

VI - 73 C - 14. Smedley, Agnes, "Sad Plight of China's War Refugees  
Told By Prominent American Writer" China Weekly Review,  
September 9, 1939.

11-73-C-14

# Sad Plight of China's War Refugees Told by Prominent American Writer

BY AGNES SMEDLEY

**Editor's Note:**—The following is a condensation of a report on civilian refugees in Kinghsien, Nanlinghsien and Suenchenghsien sent to foreign and Chinese organizations engaged in civilian relief work in China. Miss Agnes Smedley, the author, is a member of the Chinese Red Cross Medical Relief Commission. She conducted the investigations on which the report is based in April and May of this year in company with Dr. C. C. Sheng, Medical Director of the New Fourth Army. The three districts covered are situated along the southern bank of the Yangtze River, south of Wuhu, Tangtu and Nanking. Earlier, Miss Smedley compiled a similar report on Fanchang hsien, which is in the same general vicinity. This report appeared in *The Review* for May 20, 1939.

THIS report deals with the number and condition of civilian refugees in the three hsien. It includes brief mention of the medical services of four different Chinese armies and some guerrilla and self-defense units. I bring in the army medical services because up to now they are the only means the civilians have of securing aid in times of air bombings or fighting. The aid is small because the armies move often, carry as little as possible and do not have the medical personnel or medical supplies to care for their own forces adequately. Some have nothing. The New Fourth Army alone makes it an organic part of its work to give medical aid to civilians on the same terms as to its own armed forces. However, its mobile units in the field move often and cannot do regular work of this nature, so that only base hospitals continue such work consistently month after month. Its divisional hospitals do the same, though they also move quite often...

### The Relief Committees

In each hsien studied, there is an official Refugee Relief Committee which is a branch of the Refugee Relief Committee of the Third War Zone, which in turn is a branch of the Central Refugee Relief Committee of the Central Government and which receives and distributes funds from the Central Committee in Chungking...

Refugee relief funds come from a number of sources, from the Central Government committee, from local contributions, from a special tax on cigarettes, from special campaigns fostered by the various armies who contribute from their meager monthly allowances, or from theatrical performances of local youth groups or young officials who charge entrance fees to get money for refugee relief. Also a regular system was introduced by the Government in the past, and in many places until today, of using a certain proportion of public rice stored in the public granaries for food for the refugees... Japanese occupation of many places brought much of such relief to an end, for the

Japanese looted the granaries and rice shops, fed themselves, and transported vast quantities to Wuhu, Nanking and other Yangtze cities.

Funds from the Central Government Relief Committee have been most inadequate, because the refugee problem is nation-wide and of gigantic scope. Also, it must be added that not all refugees are absolutely destitute. But the vast majority of farmers, most of the artisans and a few students, primary school teachers and such intellectuals are totally destitute. Some find work; the school teachers sometimes found schools and run them on monthly collections from the public. Men and women alike cut fuel from the mountainsides and sell it. Some find a little day work as farm laborers or as carriers. Many able-bodied young men volunteer or are conscripted into the various armies or guerrilla bands. Countless numbers have died of hunger and disease, no statistics being kept. Thousands wander over the land, begging from door to door or from the various armies.

### Try to Keep Clean

Despite all the misery depicted here, still I was impressed by a number of other facts. The refugees, particularly the women, try to keep their clothing clean—and succeed where the conditions are not too impossible. The refugees are patient and have kept their humanity toward others in most cases. I have found few or no records of criminality. While many refugees have sold their children that they might get food for them and something for those unsold, still I found that they keep their children with them wherever possible. I have found no criminal children of the type who became a problem following upheavals in western countries or in countries of widespread unemployment. On the whole, I must pay high tribute to the character of the common people of China, who ask only for the means of making a living. In every region we visited I heard of refugees who would not register with the Refugee Relief Committee because they were ashamed. In only a few places did any refugees approach me as beggars. Above all, I was impressed by the helpless refugee children.

The total number of registered refugees in Nanling, Kinghsien and Suencheng hsien may be given in approximate figures:

Hsien	Receiving Relief at Relief Stations	Receiving no Relief
Kinghsien	974	3,500
Nanling	800	19,200
Suencheng	Relief Stopped	20,000

Apart from these registered refugees there are large numbers who have never registered, who wander as beggars, who have found some little work, or who had a little capital and used it to start small shops or to become vendors of small articles... There are five refugee stations around the city of Kinghsien, all of which we visited and inspected, Dr. Sheng

examining the health of all. The refugees are from regions nearer the fighting front—Suencheng, Fanchang and Wanchih (Wantze). All refugee stations are in big family temples... In one of the Kinghsien stations we found a man who told us his story, which is perhaps typical of thousands: "We left Wantze, near which we cultivated six mow of land, just as the Japanese approached. We had no time to take anything with us. We had six sons. One I sold for \$14; one I gave to a farmer who agreed to feed and care for him; one son died of small-pox this winter; we have these three little sons left." On the road we once halted at a poor tea shop to get some water. The servant was a little boy perhaps 12 years of age, thin and undernourished. The old woman who owned the shop told us that this child had stood before her shop the day before, weeping. His father had been killed by the Japanese near Wantze, his mother had wandered off, and he had no home. He was wandering the roads, looking for his mother. The old woman took him in, but she did not know what to do with him, for she earned too little to keep him.

### Terrible Diseases Rampant

In Kinghsien, the physical condition of the refugees may be said to be typical of all in the three hsien studied. A physical examination showed that fully 95 to 99 per cent were sick or diseased. Nearly all had scabies, often infected; only three or four in each station were without trachoma; some were blind from trachoma and others would later go blind. Even little babies had trachoma. Here are the afflictions we found; scabies, trachoma, tuberculosis, malaria, anaemia, rheumatism, syphilis, dysentery, various intestinal disorders including worms, goitre, chronic ulcers—and practically all had lice. In every station there had been deaths this past winter from "fevers," the refugees said—perhaps dysentery, typhoid, small-pox or influenza...

There is absolutely no medical relief for the refugees, nor are there any doctors or nurses about Kinghsien. At the present rate of relief, the Refugee Relief Committee of Kinghsien spends Ch.\$1,700 per month to maintain the five stations. Formerly, when rice was available, each adult received one catty and in addition two cents a day for salt, oil, vegetables, etc. Each child received a little over ½ lb. of rice and 1½ cents a day in cash. There is not enough relief rice now, so six cents a day is given in cash...

### Children Without a Future

Not only in Kinghsien, but in Nanling and Suencheng hsien later (and earlier in Fanchang hsien and other regions), I saw many thousands of children growing to manhood and womanhood during this war, in mental darkness, without any plans, any disciplined study or work, almost all of them sick and diseased. This is the future generation of China and these children, coming from the toiling people, will constitute the basis of future China. What kind of men and women will they be? Of course, thousands will die, for the conditions of their lives will kill many. Their lot is particularly sad because family

discipline is stronger over them (this is also an advantage in one respect) than with western children. They lack the wild energy and individual initiative of western children. China is so poor that even if a child has the wild energy and independence of a western child, still it will get him little or nothing.

So the children I have seen grow thinner and weaker and more harassed by sickness and disease. They are intelligent—no children on earth are more intelligent or accept the responsibilities of adults without complaint, as do these children. It seems to me, personally, that relief funds should also be used to organize and

Kingsien city has been bombed five times by Japanese planes, though it is not a military base but purely a market town and hsien administrative center. Bomb holes and ruined buildings mark the city everywhere. There is one large and interesting official school in which young men of middle school education are being trained to act as officials in the various sub-divisions of the hsien. While I was there, 180 of these young men graduated. They put on a dramatic performance for which they charged entrance fees, and took up a collection among themselves and the city officials, raising \$700 which they

because Chinese artillery along the Yangtze had attacked their transport ships the night before, inflicting serious damage and sinking one of them. In revenge, planes flew over the region, bombing anything that struck their fancy... Practically all bombs had been directed at the heart of the city, along the main business streets and the residential sections. I have not found any place where the Japanese aimed at any military objective, except at the railway outside Suencheng, which we visited later... All reports of the Japanese about instructions to their air forces to destroy only military objectives are the most blatant and cynical lies...

### Refugees Who are Well Cared For and Happy



One has only to observe the pleasant, smiling faces of the Chinese war refugees pictured here to realize that they are being well cared for and relatively happy—by contrast with the unhappy victims of Japan's war machine whose woes are depicted in the accompanying report by Miss Agnes Smedley. This picture, taken in Kinhua, present capital of Chekiang province, is of war refugees who are being cared for by the Catholic Mission in that city.

maintain schools for refugee children, and that the children should be fed in these schools and given a change of clothing without which such diseases as scabies cannot be cured. Medical aid should also be given in the schools, which could be organized by many of the young school teachers who are refugees from other regions now occupied by the Japanese. The cost would be little....

There are no qualified medical workers in Kingsien, and only one in Suencheng hsien. The herb doctors, and many so called doctors in private practice, are not doctors but a danger to public health. They are to be found here and there, unable to diagnose any case or treat it decently; and they sell quinine tablets for 25 cents each and other drugs for proportionate sums. They do not hesitate to sell one tablet of quinine to a man and let him believe it will cure him of malaria. In fact, they themselves do not know how to treat malaria or any other disease in a proper manner.

gave to the Refugee Relief Committee. It is clear that this hsien will have a new type of official in the future. I learned that many of these young men were themselves refugee students from Japanese-occupied regions....

We arrived in Nanling city on May 23, about four hours after Japanese planes had again bombed this much-raided city. One of the bombs this time had hit the front section of a refugee station just outside the East Gate, killing six and injuring eight.... There was no kind of rescue group to aid the refugees, no kind of medical care except the first-aid given by a clinic of the 50th Army which is some distance from the city.... The raid on Nanling was another act of purest vandalism, for there were no troops in the city and only an army clinic a number of li away to receive wounded soldiers from the front. The Japanese army bombed Nanling and other towns and villages in this region

Conditions in the refugee stations in Nanling hsien are very bad and dangerous to the general public. In one small station we found a peasant refugee dying, others haggard skeletons. In one big temple and in surrounding mud huts we found 800 refugees, 99 per cent of them peasants. In September, October and November of last year each received a catty of rice and two cents a day for other foods, while children received half a catty of rice and 1½ cents a day. Since then, these refugee stations have received nothing....

On the border of Suencheng hsien and Kingsien is a small town in which there is a temple with 97 refugees, all of them without relief, and all in a frightful physical condition.... Sanitary conditions are terrible. There are two cesspools in the middle of the temple, breeding places of disease. Dr. Sheng made a

general examination of all the 97 persons. Scabies was universal, some infected; practically all had trachoma and five were blind with trachoma, among these being two sisters about 16 years of age who came forward for examination, holding each other's hands, groping their way sadly in the eternal darkness. Tuberculosis was clear in many; malaria and anaemia afflicted others; there were chronic leg ulcers and carbuncles. One little child was not only infected with gonorrhoea but was suffering from kala azar. One baby was sick with chicken-pox. All were suffering from malnutrition. Yet with all this, most of the refugees were clean. At first sight, as we stepped in, we both said: "They are in fairly good condition." We changed our opinion after the physical examinations were completed, and after we had inspected the temple with its piles of straw, ragged bedding and a few miserable pots and pans. Most of the refugees live by begging....

#### Looted and Burned

The Japanese were driven out of Suencheng city three different times, the last time being in January of this year, but what they had left undestroyed by airplanes they looted and burned before they left.... While in the hsien, the Japanese not only lived off the rice of the hsien, but they made drives into towns and villages and looted all the public rice granaries they could find. They looted and transported from 200,000 to 300,000 piculs of rice from the hsien....

After their first occupation of Suencheng and other hsien towns, the Japanese introduced a new method which they thought would demoralize the Chinese population and which automatically revealed the kind of Chinese on whom they can depend in occupied regions; that is, they organized and brought with them Chinese "gutter-snipes" (lumpen-proletariat) from Wuhu, who, like jackals, did the looting for the Japanese. Jackals, however, are not so vicious as their human prototypes; for these gutter-snipes brought their loot to the feet of their Japanese masters and obediently took only what the Japanese did not want. If the Japanese thought this would demoralize the Chinese population and cause them to think that the Japanese have a high standard of morality, they were wrong; every person in the hsien knew that these were creatures brought by the Japanese army from Wuhu to do the dirty work which the Japanese did not have time to do....

There are bandits in this region, armed with Japanese-made rifles and machine-guns. In some of the towns, where the merchants sit supreme, fearing the mobilization of the people, there is no kind of mass organization or armed defense force. The only solution the merchants have to offer is that the people run away if the Japanese come. Repeated conduct of this nature has not taught these merchants and town officials one living thing....

At Shuiyang we spent two days and two nights. The town changed hands five times since the Japanese occupied it the first time in December, 1937. They occupied it the last time on April 4, about a month before our arrival, but slept in the town only one night because Chinese troops were converging on them. In their first two occupations, the Japanese killed altogether about 500 people by bayonetting them or burning them to death, or by drowning them in the river....

#### Another Slaughterer

When we left Shuiyang and turned to the east and northeast, we entered a region over which the New Fourth Army and other guerrillas forces fight.... We passed along in what may be called their footsteps—destroyed villages. At one village, Koulochen, all but one mud hut had been destroyed. This village had been settled by Chinese who had formerly lived in Japan, married Japanese women, but who returned to China with their wives and children after this war began. The villagers had fled as the Japanese army approached, but some of the families had small children and could not move rapidly. The Japanese caught six of these families, all Chinese men with Japanese wives and children of mixed race, and took them away. Those who escaped told me they heard that all but the children were killed. In another village, Kankou, partially destroyed, eight women and a number of old men did not run away. The men were all killed, the women were all raped, while three of the latter were afterwards killed as well. The women who survived are still in Kankou....

In Sunjiapu I could find no person in the town who had lived under Japanese occupation, for all 80 who had been there were slaughtered as the Japanese were driven out. When the Chinese recaptured the town, they found the brothel only partly burned, with the corpses of the bayoneted women still unburned. They found the bodies of the men; some of these bodies, decapitated, were still on their knees, their hands tied behind them.... At a mass meeting in the town, at which I spoke, everyone attended.... the children were half naked, ragged, bare-footed little things, their eyes inflamed with trachoma.... How can mere words comfort people in such conditions, with the gaunt ruins of their homes forming a background before me? Yet I carried nothing beyond words. I only wish that the foreign friends of China who give money, medical supplies and other relief could have heard their names shouted from thousands of throats.... I tried to give the people courage by telling them, among other things, of their countless friends and sympathizers among the peoples of democratic countries and in the Soviet Union. It seems almost deception to speak of such aid, because not one copper of it or one ounce of medical supplies has ever come into these regions, though foreign relief funds have been used to erect great refugee zones

in cities under Japanese occupation. Yet in many such zones, the men have merely constituted a reservoir of forced labor for the Japanese army.

#### Appeal to Doctors

Throughout my trip, also, my mind was filled with the knowledge that thousands of Chinese doctors and nurses still remain in port cities or even in Japanese-occupied cities and regions, and do not leave their comfort to come into Chinese territory, care for their harassed people or help the wounded of their armies struggling for the country's liberation. It seems to me essential that all Chinese who remain in Japanese-occupied regions, and all doctors and nurses in particular, shall free their minds of every illusion about the Japanese and about the future of themselves and their country if the Japanese should be victorious. Chinese and foreigners may be shocked when Japanese frankly say: "We do not want to help the wounded Chinese. We want them to die." Of course the Japanese want Chinese to die! That is why they are in China. The reason they have not killed more than they have killed up to now is only that they do not have the technical facilities for killing them. They have not killed, outraged and debased many medical workers in port and other cities because they have not had the time or opportunity—first they must try to destroy the Chinese government and the Chinese armies. After that—should such a thing be possible—they will turn their attention to the detailed job of mopping up every Chinese everywhere who entertains a shred of illusion in his brain that he is a man with the rights of a man.

Foreigners who also still foolishly believe that they and their womenfolk will, at the worst, be in Japanese concentration camps, are also living in a day-dream. The Japanese will do to these foreigners, and their women, exactly what they have done to Chinese women everywhere, and to Russian women in Manchuria. China and the Chinese are today the great barricade between civilization, on the one hand, and the ruthless barbarism of the Japanese military machine, on the other. If we permit the Chinese barricade to be broken down, we cannot expect any other treatment than that meted out to the Chinese....

#### Investigator's Conclusions

1. In the three hsien here studied, there are 50,000 registered refugees, of whom less than 2,000 are receiving some form of regular relief. The others receive nothing. Apart from the 50,000 there are tens of thousands of others unregistered and without relief; and in other regions many times their number.

2. There is no medical relief for refugees in these regions except two base hospitals and one detachment of the New Fourth Army in two places, all of which have inadequate personnel and supplies and no money for relief; there is one fairly well qualified medical worker (not a doctor) in

Suencheng city government, without supplies; the other "doctors" in the region are quacks making money out of misery. The guerrilla forces and one army have no medical force at all.

3. All hsien visited, except the northern part of Suencheng, are rich in bamboo and other timber, oil seeds, tung oil, rice, wheat, beans, cotton and silk; they also have water power. Suencheng has been looted of its rice. The other places not. Small industrial cooperatives could utilize and develop the natural resources and give employment to thousands of refugees, but it will be some time before they are adequately developed. However, medical relief—which includes medical workers—are a necessity in the region for the coming summer months, when dangerous epidemics may develop. Dr. C. C. Sheng's estimation of the kinds of medical supplies needed to treat refugees are given in the following list:

#### Concrete Needs Listed

Quinine, vaseline, sulphur powder, aspirin, amm. chloride, sodium bicarbonate, mag. usta, mag. sulphate, sodium sulphate, boric acid powder, bleaching powder, salicylic acid, zinc sulphate, ichthyol, potassium permanganate, camphor oil ampules, iodine crystals, mercurochrome, Bland's pills, copper sulphate sticks, T.A.B.C. vaccine, serum, small-pox vaccine, neostibasan, emetine, brown mixture tablets, carbolic acid, lysol, glycerine, argyrol, cod liver oil, urotropin, bismuth subnitrate, tinct. of camphor, adrenelin, carbonei tetrachloridum and cleoresina aspidii, atropin-morphine ampules, antipyrin, calcium lactate, cascara, santonin, vitamin extract, neosalvarsan, sulphanimid, scalpels, probes, dressing forceps, scissors, cylinders, small portable autoclaves, thermometers, hypodermic syringes with 2 cc. and 10 cc. needles, artery forceps, gauze, adhesive plaster.

It must be understood that the above list is for civilian refugees only. The use of these drugs should be in the hands of persons qualified to administer them. Because the refugees are concentrated in temples generally far distant from one another, medical workers—must be organized in small mobile units, to go from one station to another. Only in the hsien cities is it possible to establish a clinic to which refugees from stations there may come.

4. Cash relief is needed, to accompany the medical relief work, to feed refugees until they are economically independent through the development of industrial cooperatives, wherever such cooperatives are established. A branch office of the Industrial Co-operative movement has now been established in the Third War Zone. This office is trying to get sufficient numbers of men and women capable of becoming organizers and administrators to attend a training school for a short period of time. It will be some time before the cooperatives can be developed in all the regions in which there is need for relief. Cash for refugee relief until then should be administered by representatives of the relief organizations giving the money; such representatives could work with existing official relief

organizations, but they should inspect and check up on any cash or food distributed.

It seems to me that relief funds could be well spent if used to enlarge some of the primary schools which we saw on our trip; refugee children should be brought into these schools, given a change of clothing and fed in the school. Unless managers come to the region to establish regular children's homes to care for orphan children, or for the children of refugee parents, the primary schools seem, for the present, the best alternative.

#### Health Service Needed

5. It is my conviction that medical relief work in connection with the great refugee problem, should be the beginning of a Public Health Service, and should be brought under the Government as a system as soon as possible. There is no Public Health Service in any region we visited. There is a doctor (or nurse) in each hsien city we visited, but he is connected with the city government and the scope of his work seems to be extremely limited—far more limited than his supplies. These men give no help to the refugees right within or near the cities in which they are located. However, the existence of such "official" doctors (nurses) is a good thing, though their scope is most limited. They are insufficient in number and all but one was inadequately trained for serious cases. The supplies are also inadequate or non-existent. However, beyond the hsien cities, there is no kind of health service. The Yangtze River valley is a malaria region. In addition, flies have now begun to swarm everywhere. Food vendors, restaurants and tea houses ply their trades without even the rudiments of sanitary precautions. There have been times when water has been polluted and diseases spread by decaying corpses and human blood. In Suencheng hsien people told us that many people died from unknown diseases near regions where fighting was the most severe. A Public Health service growing out of medical relief work among the refugees could solve countless problems. Such medical relief work immediately and in the future must be accompanied by lectures on personal and environmental hygiene.

#### Urges Aid for Guerrillas

6. Medical supplies should be made available for the many guerrilla and Self-Defense Corps in the Yangtze Valley. These men are local farmers or workers, and often students, armed to defend their homes and regions. Often they combine agricultural and other activities with armed defence. I spoke to organizations of men with a fighting record of over a year. Those men came directly from their fields to hear me speak. They were all hard-working farmers. Others were farmers whose homes have been destroyed by the Japanese, whose fields cannot be cultivated because the Japanese have occupied points near them. They have become permanent fighters until the enemy is cleaned out. They have no medical staff and no medical supplies, though some of these forces are hundreds strong and some even larger.

## British Hand Over 4 Terror Suspects

Apparently acting to forestall court action which might have resulted in the liberation of the four Chinese terrorist suspects who have been held since last April in the British Municipal Jail at Tientsin, the British authorities in the northern city handed the four men over to the puppet Tientsin District Court on Sept. 5, according to a *United Press* report.

On Aug. 31, Judge P. Grant-Jones of the British Supreme Court in Shanghai ordered issuance of a summons requiring the Tientsin British authorities to show cause by Sept. 11 why the four Chinese should continue to be held. Failure to show due cause would, it is believed, have led to the issue of a writ of *habeas corpus* and the consequent liberation of the men.

The aforementioned *United Press* report said the four men were taken in sampans (Tientsin is flooded) to the Woodrow Wilson Street barrier on the border of the British Concession and there handed over to puppet court officials, from whom the British authorities obtained a receipt. A strong police escort went along to frustrate possible rescue attempts.

It is believed that the British authorities in Tientsin will endeavor to justify their extradition of the prisoners in face of the pending court action on the ground that the Shanghai court summons had not arrived in the mails. But, it is pointed out, notification that summons had been issued was telegraphed to Tientsin precisely against such a contingency.

The local British law firm of Ellis & Hays has been handling the case of the four men. Whether anything further will now be done is a moot point, but the belief prevails that, confronted with a *fait accompli*, the responsible British authorities here will take no action, despite the fact that there is a severe penalty for disobeying or circumventing a summons.

Arrested for alleged implication in the shooting of Chen Shi-kang, puppet Customs inspector, who was killed in a movie house in the British Concession on April 9, the four victims of British apprehension were held for four months without trial. The British refused to hand them over to the Japanese or their puppets because there was no evidence of their guilt. This refusal was the main pretext for the Japanese blockade of the British Concession. Finally, when the recent Anglo-Japanese negotiations in Tokyo were under way, the British Government agreed to hand them over when the Japanese produced alleged "evidence" of their guilt—evidence which the British said was sufficient to establish a *prima facie* case against the accused. Actual extradition was delayed until this week due to the institution of *habeas corpus* proceedings.