

MICHAEL S. SMITH

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REVIEW ESSAY

Gregor Benton

WANG MING REVISITED: A NEW LOOK AT THE CHINESE SECOND UNITED FRONT

SHUM, KUI-KWONG. *The Chinese Communists' Road to Power. The Anti-Japanese National United Front, 1935–1945.* Oxford University Press, Hong Kong [etc.] 1988. 312 pp. £ 29.95.

Wang Ming, otherwise known as Chen Shaoyu, is a controversial figure in the history of the Chinese Revolution. Chinese Communists claim that he led the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to disaster between 1930 and 1934 by blindly following a radical “left-opportunist” line, but that his attempt after 1935 to foist a new “right-opportunist” line on the Party was thwarted by Mao Zedong and his supporters, who followed an orthodox Marxist path that avoided both extremes. More recently, especially since 1979, Chinese historians have begun to argue that these two “deviations” were in fact the work of Stalin and the Communist International (or Comintern), whose faithful lackey Wang Ming was said to have been. Outside China this latter thesis is not new. Even before 1979 I for one had explained in detail that Wang Ming was not an independent actor on the political stage, but a Moscow puppet.¹

In 1977² the historian Shum Kui-kwong took issue with my thesis about Wang Ming, and in his new book³ on the second united front between the CCP and Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang he returns to battle. In Shum's opinion Wang Ming, like Liu Shaoqi and others vilified by the Maoists, has been the victim of a rewriting of history by the Party. Shum also believes that I and others who “praise Mao Zedong” and “negate the Comintern” have uncritically accepted the CCP's view of Wang, so we exaggerate the differences between Mao and Wang and pretend that Mao “consistently”

¹ Gregor Benton, “The ‘Second Wang Ming Line’ (1935–38)”, *China Quarterly*, 61 (1975), pp. 61–94.

² Shum Kui Kwong, “Comment on ‘The “Second Wang Ming Line”””, *China Quarterly*, 69 (1977), pp. 136–145.

³ *The Chinese Communists' Road to Power: The Anti-Japanese National United Front, 1935–1945* (Hong Kong, 1988), 312 pp.

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Mosk'ya teenager alarak gotuniz
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