

Atlantic  
Feb. 1937.

Soongs

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## THE SOONGS OF CHINA

BY GEORGE E. SOKOLSKY

CHARLES JONES SOONG took ship at Boston on a United States revenue cutter, the *Colfax*, as a cabin boy. How he came to Boston I do not know, and no one else seems to have a record of the procedure. But this is known of him beyond doubt: he became a Southern Methodist and was baptized in the Fifth Street Church in Wilmington, North Carolina, and at baptism he took the name of his sponsor, Charles Jones.

It is also known beyond doubt that he peddled hammocks in the Southern states, that General Julian S. Carr of 'Bull Durham' fame saw to his education at Trinity College, which is now Duke University, and he was graduated from Vanderbilt University. So far as anyone knows, Charles Jones Soong's family originated in the distant and not altogether integrated island of Hainan, but from the United States he went to China as a Christian missionary, to spread the Gospel and to teach English. He helped found the Y. M. C. A. in China. He became a printer. He published Bibles. He built a church. He was an upright and God-fearing man. Eventually he became a revolutionist, serving Sun Yat-sen as secretary and treasurer.

Charles Soong, as he was known, married a Miss Ni, one of three sisters, as I recall, who were also pillars of the Southern Methodist Church in Shanghai. I never knew Charles Soong, but it has been my honor to know Mrs.

Soong. She was a strong, effective woman of unusual charm and perspicacity. As long as she lived, she dominated the lives of her children. She saw to it that each child was adequately educated. And that was no simple task, for the Soongs were not wealthy.

There were three sons and three daughters. And the daughters are perhaps more of a story than the sons. Two of the daughters, Ai-ling and Ching-ling, were educated in Macon, Georgia, under the care of Bishop Ainsworth; Mei-ling, the youngest daughter, went to Wellesley. T. V. Soong and the youngest brother, T. A., were sent to Harvard; T. L. studied at his father's school, Vanderbilt. The Southern Methodist Church played an important rôle in their education.

Psychologically, all the Soongs are Americans. Any one of them is at home in the United States. I remember when T. V. and Mei-ling and T. A. returned to China from the United States. The adjustment to their Chinese environment was obviously difficult, particularly for T. V., who was impatient for the welfare of his country. In our early years in China, at the beginning of the twenties, he and I and the lady who was to become my first wife played about a good deal, and I remember that we arranged the first dance at which Chinese and foreigners danced with each other — and it was a deed to be talked about! Mrs. Soong,

the mother, disapproved of dancing, as she disapproved of all the vices enumerated by Southern Methodist preachers. Hers was a Spartan code, and the children were expected to live by it.

The Soongs are a family of brilliant minds, but the most brilliant of all is the eldest sister, Ai-ling, now the wife of Dr. H. H. Kung, currently Minister of Finance of the Nanking Government. Her husband is a Christian, but traces his descent from Confucius. They met in Japan when she was secretary to Dr. Sun and he secretary of a Chinese Y. M. C. A. He is gentle, studious, humorous, friendly; she is dominating, aggressive, intellectual.

The Kungs are not only powerful; they are rich. Dr. Kung's family in Shansi are bankers and chain-drug-store operators. They owned chain stores in North China, Mongolia, and Canton before Woolworth and Walgreen bore surnames — centuries before. But I have always suspected that the present Kung wealth is not so much a product of the chain drug stores as of the shrewd and careful manipulations of Dr. Kung. He is the sort of man who makes money easily and never lets it disturb him. He eats and drinks well, is a wonderful host, and altogether good company.

His wife knows more about the intricacies of Chinese politics than any man in that country. Such women as Madame Kung do not need equal suffrage: thousands vote as they dictate. She smooths the way and a man succeeds. She erects a hurdle and he trips. Awake to every current of public opinion, capable of knowing a man better than he knows himself, she builds surely. To her must go the leadership of this clan.

Ching-ling Soong, who became the wife of Sun Yat-sen, is altogether different. Self-sacrificing, she married a man much older than herself under

difficult circumstances, for he already had a wife and Ching-ling was a Christian. She was young and offered herself to him as to a cause, and she bore the hardships and dangers of a revolutionary existence. Very gentle and soft-spoken, yet ardent — she reminds one of a Southern lady who struggled through our own Civil War and yet never lost the softness of her dialect. Everyone who knows Madame Sun loves and respects her.

After the death of her famous husband, his revolutionary party was at last in power, and all of China was hers for the asking. Dr. Sun was deified, and she had been closest to him. Yet she chose exile in Soviet Russia and Germany because she felt that Chiang Kai-shek and her own family had betrayed the revolution. And when she returned to China she was embittered and spoke publicly against her relations. Yet no one dared raise a finger against her — for she is the most beloved woman in China.

T. V. Soong, eldest of the sons, who was then very powerful, sent his younger brother to Harbin to meet her and ask her, for the sake of the family, to hold her peace. It was said at the time that she replied, 'The Soong family was made for China, not China for the Soong family.'

T. V. Soong is a curiously complex personality. Brilliant, hard-working, single in his ambitions, he might have been one of the great men of this earth. He could do a man's work from sunrise to sunset, eat a hearty dinner, and then study Chinese classics with an old-fashioned teacher in the secrecy of his office for several hours. Rising with the revolution, he became Minister of Finance without adequate equipment or experience for such a position — and yet, almost overnight, he had earned the reputation of a sound and competent financier.

Before he went into politics, T. V. Soong tried business and banking and failed at both. Nevertheless, as Minister of Finance of the Nanking Government, he organized his work so that business men and bankers, Chinese and foreigners, admired him. He built about himself an organization of young and loyal men who served him and China well. It was an organization of enthusiasts for the new day in China, and they looked upon Soong as the embodiment of the new era.

Soong's major weakness has undoubtedly been his jealousy of his brother-in-law, Chiang Kai-shek. Both rose from obscurity together. Both are by-products of the revolution. Both supported each other firmly, but T. V. Soong became envious of Chiang Kai-shek's dominance, while Chiang Kai-shek distrusted T. V. Soong's loyalty. Standing between the two, Madame Kung supported Chiang against her brother. Whereas most Chinese used to speak of the 'Soong Dynasty' and of T. V. and Chiang in the same breath, actually there was no point of real union between them.

When Chiang Kai-shek wanted to marry Mei-ling, T. V. Soong went away to Japan to avoid his responsibilities as the eldest son of a fatherless family. It was Madame Kung who took on that job. Often, in conversations with me, Soong was sharply critical of Chiang's policies and methods, and yet at that very moment he was ardently raising money for Chiang's armies.

The fact of the matter was that Soong hoped for an end to military dictatorship and for civilian government. Such a government would place him in control. So long as the armies dominated China, Chiang must be supreme. It is utterly absurd to suggest that Chiang and T. V. split on the Japanese policy of the Nanking Government. T. V. was at one moment as close to the Japanese as Chiang ever

was, and one of the last jobs I did for him was in connection with Baron Shidehara and certain Japanese financiers. It was not Japan that split these two men; it was jealousy.

T. V. Soong might never have left the Nanking Government, in spite of this jealousy of Chiang Kai-shek, had it not been for the baneful influence of Dr. Rajchman of the League of Nations. To all of us who were with him much, T. V. Soong was always T. V. He was genial, friendly, and big-hearted, and though there was in him a streak of ruthlessness, he was a good friend. Dr. Rajchman and the other League of Nations advisers truckled to him in a manner that no Chinese or foreigner who knew him believed that he would tolerate. 'Your Excellency!' 'Monsieur le Ministre!' — T. V. suddenly found himself liking it. His secretary tipped us off that he was no longer to be called 'T. V.,' but Dr. Soong. We were too sorry to be amused.

T. V. Soong had always depended upon his own resources. The League of Nations party exaggerated what they could do for China. If one could believe them, China's problems could be solved by the League Secretariat. Well, Soong believed too much of that tale, and because of it came a cropper. In the Manchurian matter he took a perfectly mad stand — mad because it ran counter to China's best interest and to the policies of his chief, Chiang Kai-shek. He then came to this country and went on to Europe, where he received row on row of decorations; but he spoke ill of Chiang, and, when the news got back to Nanking, T. V. ceased to be Minister of Finance. The decorations were not worth the job.

T. V. Soong would be an important figure in any country. He is in his early forties and has prospects of serving China again, and he will do it well. He will do any job well. He exercised too much power too competently at too

early an age; a sobering defeat has probably done him a great service. To me, knowing with intimacy his every fault, he remains the most attractive personality in China.

Mei-ling married Chiang Kai-shek because she wanted to. Beautiful, vivacious, possessed strongly of the characteristic Soong dominance, she could have had any man. Chiang appealed to her because he is a heroic figure. Even in his early days, when his career was uncertain, Chiang bore the mark of heroism. After all, in spite of everything that Sun Yat-sen accomplished, his revolution and his party were failures until Chiang Kai-shek took over control. He was the first revolutionist in China who could make the revolution stick. I think Mei-ling understood that earlier than anyone, except possibly Madame Kung, who always picked Chiang Kai-shek for a winner. There was plenty of opposition to their romance, for Chiang also had a wife or two in the offing. But Mei-ling went through with it. And a good thing it has been for China, for together they produce an unbeatable team.

In China most great men are ruined by their secretaries, who intrigue, scheme, and sell out their principals. From this peril Chiang has been freed by his wife. She is his ears and eyes. The entire world of the English language is open to her, so that no expert can cover deficiencies by the brilliance of a Chinese essay. And Mei-ling, like Madame Kung and T. V., is an indefatigable worker. Possessed of great personal bravery, she has generally been at her husband's side in every crisis. Women are not like that too often in China, or anywhere else.

Although many think of Chiang Kai-shek as a ruthless soldier who murders innocent Communists and bandits and yet does not fight Japan, he is altogether different in his private

life. Mild of manner, smiling often, taciturn, yet saying quickly what he has to say, he is a bit of a philosopher and a moralist, but above all a patriot. He waits long to make a decision, but once it is made he moves swiftly and ruthlessly in its execution. Before his enemies can imagine what he plans to do, he has usually finished the job. He avoids the trivia of Oriental intrigue and hits hard at vitals. Chiang Kai-shek serves China.

Anyone who has not the responsibility for the act can tell China to fight Japan. But Chiang Kai-shek, who knows what that would mean, has adopted the 'policy of the willow.' He bows, but does not break. It is this policy that has saved China from the fate of Ethiopia. And those who believe that Japan could not have done in 1931 as complete a job as Mussolini did in Africa little understand the problems that Chiang Kai-shek faced and handled admirably. He understood that if China became a battlefield for the powers 'to save China' it would mean that in the end China would pay all the bills — or there would be no China.

He has risked unpopularity, but adhered to a policy. That is Chiang Kai-shek. He gives the impression of being an opportunist and a careerist. Actually, he is a man who follows guiding principles. That is perhaps why his new army is built upon moral principles incorporated in his 'New Life Movement,' a combination of the morals of Christianity with the ethics of Confucius.

Here in tabloid is the Soong family as I have known it all these years. They are big people, these Soongs. Family intrigues, jealousies, disputes — all of these they have, and at times the situation is very tense. But, in the large, they have done a brave and manly job for China, and there is no one to take their places.