

Still, China is the world leader in journalists and netizens in prison. Goldman's reliable and illuminating essay clarifies how many Chinese of conscience are not cowed by the repressive Beijing regime. This wonderful pamphlet is about how these people struggle to advance the cause of "Political Rights in Post-Mao China." ■

EDWARD FRIEDMAN, a specialist in Chinese politics who teaches courses on democratization, is a professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Yale University Press has just published a paperback version of his book *Revolution, Resistance, and Reform in Village China*.

### New Booklet Series from the AAS

## Introducing *Key Issues in Asian Studies*

Published by the Association for Asian Studies (AAS), *Key Issues in Asian Studies* is a new series of booklets designed for use in undergraduate humanities and social science courses, as well as by advanced high school students and their teachers. *Key Issues* booklets are designed to complement *Education About Asia*, and serve as vital educational materials that are both accessible and affordable for classroom use. Booklets will sell for around \$10. AAS plans to publish two or three booklets per year.

Booklets in the series will tackle broad subjects or major cultural and historical themes in an introductory yet compelling, jargon-free style, written to encourage classroom debate and discussion. The idea for a teaching booklet series was first conceived by Jim Huffman and Peter Frost, names familiar to readers of *Education About Asia*.

Former *Key Issues* Editor Robert Entenmann commissioned two booklets. *Political Rights in Post-Mao China* by Merle Goldman, and *Gender, Sexuality, and Body Politics in Modern Asia* by Michael Peletz are now available for purchase. Please visit [www.aasianst.org](http://www.aasianst.org) for details and ordering information.

After Robert Entenmann's resignation due to personal commitments, AAS Editorial Board Chair Martha Selby and I asked Lucien Ellington whether he would consider taking on the role of *Key Issues* Editor. We are thrilled to announce that Lucien has agreed to spearhead this important new series. Lucien, who will of course continue as Editor of *Education About Asia*, is ideally situated to guide *Key Issues* to great success. We have high hopes for the series under his editorship.

We are pleased to announce that interest from potential authors about writing *KIAS* booklets has been very encouraging. Potential titles include: *Caste in India*, *Traditional China in Asian and World History*, *Understanding East Asia's Economic Miracles*, *South Asia and Globalization in Early World History*, *Korea in World History*, and *Japanese Pop Culture*.

When you have questions about *Key Issues*—or have suggestions for topics that would be useful in your teaching—please contact Lucien at [l-ellington@comcast.net](mailto:l-ellington@comcast.net). For further information, visit [www.aasianst.org](http://www.aasianst.org). ■

Jon Wilson, AAS Publications Manager

## Helen Foster Snow

### *An American Woman in Revolutionary China*

BY KELLY ANN LONG

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF COLORADO, 2006

237 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0870818479, HARDBACK

REVIEWED BY DIANA MARSTON WOOD



For those who entered the Asian Studies field in the 1970s, the names Edgar Snow and Helen Snow (Helen wrote under the pseudonym Nym Wales) "loomed large." These two individuals, along with Agnes Smedley, Israel Epstein, and Rewi Alley, wrote extensively about the Chinese Communist Party and became advocates for understanding and supporting its policies during the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s. The Snows both visited (on separate occasions)

the Communist Yan'an base during the years prior to World War II, and each was able to interact personally with Mao Zedong and other Communist leaders. However, it is Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China* that appeared on required reading lists in the 1970s. Despite the publication of her own books and her marital connection with the famous Edgar Snow, Helen Snow's work is often overlooked. Kelly Ann Long's biography effectively clarifies the reasons.

While Long divides this thoroughly documented biography into discrete, chronological chapters, I believe the work can be appreciated best by focusing on three major sections. The first section focuses on Helen Snow's family background, pathway to China, marriage, and partnership with Edgar Snow, and the couple's entry into radical Chinese politics during the mid-1930s. I was surprised to learn that Helen was raised in a conservative Mormon family. However, her intelligence, determination to become a "great author," and the confidence she gained because of her glamorous appearance, led her to "ship out" to China in 1931 in the midst of the depression. She quickly found work in Shanghai and became part of a coterie of Western correspondents and writers assembled to monitor those turbulent years in Asia. Once married to the correspondent and occasional university teacher Edgar Snow, Helen created in their home a "salon" where university students and intellectuals gathered to discuss politics. Through this involvement, Helen honed her ideas about China and East Asian policy and, according to John Dower, "contributed to a growing body of foreign correspondence that over time would help to move US public sentiment away from long-standing negative views of China and its people, eventually shaping new images of the Chinese" (69).

The second section focuses on Helen Snow's half-year stay in Yan'an, its impact on Helen, and its significance for the larger world.

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Although her husband had already visited Yan'an to obtain the interview with Mao Zedong that would rock the world, Helen's competitive nature drew her there independently in 1937. While the living conditions were harsh and the challenges huge for obtaining a realistic understanding of Communist policies and potential, Helen persisted, returning to write her own book, *Inside Red China*, published in 1939. For the reviewer, this part constitutes the most interesting section of the book. Long explores an essential issue: the cultural limitations imposed on anyone who attempts to interpret another culture. She portrays Snow as often naïve, guilty of being a "sentimental imperialist travel writer," and all too often attempting to make the Communists attractive to Americans, which resulted in distortions. Despite these limitations, Long argues that Helen Snow's chapters on Communist policies toward women and children were groundbreaking and contribute uniquely to our understanding of these early years.

The third section deals with Helen and Edgar Snow's return to the United States in the wake of World War II—in 1940 and 1941, respectively. Their marriage quickly disintegrated, but Helen's long life (she died in 1997) allowed her to write extensively about her China experiences, to clarify her version of the Snow marriage (presenting the reasons she was overshadowed by Edgar), and to enjoy an exalted position within the circle of "early Western friends of Communist China." Long's evaluation of Snow's contribution is instructive for those who study Asia. She argues that despite her inability to "shed culturally instilled predilections and perceptions" that distorted her views of the Chinese, she served as a valuable "bridger" between cultures. Helen "engaged the Chinese as individuals" and "helped to change popular notions of other people and cultures." Through her intimate involvement with the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives (Indusco), she demonstrated her humanitarian commitment and "showed others how to move beyond isolationist worldviews." Indeed, according to Long, Snow's work presents us with the challenge of evaluating any memoir, which Long sees as a balance of "myth, memory, and history."

For teachers interested in understanding the formative years of the Chinese Communist Party during the 1930s, Helen Snow's writings deserve attention, and Long's biography is a great place to start. This book requires a closer examination of 1930s China (including the dynamics of the expatriate community) than one can usually devote in the typical undergraduate Asian, or even China, survey class. However, the biography presents a great opportunity for undergraduate research on "the Western experience during the Yan'an years" or "policies toward women at Yan'an compared with the 1950s, 1960s, or even the 1980s." The possibilities for research are enormous. As Kelly Ann Long says, "much remains to be discovered about the life and work of Helen Snow; many texts still must be mined." ■

**DIANA MARSTON WOOD** is a research associate in the Asian Studies Center at the University of Pittsburgh. She serves as a regional coordinator for the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia.