

On Anna Seghers' Acceptance of China in the 1920s and 1930s

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Abstract:

Anna Seghers is a famous German anti-fascist writer in the 20th century and a famous proletarian revolutionary fighter, her work is notable for exploring and depicting the moral experience of the Second World War. Born into a Jewish family and married to a Hungarian Communist, Seghers escaped Nazi-controlled territory through wartime France. She returned to Europe after the war, living in West Berlin (1947–50), which was occupied by Allied forces. She eventually settled in the German Democratic Republic, where she worked on cultural and peace issues. She received numerous awards and in 1967 was nominated for the Nobel Prize by the GDR.

Throughout the life of Seghers, whether she studied Sinology in Heidelberg and Cologne in her youth, or joined the Communist International and paid close attention to the revolutionary movement led by the Communist Party of China, China's influence on her was manifold. As we can see, there are many descriptions of China in her works. Although she never visited China in the 1920s and 1930s, we can still feel her interest in the Chinese revolution in her work. Communicating across cultures has a two-way influence. On the one hand, we can clearly see her acceptance of China, whether it is the traditional Chinese ideology and culture or the creative inspiration brought by the Chinese revolutionary movement. On the other hand, when we read the literature of Seghers, we see China a hundred years ago and the proletarian revolutionary movement in China. In this way, we can see ourselves through the eyes of the other, adding a different perspective to this great history.

Keywords: Anna Seghers, German Left-wing Literature, Chinese Culture and International Communication

I. The Origin of Seghers ' Study of China

Anna Seghers (pseudonym of Netty Reiling Radványi) was born in Mainz into a cultured Jewish family. Netty, an only child, was often ill and sought solace in her vivid imagination and in books. ¹Seghers first came into contact with Chinese culture while reading, as she said "Ich wünschte mir, als ich noch ein Kind war, hier [in China] einmal anzugelangen. Ich hatte ein paar Märchen und Gedichte gelesen, auch Schriftzeichen, die mir vorkamen wie Gedichte und Bilder in einem. Ich fragte mich, was sind das für Menschen, die ihre Gedanken mit Tusche und Pinsel in solchen Schriftzeichen ausdrücken können? [...] Dann lasen wir Bücher, die über Chinesen und von ihnen geschrieben waren."² I wished to come here [in China] when I was a kid. I had read a few fairy tales and poems, also written characters that seemed like poems and pictures in one. I asked myself, what kind of people are they who can write these Chinese characters with ink and brush to express their thoughts [...] Later I read some books about Chinese people and books written by Chinese people.) Seghers loved painting and art since childhood, so she developed a huge curiosity about picturesque Chinese characters. In order to quickly decipher the texts in ancient Chinese pictures and gain a better understanding of this fascinating culture, she majored in Chinese language and culture, sociology and history, while studying at Heidelberg University. She ultimately obtained a doctorate in art history.

In addition, Seghers' study of Sinology was also influenced by her family. It was a wealthy Jewish family with good traditions and deep cultural literacy. On both her parents' sides she came from Jewish families that had risen to prosperity during the nineteenth century. Seghers' father Isidor Reiling (1867-1940) and his brother Hermann Reiling (1862-1942) owned an art and antiquities firm inherited from their father David Reiling, who first came to Mainz dealing in dry goods. The brothers turned the family trade into one of the city's thriving businesses. The firm soon acquired a European reputation, and its regular customers included members of the Hessian, Prussian, and Russian courts.³ Her mother, Hedwig Reiling (pseudonym of

¹ Christiane Zehl Romero. "Anna Seghers". Jwa.org. Jewish Women's Archive. Retrieved 21 July 2017.

² Anna Seghers: Verwirklichung. In: Gustav Seitz: Studienblätter aus China. Mit einem Geleitwort von Anna Seghers. Aufbau-Verlag, 1953, S. 6.

³ Fehervary H. Anna Seghers: The Mythic Dimension[M]. University of Michigan Press, 2001, S. 19.

Hedwig Fuld, 1880-1942), came from a long-established Mainz family. She was the daughter of Helene and Salomon Fuld. Salomon Fuld was a famous lawyer and politician of Jewish descent in Frankfurt. The Fuld family has a long history and a high reputation in Mainz. In addition to making achievements in the legal and political circles, the family also dealt in art and antiquities but whose members branched out into other very successful enterprises at home and abroad. Hedwig Fuld's mother, Helene Fuld (pseudonym of Helene Goldschmidt), was the younger sister of Julius Goldschmidt, an international antiques dealer, who had antique stores in cosmopolitan cities such as Berlin, Paris and New York. Seghers' parents were members of the Israelitische Religionsgemeinschaft in Mainz, the conservative branch of the Jewish community. Her parents were active in society, and her mother, Hedwig Reiling, was a founding member and board member of the Mainz Jewish Women's Association. As Seghers said, the atmosphere in her hometown and home as open-minded and free from parochial nationalism. She received artistic influence from her family since she was a child.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, China was one of the most turbulent part of the world, so the supervision by the government of cultural relics was greatly weakened, and many national treasures were sent abroad. The West has had a great fondness for oriental art for centuries, and this fondness continued unabated as the colony expanded. Many European artists and writers turned their eyes to the East during this period, trying to find a new spiritual home and a new way of life. They greatly appreciated the ancient codes and records, paintings, porcelain and other works of art from the Orient, and they were eager to understand the aesthetic art of the East and the ancient philosophy behind it. Therefore, driven by many factors, the purchase of Chinese and Japanese art in Europe increased significantly during this period. As Kopplin pointed out "der Tatsache, dass sich die europäischen Ankäufe chinesischer und japanischer Kunstwerke um die Jahrhundertwende beträchtlich vermehrten". 1897 wurde die erste deutsche spezielle Ausstellung ostasiatischer Kunst in Dresden veranstaltet (ebd. 37). 1901 fand die erste Versteigerung einer „Alt-China-Sammlung“ in Köln statt. Weitere Versteigerungen ausschließlich chinesischer Kunstgegenstände wurden 1902 in Leipzig und 1903 in Berlin veranstaltet (ebd. 39). Von 1909 bis 1911 fanden in Berlin, Wien, Frankfurt und München sieben weitere Versteigerungen japanischer und chinesischer

Kunstgegenstände statt (ebd. 41).”¹(The fact that European purchases of Chinese and Japanese works of art increased considerably around the turn of the century. In 1897 the first German special exhibition of East Asian art was held in Dresden. In 1901 the first auction of an “Ancient Chinese Collections” took place in Cologne. Subsequent auctions of Chinese art were held in Leipzig in 1902 and Berlin in 1903. From 1909 to 1911, seven auctions of Japanese and Chinese art were held in Berlin, Vienna, Frankfurt and Munich.) And David Reiling, once a leader in the antiques industry, had a very rich collection of oriental art. Therefore, it can be inferred that Seghers received the original enlightenment about Chinese culture in her antique store when she was a child. And it's also possible, as Zehl Romero surmised “Da sich Hermann Reiling und seine Frau kinderlos waren, sollte Seghers als das einzige Kind von Isidor Reiling die Erbin des Familiengeschäfts sein. In diesem Kontext besteht es Anlass zur Vermutung, dass Seghers’ Sinologiestudium und besonders ihre Hinwendung zu ostasiatischer Kunst aus der Perspektive ihres Vaters eine berufliche Vorbereitung zur Unterstützung für das väterliche Antiquitätengeschäft sein könnten”² (Because Hermann Reiling and his wife were childless, Seghers, as Isidor Reiling's only child, would be the heir to the family business. In this context, it is reasonable to believe that, from her father's perspective, that Seghers' studies in Sinology and especially her turned to East Asian art, may have been a career preparation to support her father's antiques business). To sum up, out of her own obsession with Chinese culture and under the influence of her parents, Seghers started her Sinology research at Heidelberg University in 1920, which is also the place where she systematically established a connection with Chinese culture.

II. Seghers’ Sinology Research in University

The Sinology Department of Heidelberg University was established in 1919. Sinologist Friedrich Ernst Augustus Clause delivered an inaugural speech entitled “Speaking and Writing in China and Japan” (Sprache und Schrift in China und Japan) on July 19, which marked the establishment of

¹ Kopplin, Monika. „Das Sammelwesen von Ostasiatika in Deutschland und Österreich, vorzugsweise verfolgt für die Zeit von 1860-1913.“ Zur Kunstgeschichte Asiens. 50 Jahre Lehre und Forschung an der Universität Köln. Hrsg. v. Roger Goepper. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977. 33-46.

² Zehl Romero, Christiane. Anna Seghers. Eine Biographie. 1900-1947. Berlin: AufbauVerlag, 2000: 122.

the Department of Sinology at Heidelberg University. When Seghers was studying at Heidelberg University, the Sinology Department, as a newly established department, had only one Sinology teacher from Clause. Seghers took 13 of Clause's courses during her school days, covering While studying in Heidelberg, Seghers met Philipp Schaeffer, and they formed a strong friendship. In her view, Schaeffer is not only a central figure in the study of sinology, but also a symbol of combining the enthusiasm of sinology with political belief.¹ They read a lot of traditional Chinese classics, novels, legends, and essays. Seghers especially loves Pu Sungling's *Strange Tales from a Chinese studio* (Liao-Chai-Chih-I), which relies on the myths and stories of traditional Chinese Taoism and Buddhism to criticize the society. In this book, whether it is exposing the darkness of feudal rule, attacking the corrupt imperial examination system, or resisting the shackles of feudal ethics, they all reflect extremely rich and profound ideological content. In particular, there are a lot of love stories in the book about people falling in love with gods, ghosts and fairies, showing a strong criticism of feudal ethics and the spirit of pursuing love and freedom, which is similar to the values pursued by mainstream Western thought. This struck a chord with Seghers. She expressed her love for *Strange Tales from a Chinese studio* in *In Memory of Philip Schaefer* (Erinnerungen an Philipp Schaeffer) "In schönen chinesischen Schriftzeichen schrieb mir Schaeffer als Geschenk zum Doktorat eins meiner Lieblingsmärchen auf Seidenpapier. „Das Wandbild“. Es ist einer alten chinesischen Märchensammlung entnommen. Die Sammlung heißt *Liao-Chai-Chih-I*"²(Schaeffer wrote me one of my favorite fairy tales on tissue paper in beautiful Chinese characters as a present for my doctorate. "The Mural". It is taken from an old collection of Chinese fairy tales. The collection is called "Liao-Chai-Chih-I"). This handmade book adheres to the ancient Chinese method of bookbinding, right-aligned and bound with red paper for the inner cover. And this book is still preserved in the Seghers library today.

In addition to the study of ancient Chinese literature, Seghers also had a deep understanding of Chinese classical philosophy. She studied *Mencius*, *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Liezi*, translated by German sinologist Richard Wilhelm, *The Spirit of Chinese People* by Gu Hongming, and articles by other

¹ Li W. China und China-Erfahrung in Leben und Werk von Anna Seghers[M]. Peter Lang, 2010.

² Anna Seghers: Aufsätze, Ansprachen, Essays 1954-1979, Berlin 1980, 388.

sinologists on Chinese philosophy. For example, Wilhelm Grube's *History of Chinese Literature* has a separate chapter on Taoist philosophy. Seghers made her own interpretation and understanding of Chinese classical philosophy, as she said in *In Memory of Philip Schaeffer* "Wir beide, Schaeffer und ich, waren nicht für Konfuzius mit seiner feudalistischen Staatsmoral... Wir glaubten zu verstehen, was Laotse verstand unter seinem großen Tao, mit seinem Leitsatz ‚Tun durch Nichttun‘. Das Original, wenn es ein solches gab, war dunkel und in der Übersetzung noch dunkler doch wurde es aufgebildet durch das, was ich darunter verstand oder vielmehr Schaeffer daraus entnahm"¹ (Schaeffer and I do not agree with Confucius and his feudalist ideas of governing the country, we agree with Lao Zi's ideas. We consider ourselves to have understood the great "Tao" and its principle of "governance by inaction" as mentioned by Lao Zi. The original text written by Lao Zi is obscure and difficult to understand, and the German translation is even more difficult. But through my interpretation and Schaeffer's inference, the meaning of the translation has become clearer). From this passage, we can feel Seghers' disapproval of Confucianism and her admiration for Taoism. This was also influenced by the ethos of "respecting Taoism and anti-Confucianism" towards Chinese philosophy in Europe at that time.

There are two main reasons for the ethos of "respecting Taoism and anti-Confucianism". On the one hand, Confucianism advocates the theory of moral and ethical norms in human society, that people belong to "society", and emphasizes hierarchical order and ethical guidelines, which is obviously contrary to Western values. On the other hand, because of the success of the Industrial Revolution, the Western world has entered an unprecedentedly rich material stage, but this has resulted in the "alienation" of people. Individualism and hedonism prevailed, the destruction of natural ecology and the First World War made Western society face a huge spiritual crisis, and many people fell into a strong confusion. In the book *The Decline Of The West* by the German philosopher Oswald Spengler, it directly reflects the disappointment of Westerners with Western civilization after the First World War. In the author's opinion "Each Culture has its own new possibilities of self-expression, which arise, ripen, decay, and never return."² The Europe of the 1920s had clearly ended its glory days and began to decline. So the whole society is shrouded in the sad atmosphere of the "end of the

¹ Anna Seghers: Aufsätze, Ansprachen, Essays 1954-1979, Berlin 1980, 387.

² Spengler O. The decline of the West[M]. Oxford University Press, USA, 1991, 21.

century", the strong review of the subject's manipulation of rationality, and the expectation of peace and return to nature, became the common aspirations of Westerners at that time. The idea of harmony and natural inaction advocated by Taoism just fits this spiritual need. Especially as a defeated country in World War I, Germany, after experiencing a huge blow, the state feels more strongly that there is an inherent need to 'correct direction'. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that Taoism became a popular trend of thought at that time.

These studies and reflections on Chinese classical philosophy had a profound influence on Seghers' later literary creation. For example, because of the early rejection of Confucianism, in the 1930s, there was no trace of Confucianism in the literature she wrote about China. It was not until the early 1950s that Seghers reassessed the positive impact of Confucianism on Chinese culture and history. In the short story *Die verlorenen Söhne*, she tried to incorporate the Confucian sense of responsibility, loyalty to the country and family, as an excellent character, into the characters she designed. In my opinion, this has nothing to do with her first visit to China in 1951 and being invited to participate in the National Celebration of the second anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. During the visit, Seghers visited the Committee for Safeguarding Peace and Anti-US aggression(保卫和平反美侵略委员会), and participated in a symposium on art issues at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. She communicated with Chinese writers such as Guo Moruo, Ding Ling, Feng Zhi, etc., and gained an in-depth understanding of the changes of Chinese workers before and after the founding of New China. Afterwards, she visited scenic spots and historical sites, watched Beijing Opera and other literary and artistic programs, and experienced Chinese traditional culture up close. So she may have some new insights into the Confucianism behind this traditional culture.

During the winter and summer semesters of 1921 and 1922, Seghers went to the University of Cologne as an exchange student and began her internship at the Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne. The Museum of East Asian Art, which overlooks the Aechener Weiher pond in Cologne, was the first museum of its kind in Germany when it opened in 1913. Its collection is comprised primarily of Chinese, Japanese and Korean art. The museum's founders, Adolf Fischer and his wife Frieda Bartdorff, amassed a significant collection of Japanese art, which forms the basis of the museum's holdings. This includes Buddhist painting and wooden sculpture, Japanese standing screen painting, color woodcuts and lacquer objects. Other world-renowned

treasures in the museum's collection include Chinese bronzes, Buddhist sculpture, ceramics from China, Korea and Japan, and Korean celadon pottery from the Koryô dynasty. The museum's building is an important example of the classical modernist period in Cologne and was designed by Japanese architect Kunio Maekawa, a pupil of Le Corbusier. The museum courtyard is home to a garden, which was designed in the style of traditional Japanese meditation gardens¹. When Adolf Fisher opened the museum in 1913, he provided a guidebook for the Museum of East Asian Art, which introduced each exhibition room and exhibits in detail. Through this booklet, we learned that the museum has an exhibition room dedicated to displaying Asian textiles. There are two official costumes from the late Qing Dynasty in China, which are embroidered with dragon and cloud patterns². On the website of the Berlin-Mitter Library, I found an old photo of Seghers wearing a late Qing official robe. From the photo, we can see that Seghers is wearing a late Qing hairstyle, her right palm is facing the sky, holding a scroll in her left hand, her clothes are embroidered with dragon cloud patterns, and she wears a pair of late Qing official boots on her feet (picture 1).



(picture 1)

However, due to the age and the low definition of the photo, it is impossible to see the number of dragon claws on this picture, so it is impossible to speculate which grade of official clothing this dress is. There is no detailed description of this black and white photo of Seghers on the library's website, except that her name is simply marked under the photo, indicating that the person in the photo is Seghers. So I can't tell if this photo was taken at the Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne. We can only speculate from the young face of Seghers in the photo and the fact that there were two official gowns from the late Qing Dynasty in the Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne at that time, she may have taken this photo during her internship in Cologne. But no matter whether the photos were taken in Cologne or not,

¹ Museum of East Asian Art <https://www.sothebys.com/en/museums/museum-of-east-asian-art>.

² Fischer, Adolf. *Kleiner Populärer Führer durch das Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst der Stadt Köln*. Köln: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1913.195.

we can be sure that when Seghers learned about Chinese culture, she did not just bury her head in a pile of old papers. She had a multi-faceted understanding and understanding of China. Seghers learned a lot about East Asian art history and art theory in Cologne, including the characteristics of Oriental aesthetics (such as blank space), which made her research field no longer limited to Sinology, and she began to focus more on East Asia Art History Research. The Institute of Art History at the University of Cologne and the many local art and ethnological museums expanded Seghers' horizons. She met a group of like-minded friends in the museum in Cologne, such as Karl With and his wife, Alfred Salmony, and the director of the Museum of East Asian Art, Adolf Fischer and his wife, they are called the "Kölner Kreis". The "Kölner Kreis" thought it was arrogant to understand East Asian art from a European perspective. Only by placing East Asian art and European art in the same position and respecting the independence of East Asian art can a comparison be made between them, that compare individual artworks and artistic phenomena from East Asia and Europe¹. And if you want to truly understand the art of other countries or civilizations, you must get rid of the original aesthetic paradigm and learn to recognize the rationality of the existence of others². At that time, the Museum of East Asian Art was a stronghold for defending the independence of East Asian art. This way of thinking against Eurocentrism deeply influenced Seghers, not only changing her artistic outlook, but also making her world outlook mature.

III. Seghers' Political Turn to China Studies

After studying in Cologne, Seghers viewed the Western bourgeoisie more and more critically, extending from artistic ideals to political ideology, and she began to consciously learn about socialism. "Seghers belegte bereits in ihrem ersten Studienjahr, im Sommer semester 1920 „Sozialtheorie des Marxismus“, im Wintersemester 1920/21 „Sozialpolitische und soziale Bewegung“ sowie „Theorie des Sozialismus“, die alle von Professor Emil Lederer, einem bedeutenden sozialistisch geprägten Sozialwissenschaftler angeboten wurden"³ (According to the courses she took at university, Seghers took

¹ Salmony A. Europa –Ostasien: religiöse skulpturen[M]. G. Kiepenheuer, 1922.

² Fischer, Frieda. Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Köln: Gonski, 1922.

³ Li W. Anna Seghers' China-Begegnung in ihrem Leben und ihren Werken[M]. The Ohio State University, 2009. 65

"Marxist Social Theory" in the summer semester of 1920, "Social Politics and Social Movements" and "Socialist Theory" in the winter semester of 1920/21, these courses are taught by the renowned economist and sociologist Professor Emil Lederer). Seghers systematically learned socialist knowledge in class and had a solid theoretical foundation.

Seghers met many political exiles from abroad during her time at Heidelberg University, as she said " The exiles had to end their studies and go into exile in Germany because of the bloody repression and persecution in their own country. It was through them that I was able to witness the political process and the class struggle."¹ Among these exiles was Laszlo Radvanyi. Laszlo Radvanyi also known as Johann Lorenz Schmidt, was a Hungarian writer and academic. He was born into a Jewish family in Hungary and was a staunch communist. Radványi studied economics and philosophy at the University of Budapest from 1918 to 1919, where he became involved in radical politics. He was involved in the student revolution and was invited by Lukács to join the Sunday group (Sonntagskreis). With the destruction of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919 he fled to Vienna, where he adopted the pseudonym "Johann Lorenz Schmidt", from the 18th-century Protestant dissident theologian. He studied philosophy, psychology, sociology and economics at the Heidelberg University between 1920 and 1923, where he obtained his doctorate. Directed by Karl Jaspers, his thesis on Chiliasm was summa cum laude. While at Heidelberg, Radványi met the poet Anna Seghers. They got married and moved to Berlin in 1925. In the same year, Radványi joined the German Communist Party. He taught at the Marxist Workers' School (Marxistische Arbeiterschule) in Berlin, which aimed to bring political and general education to the working class. The school hired many Weimar Republic-era left-wing and communist-leaning intellectuals as teachers, and Radványi later became the school's principal. He was a teacher all his life, a beloved and most important supporter of Seghers. Philipp Schaeffer, a friend of Seghers mentioned above, is also a famous communist fighter, and as early as 1922, Philipp Schaeffer began to pay attention to the proletarian movement in Asia. He published an article entitled *Der Bolschewismus in Asien* in *Washington: Conference Process and Outcome* edited by Krause². They undoubtedly played a huge role in Seghers' understanding of communism and the proletarian movement.

¹ Anna Seghers: Aufsätze, Ansprachen, Essays 1954-1979, Berlin 1980, 387.

² Li W. Otherness in Solidarity[J]. *Beyond Alterity: German Encounters with Modern East Asia*, 2014, 7: 73.

At this time, China has a different meaning for Seghers. In the 1920s and early 1930s, China became the focus of attention of progressive political forces in Europe. The reason is because of changes in China's domestic political situation at that time. Since the bourgeois revolutionaries led by Sun Yat-sen overthrew the feudal monarchy and established the Republic of China in 1911, the domestic political situation has been unstable, not only facing the semi-colonial rule of Japan, but also facing the intensifying situation of warlord melee. So under the common desire of "overthrowing foreign powers and eradicating warlords", Sun Yat-sen began to unite with Russia and the Communist Party, support and rely on farmers and workers, put forward the New Three Principles of the People, and facilitated the first cooperation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. Different political parties in China have different positions on the issue of foreign colonial interests, which makes China an important part of world politics. But at this time, the Sinology Department of Heidelberg University was not at all interested in modern China, which was undergoing great changes. Seghers found that "In unserem Institut war nie die Rede von dem zeitgenössischen China. Kenntnisse über Sun Yat-sen und seine drei Volksprinzipien verschafften wir uns allein. Die Zeitungen hatten nur hie und da eine Zeile frei für die Machtkämpfe chinesischer Generäle, denn alle Zeitungen waren überbesetzt von den Ereignissen in Deutschland und Europa zu Beginn der zwanziger Jahre."¹(In the Sinology Department, no one has ever talked about contemporary China. The knowledge about Sun Yat-sen and the Three Principles of the People is not taught by a teacher, we learn it ourselves. All the pages of the newspapers are filled with events in Germany and Europe in the early twenties, except for the occasional line or two about the melee of the Chinese warlords in the corner.) This phenomenon of "only talking about the past, not the present" made Seghers very disappointed.

At that time, German sinology circles were only interested in ancient China, whether it was literature, art or religious philosophy. As long as it is from ancient China, they are interested, and ancient China is full of mystery, wisdom and beauty in their eyes. During this period, the German translation and introduction of Chinese literary and artistic works reached a peak, but they were all classical literary works without exception. On the contrary, no one cared about the chaotic and poor modern China in the

¹ Frank Wagner (Hg.), Anna Seghers. Eine Biographie in Bildern. Berlin 1994, S.41.

German sinology circle. It can be said that the German sinology circle in the Weimar period completely separated ancient China from modern China. The main reason for this is the colonial system of imperialism.

In the eyes of some colonial politicians, 19th-century oriental studies were only intended to allow scientific Europe to conquer the Asian continent¹. Asia was clearly seen by the colonists as a rich but uncivilized continent. Asia does not have advanced science, weapons, and even its culture was initially very ignorant. Europeans scoffed at Chinese Confucianism for a long time in the 19th century. Kaiser Wilhelm II even proposed the "Yellow Peril" (Die Gelbe Gefahr) in public, in order to find an excuse to invade Asia. Take Clause, for example, who was Seghers' sinology teacher. He worked at the German embassy in China around 1911, and after returning to Berlin, he studied under the sinologist J. J. M. de Groot and obtained his doctorate. Groot was a staunch militarist and advocate of colonial policy, and he was involved in the Dutch government's colonial work in China. His early writings on China studies have a strong European Christian supremacy style². Clause was deeply influenced by his teachers and a staunch supporter of colonialism, Seghers had deduced "Ich glaube, unser Sinologielehrer war als Kolonialoffizier während der Boxer-Aufstände in China gewesen und hatte dort sein Chinesisch gelernt. Er brachte jetzt im Institut eine Karikatur Erzbergers an, unter der in chinesischer Schrift zu lesen war, was Schaeffer mir übersetzte: „Heute nennt man ihn einen Minister, früher nannte man ihn einen Räuber am Volk.“³(I'm sure our Chinese teacher spent some time in China as a colonial army officer during the Boxer Rebellion and learned Chinese there. He also hung up a cartoon of Etzberger's mockery in Chinese in our department. Schaeffer told me that the meaning of that sentence is that the robber who was plundering the people yesterday is now a minister). She realized from her sinology teachers that German sinology developed under colonial politics, and they were only interested in ancient Chinese art and culture. And progressive forces with advanced political consciousness

¹ Leutner „Sinologie in Berlin. Die Durchsetzung einer wissenschaftlichen Disziplin zur Erschließung und zum Verständnis Chinas.“ Berlin und China. Dreihundert Jahre wechselvolle Beziehungen. Hrsg. v. Kuo Heng-yü. Berlin: Colloquium, 1987. 31-55.

² Leutner, Mechthild. „Deutsche Vorstellungen über China und Chinesen und über die Rolle der Deutschen in China, 1890-1945.“ Von der Kolonialpolitik zur Kooperation. Studien zur Geschichte der deutsch-chinesischen Beziehungen. Hrsg. v. Kuo Heng-yü. München: Minerva Publikation, 1986. 401-42.

³ Anna Seghers: Aufsätze, Ansprachen, Essays 1954-1979, Berlin 1980, 387.

like Seghers are watching with hopeful attention the latest changes in China. As Wagner pointed out, "She studied hard not to get a good score on a test, but to identify the contradictions and antagonisms from history that are closely related to today's struggles. For college students at the time, recognizing that It's not easy to connect conflicts and struggles at home with struggles in far-flung China. But Anna Seghers has done it."¹ Seghers's focus on Sinology, or China, has changed at this time. She obviously wants to learn more about modern China, rather than scrutinizing ancient Chinese texts from centuries ago.

IV. China in the Works of Seghers in the 1930s

Seghers began her literary career in her final year at Heidelberg University, publishing her first essay *Die Toten auf der Insel Djal* at the end of 1924. In 1928, she joined the German Communist Party and became a member of the Union of Revolutionary Writers of the German Proletariat. In the same year, she published his famous novel "Revolt of the Fishermen of Santa Barbara", which won the Kleist Prize. In November 1930, Seghers attended the Second International Conference of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers held in Kharkov, Soviet Union, as a representative of German left-wing writers. She began to actively participate in the international proletarian movement, which opened up a vast world for her literary creation.

In the early 1930s, Seghers met a group of Chinese communists in exile in Germany, and formed a deep friendship with them. From these people, she learned many stories about the Chinese revolution, and based on this, she wrote a series of articles about the Chinese revolution. These articles reflect important historical events in the development of China's political revolution from the late 1920s to the early 1930s. These articles reflect Seghers' concern for the Chinese proletarian movement.

Among these political exiles from China is the female writer and social activist Hu Lanqi (picture 2). The May Day of Yangshupu (1. Mai Yanschupou, 1932), a collaboration between Seghers and Hu Lanqi, was published in *Die Rote Fahne* (Red Flag), a magazine published by the German Communist Party on May 1. The story is set in the Shanghai labor movement

¹ 弗朗克·瓦格纳, 吕一旭. 安娜·西格斯与中国[J]. 国外文学, 1987(01):80-95.

led by the Communist Party of China. It tells the story of workers in Yangshupu, Shanghai, defending their rights through strikes and demonstrations to celebrate the "May 1st International Labor Day". In the same year, the "Small Report from My Workshop" (Kleiner Bericht aus meiner Werkstatt, 1932) was published in Die Linkskurve, a publication of the German Left Writers' Union. The article recorded how they communicated and completed this article through the "writing workshop".

Focusing on the theme of "what happened on May Day in Shanghai", the two discussed the writing techniques of reportage – how to vividly describe the characters' living environment to show their characteristics, thereby increasing their attraction to readers. Seghers argues that it is necessary to describe some "external" environments and things in detail, such as Yangshupu's "alley", workers' "wooden house", "shoes", "dirty clothes", etc., rather than just describing Shanghai textile workers organize a rally to celebrate May Day. She believes that the description of these external things is not only to create a picture in the reader's mind, but more to reflect the characteristics of the characters through the environment. For example, "We describe the dim light of bulbs not to make a picture, but to express the class situation of its users through these bulbs, as is the case with every other object." And "describes the first time a farmer-turned worker enters the workshop 'he closes his eyes in a daze, and for a split second, as if the air is filled with the chirping of millions of crickets.' The metaphor shows the man from the countryside, and his tragic situation. Anyone who mechanically accepts this metaphor that is not out of his own imagination and actually describes a workshop with what looks like millions of crickets chirping in it is wrong. Because if a man has been in the city, the rumble of the machine will never remind him of crickets."¹ She believes that it is precisely because of the neglect of the description of the external environment that reportage has become a piece of news. The literary quality of the story is



(picture 2)

And "describes the first time a farmer-turned worker enters the workshop 'he closes his eyes in a daze, and for a split second, as if the air is filled with the chirping of millions of crickets.' The metaphor shows the man from the countryside, and his tragic situation. Anyone who mechanically accepts this metaphor that is not out of his own imagination and actually describes a workshop with what looks like millions of crickets chirping in it is wrong. Because if a man has been in the city, the rumble of the machine will never remind him of crickets."¹ She believes that it is precisely because of the neglect of the description of the external environment that reportage has become a piece of news. The literary quality of the story is

¹ Anna Seghers: Kleiner Bericht aus meiner Werkstatt, in: Die Linkskurve. Nr.09.09.1932. S223.

greatly reduced, and the characters are just vague images, no different from the cold names printed in the newspapers, so they cannot resonate with readers at all. In addition, she makes the claim that literary works change reality by describing reality: "We can't just describe events. Because we don't write to describe, but to write to change by describing."¹This idea is also reflected in her collaboration with Hu Lanqi in "May Day in Yangshupu", which fits the slogan "United Proletariat of the World", which can be seen as "the product of the interaction of left-wing literature between China and Germany".²In the grand narrative of the Chinese revolution, every ordinary character in her writing moves the world with the image of a revolutionary. This prompts readers to have a strong "sense of substitution" to understand and support the Chinese revolution.

In addition to the two articles co-authored with Hu Lanqi, Seghers also learned about the real situation in wartime China from other Chinese revolutionaries, and based on this, she wrote several articles reflecting the theme of the Chinese revolution. These articles reflect the spirit of the Chinese people's heroic resistance in the face of oppression.

The short story "The Stopwatch" (Die Stoppuhr, 1932) tells the story of the German military adviser, General Seekert, who was entrusted by Chiang Kai-shek to train the Kuomintang troops with a stopwatch, in order to encircle and suppress the Red Army dormant in southern China. This short story exposes the fact that imperialism interferes in China's internal affairs. In the article, the author vividly compared the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, reflecting the brutality of the Kuomintang and the Communist Party's diligence and love for the people. "The government soldiers who were still setting fire and looting just woke up from the red-eyed frenzy. They stared blankly at the remaining banners, slogans and pictures in the occupied area, which said a fair distribution of land and food., to educate young and old."³ The ending of the story is unexpected but seems reasonable. The wellequipped Kuomintang troops turned their guns after the charging horn and chose to stand with the people. This fully demonstrates that victory can only be achieved by winning the hearts of the people. No

¹ Anna Seghers: Kleiner Bericht aus meiner Werkstatt, in: Die Linkskurve. Nr.09.09.1932. S223.

² 载《人民政协报》2009年6月25日。

³ 张帆. 安娜·西格斯中国作品集[M]. 世界知识出版社,2021.1

matter how sophisticated weapons or powerful foreign aid are, they cannot defeat the common aspiration of the people.

The second short story "Driving License" (*Der Führerschein*, 1932) published in "Left Front" was based on the famous Shanghai Hu A Mao incident in 1932. The story tells that after Japan invaded Shanghai in the early 1930s, a Chinese driver drove his car into the Huangpu River and perished together with the Japanese invaders. This reflects the Chinese people's spirit of facing death unflinchingly when they were humiliated by foreigners. Seghers extols the great spirit of self-sacrifice for the country and the faith, and she is convinced that their sacrifice was not in vain, but was of profound historical significance. It's also a common theme in her writing.

In addition, Seghers also has a description of China in her novel "Comrades in Arms" (*Die Gefährten*, 1932). It consists of five parallel story lines, describing the revolutionary struggles of five countries, Bulgaria, Poland, Italy, Hungary and China. They show the hardships the Communists of various countries endured during the low tide of the revolution. In this Chinese storyline, the author tells the story of the Liao brothers' dedication to the revolution. The Liao brothers, who were born into wealthy families, did not go to Europe to learn capitalism as their father expected. On the contrary, they chose Marxism and stood firmly on the side of communism. Later, the elder brother died because of the traitor's betrayal, and the younger brother lived to continue the revolution. The novel reflects the enthusiasm of the Chinese youth to save the country and the people. The author praises them as the dawn of hope for the country, and they are upright and fearless fighters.

The above is a summary of Seghers' literary works on China in the 1930s, from which we can see that these works almost completely cover all the most important political events in China from the late 1920s to the early 1930s. It also reflects Seghers' support for the Chinese revolution. In her works, revolutionaries in China are as respectable as revolutionaries around the world. They have made great sacrifices for great ideals and communism, and China has always played an important role in the international communist movement and the proletarian revolution.

Throughout the life of Seghers, whether she studied Sinology in Heidelberg and Cologne in her youth, or joined the Communist International and paid close attention to the revolutionary movement led by the Communist Party of China, China's influence on her was manifold. As we can

see, there are many descriptions of China in her works. Although she never visited China in the 1920s and 1930s, we can still feel her interest in the Chinese revolution in her work. Communicating across cultures has a two-way influence. On the one hand, we can clearly see her acceptance of China, whether it is the traditional Chinese ideology and culture or the creative inspiration brought by the Chinese revolutionary movement. On the other hand, when we read the literature of Seghers, we see China a hundred years ago and the proletarian revolutionary movement in China. In this way, we can see ourselves through the eyes of the other, adding a different perspective to this great history. Seghers "was not only a brave communist fighter, but also a good friend of the Chinese people".¹

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¹ 冯至：《冯至选集》第二卷，四川文艺出版社，1985年，第246页，第249页。

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