

Biographic Dictionary  
of Chinese Communism  
1921-1965

VOLUME I: Ai Szu-ch'i-Lo I-nung

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Asia

### Ai Szu-ch'i

(c. 1910–1966; T'eng-ch'ung, Yunnan). Marxist philosopher; vice-chairman, China Philosophy Association; vice-president, Higher Party School.

Ai Szu-ch'i was among the most important Chinese Communist interpreters and popularizers of Marxist-Leninist thought. His 30-year career with the Party began in Shanghai in the mid-thirties; he was among the leading lecturers, writers, and editors during the Yen-an era, and after the PRC was established he continued in these capacities, his principal work being with the Central Committee's Higher Party School in Peking. Though nothing is known of Ai's younger years, it is apparent that he received some higher education, for by the early thirties he was working and writing in Shanghai, then the major center for leftist and Communist intellectuals. In 1934 he published *Ta-chung che-hsueh* (Philosophy of the masses), a popular version of Marxist ideology that went through 32 editions during the next 12 years. One writer on 20th-century Chinese intellectual history claims that this work "spearheaded the movement of the '30s . . . to capture the intelligentsia" and that it was "marked by its effectiveness as propaganda." This same authority continues: "It is a skillful piece of writing to instill in the people a sense (not necessarily a complete understanding) of dialectical materialism, giving the people the terms and directions of thought."<sup>1</sup> This work was one of the earliest of the numerous books, tracts, and articles that were to flow from Ai's prolific pen in the next 30 years.<sup>2</sup> In 1935, just one year after *Ta-chung che-hsueh* was published, Ai was admitted into the CCP, and from that same year until 1937 he was one of the editors of a Marxist review known as *Tu-shu sheng-huo* (Intellectual life), a journal that was ultimately shut down by the KMT authorities.

During his days in Shanghai, Ai was closely associated with such important Communist propagandists as Chou Yang and Chang Han-fu (q.v.). In 1936 he was one of the leading protagonists in a lively battle of slogans among the left-wing intellectuals.<sup>3</sup> One side, led by Chou Yang, argued in favor of the so-called "literature for national defense," which meant that writers had to mute their criticisms of the KMT in order to strengthen the national united front against Japan. The opposition was led by famed writer Lu Hsun who feared that any compromises vis-à-vis the KMT would dilute the revolutionary ardor of China's intellectuals. Lu's group organized a rival organization and promoted their own slogan, "people's literature for the national revolutionary struggle." Ai was on the side of the national defense literature and was thus on the "correct" side in terms of the Communist policy enunciated in 1935 at the Seventh Comintern Congress that called for an international united

front against fascism. This important debate is treated more fully in the biography of Chou Yang. In addition to these activities, Ai was chief editor by 1937 of *Wen-hua chan-hsien* (Cultural front),<sup>4</sup> a newspaper published every 10 days; also, together with Chang Han-fu, he was on the editorial board of *Chan-hsien* (War front), still another newspaper that dealt with political and military affairs.<sup>5</sup>

Like so many of the intelligentsia in Shanghai, Ai left for the Communist stronghold at Yen-an when war against Japan erupted in mid-1937. He remained in Yen-an for the next decade, establishing himself as one of the most important Communist philosopher-propagandists. During these 10 years he taught at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political Academy (K'ang-ta), and he was director of the Cultural Research Office of the Party Central Committee's Central Research Institute, "a higher research organ for the training of the Party's theoretical cadres."<sup>6</sup> He also served as secretary-general of the Central Committee's Cultural Committee and as a deputy editor of the Party's most important newspaper, the *Chieh-fang jih-pao* (Liberation daily). In addition, he engaged in the translation of various Marxian classics,<sup>7</sup> and from 1938 he was president of the "Society of the New Philosophy," which he had helped to establish.<sup>8</sup>

Together with such Party stalwarts as Chou Yang, Ch'en Po-ta, and Fan Wen-lan (qq.v.), Ai was among the most active participants in the Party-sponsored *cheng-feng* ("rectification") movement that began in 1942. A point stressed by Ai and the others that was in keeping with the spirit of the movement was the need to use "literary forms familiar to the Chinese masses rather than literary styles imported from the West." In this connection, he was one of the leading opponents of the important Marxian writer-translator Wang Shih-wei, who opposed these ideas.<sup>9</sup> Wang fell from power at this time, as did popular authoress Ting Ling (although Ting later reemerged, only to be purged again in the 1950's). Following the ouster of Ting, in June 1942 Ai assumed her post as editor of the cultural page of the *Chieh-fang jih-pao*. He was reported to be a member of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia (Shen-Kan-Ning) Border Region Government Council by 1943, and by the following year he was also teaching philosophy at Yen-an University, where his colleague Chou Yang was president. Ai was also active in the Shen-Kan-Ning Cultural Association; a visitor to Yen-an in the spring of 1944 described him as one of the five persons responsible for the association, a group that included Wu Yü-chang (q.v.) and Chou Yang.<sup>10</sup> Ai was again associated with Wu in 1948 at the North China University (Hua-pei ta-hsueh), located in the Communists' Shansi-Hopeh-Shantung-Honan Border Region. Wu was the president and another colleague of