. When she departed China for good, she felt a sense of melancholy and was deeply sobered by her experiences. Ultimately, she was rejected by the Chinese Communist Party, and unable to report on the front lines that she once loved.³⁵ China's impact on Smedley reflected the work that she had placed within its borders, and the mutual exchange of influence can definitely be seen within her writings on China. Through American readings, China had left its legacy on Smedley. Through Chinese readings, she had left her mark on China, but only posthumously. In later life she became a nuisance to officials. . However, contemporary articles written by party sources cite her as a "soldier of China," and that to her death she "never forgot the feelings of the Chinese Revolution."³⁶ From these attributes, it can certainly be said that her life and work are remembered all too warmly by contemporary Chinese Communists.

Keepers of Records: Journalists from Chinese Eyes

In rereading Snow and Smedley's accounts, it is important to consider how the subjects of their writings reflect on and use the legacies of these journalists. In these travelers' case, the Chinese historiography is one that integrates their sympathetic findings and correspondence into the fabric of Red Chinese history. Within his time, Snow's Chinese hosts "regarded him as a 'historian'" rather than a war correspondent throughout visits. His story, which places the struggle of White and Red China as a struggle of "haves" against "have

33 McKinnon and McKinnon, *Agnes Smedley* 211.

34 *Ibid.*, 217.

35 *Ibid.*, 229.

36 Gao, "史沫特莱的中国情愫," 2.

nots” humanizes the pieces and components of the Chinese Communist Party.³⁷ Smedley’s story is a fight, evidenced by her fascination with military figures and leaders. Their normalization of life as a Red Chinese appealed to Chinese Communist leaders immensely. On the basis of China’s isolation, there were few venues for information to be transmitted outside, let alone to Western World powers. What makes Snow and Smedley important to the Communists is their pioneering efforts. Despite gaps in communication and tensions present throughout the travelers’ lives, modern-day historiography is generous with praise. In evaluating the lives of American journalists in Red History, a story of friendship and diplomacy emerges.

Contemporary Chinese historians marvel at the records that western travelers were able to obtain from communist China. “Zhou Enlai and many other leaders would often receive western journalists to dine and converse at length with about Party-related news. In December of 1940, he discussed the history of the Eighth route campaigns and army to [Anna Louise Strong] over the course of several evenings.”³⁸ These traveling journalists, often a good channel for information outside of the compound and into international print, provided an invaluable political platform for early leaders. Party members were open to dedicate hours or days to carefully explaining components of strategy and ideology to sympathetic ears. With the relative diplomatic isolation of Yan’an, to have interest shown in the Party’s cause was a welcome relief to its leaders. Agnes Smedley is remembered fondly by party historians who recalled her charged speeches and camaraderie with Zhu De, who shared difficult childhood experiences for an extensive biography she authored.³⁹ Smedley and Snow, throughout their stay in Yan’an, also took many photographs that captured life in the Yan’An compound, totaling an archive of over 60 photographs, including Mao and Zhu in their earlier days.⁴⁰ Citing Snow’s claim of Mao as a “prophet in the caves,” the Chinese school of analysis focuses on the precedents of Yan’an as integral to Chinese history, and found the archiving work done by American travelers invaluable. Snow learned that Mao predicted the Chinese would emerge triumphant in the Sino-Japanese War (give dates). Citing Snow’s observations, contemporary historians extrapolate a landscape of Yan’an that fits with the rhetoric of the modern day communist ideology. The four character slogan of “Japan must lose, China must win” (日本必败·中国

37 Stanley K. Hornbeck, “Book Reviews: The Other Side of the River” *World Affairs* 126, no. 2 (1963) 120.

38 Wang, “抗战时期中国共产党人与外国记者的交往,” 27.

39 Gao, “史沫特莱的中国情愫”, 1.

40 Zhao, “外国记者眼中的延安,” 44.

必胜) snappily characterizes the drive and motivation of the Yan'an government. This comes as a surprise to Snow, who "couldn't believe his ears" in hearing this statement from Mao.⁴¹ This neat interpretation of the Snow-Mao interviews is conveniently consistent with contemporary Chinese Communist rhetoric. It universally confirms Yan'an ideology as legitimate and, taking strong control of China where the KMT failed. Using these positive interpretations, Chinese historians heap praise on Americans telling their story to sustain political equilibrium and consistency.

From Snow's accounts, Chinese historians derive a different picture of Yan'an than American counterparts. From one passage, communist slogans extol the egalitarian aspects of Yan'an, ostensibly contrasting Red life to life in White China: "There the sexes are equal, the education is free. The Red Army and civilians alike sing daily.... The People's government love the people! The Communist Party's love can be spoken of endlessly!"⁴² To label this description as absolutely uninfluenced by party ideology is difficult. Yet, this landscape that historians glean from travelers' records suggests what the Red Chinese wanted out of the journalists—to present their struggles and livelihood in a positive context. How the Chinese received journalists' writings are to be observed as partially political. Yet, it is consistent with the intentions of the journalists as well. In considering Snow's intent in telling their story to the Western World, contemporary Chinese readings of his records fulfill this goal, albeit decades later. "Snow's reports brought hope, trust, and strength to the suffering people Chinese people,"⁴³ writes historian Sun Guowei. In writing correspondence and compiling notes for a book to be published back in America, he was also impacting the lives of leaders and peasants back in Yan'an, as well.

It is difficult to separate political ambitions and ideology from Chinese historians, who work within a communist framework where their western counterparts do not. But despite the limitations of information, there is a lot to be said about the legacy of American journalists from the observations of Chinese historians. Focusing on the lives of men and women that wrote on their earliest days, they integrate these historical figures, foreign in origin, into the vast landscape of Chinese history. What they seek in re-interpreting these travels and the writings from them is a sense of appropriation. In taking these journeys that were once neglected by leaders in the Mao era, contemporary historians

41 Ibid., 43.

42 Sun Guowei, "sinuo jiang maozedong tuixiang shijie", 斯诺将毛泽东推向世界, *jizhe guancha* 记者观察 13 no. 6 (2010), 68.

43 Ibid., 69..

can re-appropriate the bravado of Red China in Snow and Smedley's Yan'an. Their writings affirm a rose-tinted view of a positive, struggling Red underdog in a White sea of corruption. Because of this purposeful interpretation of Americans in Yan'an, the contemporary Chinese historiography is an important political move. Although these journeys are conducted by American actors, no longer are their findings entirely American in nature and purpose.

Distance and Proximity: Western Historiography of Travel and Journalism

The Red China that American journalists wrote about during the Yan'an period faces criticism by American scholars and acclaim by many of their Chinese counterparts. From a superficial overview, it is simple to attribute this dichotomy to the politics of the two states. However, there are many dimensions to account for in these schools of thought, which paint very different portraits of the journalists. Within American and Western biographies of these travelers, the aim of the historiography is to illuminate what influences their writing.

For historian Nicholas R. Clifford, who has written specifically on British and American travelers in the Chinese countryside, ideology and writer are difficult to separate. Clifford in particular focuses on journalism and correspondence of the Yan'an period. He questions the accuracy of the Yan'an portrayed by Snow and Smedley, the selfsame Yan'an that Chinese historians use as a record. Within the Yan'an Era, there was the old ways of White China and the new philosophy of Red China.

This new way is, of course, Communism. Or at least what is called "Communism" by its Chinese practitioners, for it is apparently taking a form rather different from that visible in the Soviet Union. Edgar Snow first encounters this development in 1936, when he makes his way in secret from Xi'an to Baoan, Mao Zedong's temporary northwestern headquarters, and for Snow and those who follow him, the line dividing White from Red China is no mere geographer's expression, but a rhetorical or discursive frontier as well.⁴⁴

Clifford illustrates this image of a China divided by an ideological wall in addition to the mountains that carved apart the space between Yan'an and Nanjing. In transitioning from White, KMT China to Red, Communist China, travelers such as Snow view the new environment with a sense of exoticism, an Eden away from the corruption of the outside world.⁴⁵ In readings of these accounts, the sense of the "Other" is downplayed, but still present. Snow uses

⁴⁴ Clifford, "White China, Red China," 136.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

his practical, middle-American style to normalize himself when possible. As he establishes his journey, he builds it up to a trip of grand proportions with deliberate motivations, and is able to depict two distinct Chinas. Certainly, there were two states within Republican China. But how Snow chooses to write them, argues Clifford, makes all the difference of ideology and politics that colored the texts. It is argument that Chinese historiography deliberately overlooks. To concede that their 'western friends' had flaws detracts significantly from their trustworthiness as a channel of information. Snow's intent to divide China, a sentiment that helps the public image of Communists immensely, is what popularizes him with Red Chinese historians. In examining his and Smedley's highly politicized biographies and writings, Western scholars attempt to present a more integrated story of the American traveler.

White China and Red China are different entities when the travelers arrived in Yan'an. Although Communist Chinese lauded Snow and Smedley on clear, concise portrayal of the countryside, Clifford finds his and other writers' images of China biased by their proximity to the leaders. Quoting accounts of Snow and Smedley, Clifford finds both radical, yet representative examples echoing orientalism of the past. This identification of Chinese by predecessor "capitalist vanguards" reduces China's people to incomplete beings within the context of a western model of success.⁴⁶ Clifford's readings of Snow's accounts and writings were clouded to a certain degree, based partially on the nature of travel writing. To a certain degree, he finds these travelers' eyes clouded by the same limitations and urges them to Orientalize as their fellow westerners have. What makes Snow and Smedley's accounts so compelling is their directness, the physicality and close proximity to all subjects when traveling.⁴⁷ The reader gains trust in Snow based on immediacy, telling detail, and the concrete visuals that he is able to present within medium of travel writing. Clifford discounts Snow's views that separate "scoundrels" and "crooks" of White China from the "intense eyes" and "bravado" of the Reds that Snow finds early in his journey.⁴⁸ Once again the divide between the "Two Chinas" is made apparent. White is antagonized and Red is romanticized in Snow's view. The language he uses to separate the two is emotionally charged, and compels the reader to see the Reds as intense, courageous freedom fighters. To a historian examining Snow's political influences, these factors affect his writing significantly. The orientalism that Clifford finds is echoed by other historians when discussing general trends

46 Nicholas R. Clifford, "The Long March of "Orientalism: Western Travelers in Modern China," *New England Review* 22 no. 2 (2001) 128.

47 Ibid., 129.

48 Clifford, "White China, Red China," 108.

of early Communist China. This romanticism in writing was certainly a prevailing trend within the period that Snow observed China. Fairbank also writes on the context of Westerners in China, which he finds ingrained in American jingoism and established actions.

During these decades of warlordism, revolution, and invasion, foreigners had special opportunities to participate and be helpful or acquisitive in Chinese life. It was a golden age, the great American experience of semicolonialism. It is a fine thing if you can get it, as we would, without a sense of guilt for having set it up.⁴⁹

Even though to a certain degree, these sympathetic journalists contribute to this process, it is superfluous to lump them in with the old China hands in corner offices, working off secondhand news. To simply view the flaws in their works without context neglects the components of their stories. What they brought to China, argues other scholars, is as notable as what they took out of it. In understanding backgrounds and influences of Snow and Smedley's writings, their intents in publication gradually surface. Although Snow was only thirty upon entry to Yan'An, he had worked for seven years within China, and had gained the connections needed to do so. His friendship with Mme. Sun Yat-Sen allowed him to gain entry into the Communists' mountainous citadel.⁵⁰ Just as Snow's influences prior to China have received some scholarship, relationships he formed throughout his travels are also important to consider. The figures that Snow wrote about were not merely historical characters written in reflection, but men and women that he ate with, conversed with, walked with, and befriended. This sense of sympathetic "authenticity" legitimized his writing style to the Red Chinese and supplemented Communist readings of *Red Star*.

Based on Snow's experiences, Clifford finds *Red Star* difficult to regard as an objective primary view into Red China. Other historians view Snow's later career and its factors in his reporting. Jerry Israel finds the characterization of Edgar Snow solely on the basis of *Red Star* to be inaccurate—although it is among Snow's most read work, it cannot define his life's work as a whole. He evaluates the labels of "propagandist" and "romantic rhetoric" and expands beyond these easy stereotypes of the journalists. Such simplification, argues Israel, characterize Snow, and by extension, Smedley, into blank slates. These archetypal journalists sleep restlessly in Red China, only awakened from a Van Winkle-like dream by the philosophies and practices of Chinese Communism.⁵¹ Indeed, his experiences in 1938 Yan'an were only one of many components of

49 John K. Fairbank, *China Watch* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1987) 29.

50 *Ibid.*, 11.

51 Jerry Israel, "'Mao's Mr. America': Edgar Snow's Images of China" *Pacific Historical Review* 47, No. 1 (1978): 108.

Snow's writing and professional experience. The makeup of Snow's extensive bibliography on Asian affairs, offers a great deal of context for Snow's writings. His goals in publishing *Red Star* and other articles on Red China would become renowned. Yet the legacy of Snow is inconsistent throughout differing decades. Bernard, in a biography of Snow, found that in later years his ties to the Communist party would wane. Mao would forget details about his close friend's life, and the circulation of *Red Star* within China would be highly limited.⁵² Although Snow carries a significant legacy within China today, he would not live to see his writings' effects on Chinese history.

It is important to consider Agnes Smedley's bibliography differently from Snow's writings. While the two corresponded, collaborated, and were close friends, Smedley's personality permeated her many accounts within China. Again, Israel's warnings must be taken into consideration. Her background before China, which included work with Indian communists and separatists from British rule, established her reputation long before her days in Shanghai. Analysis of Smedley incorporates these contexts into readings of her work, and criticism of it highlights her attention to the details of the makeup of the Chinese people. In one early review of *Battle Hymn of China*, Harley F. MacNair writes that "In no other account of contemporary China known to this reviewer are there contained so many facets of life and the character of people and country. Scores of details—tragic, comic, drab, heroic" intrigue the reader. Certainly, embellishments are present, as Smedley's account retains the characteristics of a travel narrative.⁵³ Indeed, there are a great many telling details within both *China Fights Back* and *Battle Hymn*. Its contents encompass "deep tragedy, high comedy, [and] gray drabness of revolutionary life," according to reviewer Harley Macnair.⁵⁴ Within these accounts of colorful rhetoric, Smedley simultaneously immerses herself and draws information from her personal discovery of Red China.

Smedley, politics aside, is able to pull anecdotes together well, using one scene of socialist doctors grave-digging for Japanese bone specimens. This somewhat macabre action is reported brightly by Smedley with a comedic tone.⁵⁵ Clifford finds that she "participates wholeheartedly in the conventional planting of Western history's signposts in a country with a quite different past:

52 Bernard, *Season of High Adventure* 186.

53 Harley Farnsworth MacNair, "The Battle Hymn of China: Review," *The Journal of Modern History* 16, no. 1 (1944); 68.

54 *Ibid.*, 68.

55 Smedley, *Battle Hymn of China* 270.

the European placing herself “in command, almost at will, of Oriental history, time, and geography.”⁵⁶ To categorize Smedley’s actions as such is confusing, however. To discern which attributes are aspects of her domineering and direct personality and which are characteristic of the European orientalist is more ambiguous, given the context of her works and actions within China. What Clifford characterizes as Smedley’s and Snow’s usage of orientalism is its presence as a political tool.⁵⁷ As travelers describe contrasting images of White and Red China, they utilize the good and bad imagery latent in travel writing to associate potential and hope with the Reds and the squalid filth they find with the KMTs at the helm. The bold rhetoric of Smedley and likeability of Snow are qualities that appeal to contemporary Chinese historians, and are emphasized through their interpretations.

Legacies of Red Stars and Battle Hymns

Until 1979, the People’s Republic of China was not recognized as China’s national government by the American government. At that point the Communists had journeyed far from their self-identified humble roots, and had controlled China since 1949 at the close of a bitter civil war. For most of the duration of the Cold War, the definition of legitimacy and identity of the Chinese State was a large question on the minds of American diplomats and foreign policy analysts. America perceived mainland China as a problematic component of the communist bloc, and their relations from then on were tenuous until the advent of the Nixon Administration. Still, the connections and communication established by journalists into Yan’an remain key accounts from American Perspectives in China. In America, they served as a sympathetic vehicle into the territory of a potential adversary. American scholars and politicians can pare out the extraneous opinions and ideological leanings of the authors. Chinese scholars choose not to, using a broader reading of travel records and memoirs to propagate a rosier view of early Red China. This revisionism takes the best qualities of Snow and Smedley and integrates them into a relationship of lasting friendship that may or may not have existed.

Despite difficulties and declining relationships, American travelers did not absolutely forget their friends. Photos of Edgar Snow standing side-by-side in Mao’s last days remain. Smedley, still loyal to her dear friend and comrade Zhu De, had a biography of him published posthumously, a work that she had been writing for a great deal of her life in China. While it can certainly be said

56 Clifford, “The Long March of Orientalism,” 134.

57 Ibid., 135.

that these writers made a great impact on modern China, the same can be said that China left a great impact on them.

Edgar Snow's ashes are partially buried beside a lake in prestigious Peking University. English and Chinese inscriptions on his grave marker read "An American friend of the Chinese people." The other half was scattered along the banks of New York's Hudson River. These ashes were scattered at his requests, in deference to his wish to become part of China. Many readings of Snow focus on aspects of his Chinese life. Smedley was buried in Babaoshan cemetery, and her ashes sent to General Zhu De, her life-long friend and subject of a posthumous biography⁵⁸. However, in order to truly understand the breadth of any journalist that spent time within Yan'an, their writings must be read as part of American history as well. Despite their allegiances and sympathies, the background and experiences of these travelers are inescapable, by the writers and readers alike.

58 Snow, "Review: China Correspondent," 523.