

WOMAN IN WORLD HISTORY

Soong Ching Ling
(Mme. Sun Yatsen)



I. Epstein

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WOMAN IN WORLD HISTORY

Life and Times of

Soong Ching Ling

(Mme. Sun Yatsen)

By Israel Epstein

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PREFACE

Huang Hua

It is a great honor for me to write a preface for the new, PFS (China Society for People's Friendship Studies) 50-book series under the general title of *Light on China*. All these books were written in English by journalistic and other eyewitnesses of the events described. I have read many of them over the seven decades since my student days at Yenching University. With some of the outstanding authors in this series I have ties of personal friendship, mutual regard, and warm memories dating from before the Chinese people's Liberation in 1949.

Looking back and forward, I am convinced that China is pursuing the right course in building a strong and prosperous country in a rapidly changing world with its complex and sometimes volatile developments.

The books in this series cover a span of some 150 years, from the mid 19th to the early 21st century. The numerous events in China, the sufferings and struggles of the Chinese people, their history and culture, and their dreams and aspirations were written by

foreign observers animated by the spirit of friendship, equality and cooperation. Owing to copyright matters and other difficulties, not all eligible books have as yet been included.

The founder of the first Chinese republic, Dr. Sun Yat-sen wrote in his Testament in 1925, “For forty years I have devoted myself to the cause of the people’s revolution with but one end in view: the elevation of China to a position of freedom and equality among the nations. My experiences during those forty years have convinced me that to attain this goal we must bring about an awakening of our own people and ally ourselves in common struggle with those people of the world who regard us as equals.”

Chairman Mao Zedong declared, at the triumphal founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, “The Chinese people have stood up.” Today, having passed its 53rd anniversary, we see the vast forward strides that have been taken, and note that many more remain to be made.

Many foreign observers have traced and reported the real historical movement of modern China, that is: from humiliation — through struggle — to victory. Seeking understanding and friendship with the Chinese people, their insight and perspective were in basic harmony with the real developments in China. But there have been others who viewed China and the Chinese people through glasses tinted by hostile prejudice or ignorance and have invariably made irrelevant observations that could not stand the test of time. This needs to be better understood by young people and students, at home and abroad. The PFS series *Light on China* can help them gain an overview of what went before, is happening now, and will

emerge in the future.

Young students in China can additionally benefit from these works by seeing how foreign journalists and authors use fluent English to record and present historical, philosophical, and socio-political issues and choices in China. For millions of students in China, English has become a compulsory second language. These texts will also have many-sided usefulness in conveying knowledge of our country to other peoples.

Students abroad, on their part, may be helped by the example of warm, direct accounts and impressions of China presented by their elders in the language that most readily reaches them.

Above all, this timely and needed series should help build bridges of friendship and mutual understanding. Good books long out of print will be brought back to strengthen the edifice.

My hearty thanks and congratulations go first to ex-Premier Zhu Rongji, who has been an effective supporter of this new, PFS series. They go to all engaged in this worthy project, the Foreign Languages Press, our China Society for People's Friendship Studies, and others who have given their efforts and cooperation.

Chairman Mao Zedong has written: "So many deeds cry out to be done, and always urgently. The world rolls on, time presses. Ten thousand years are too long. Seize the day, seize the hour."

The hour has come for making these books available to young people in China and abroad whose destiny is to build a better world together. Let this series add a small brick to that structure.

Beijing, Autumn 2003

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Soong Ching Ling (Mme. Sun Yatsen) was an outstanding woman in China's history, and the world's, in the 20th century. Most of it was spanned by her long life—born in 1893, she died in 1981.

She was linked with many of the century's key events. In China they included three revolutions and their attendant civil wars plus national wars against foreign invasion and intervention. Globally, they embraced World War I and II and the great Russian and Chinese revolutions that followed in their wake—and the subsequent universal surge of independence struggles in the former colonies and semi-colonies of imperialism.

She herself was, first and foremost, a revolutionary patriot of China, though international in her culture and contacts. Strength, faithfulness to principle, caring gentleness, high courage, self-effacing modesty and striking womanly beauty combined in her to a rare degree. Few people have exercised so much public magnetism without any desire for, or use of, wealth or power.

Wife of Sun Yatsen, founder of the Chinese Republic, for a decade up to his death, she survived him by 56 years, always faithful to his revolutionary cause. She bitterly opposed Chiang Kaishek, her brother-in-law, who violated Sun Yatsen's key precepts while pretending to revere him. From the 1920s on she knew Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and other leaders-to-be of the Chinese Communist Party. Increasingly cooperating with this party, she became one of the founders of the People's Republic and died as its honorary head of state.

In foreign affairs, in ties with the Soviet Union, the first country to appreciate and assist China's new forces, she helped Sun Yatsen correspond with Lenin, twice met with Stalin, and knew well Mikhail Borodin and other Soviet advisers to the Guomindang in its revolutionary period in the mid-1920s. The two revolutions, the Soviet and Chinese, in her view, were interconnected. Like Sun Yatsen, she held the relations of the two countries to be in the best interest of both. But they developed in a zig-zag way, with deep dips first when Chiang Kaishek turned on the revolution, and again much later when the equality of China as a socialist country was not respected by Moscow.

In the United States, where she studied, she had a host of friends some kept from her girlhood. Later, she helped the pioneering journalists Anna Louise Strong and Edgar Snow to travel to key areas of the Chinese revolution, and write their influential books. In the course of the anti-Japanese war she impressed, and won the admiration of, prominent Americans like General Joseph Stilwell and Gen. Evans F. Carlson of the U.S. Marines. When the U.S. government armed China's reactionaries and obstructed China's revolution, she denounced those actions. But Americans who showed understanding of China and its revolution were at all times among her friends and colleagues. When normal relations between the People's Republic and the U.S.A. finally began to take shape, few were happier, but in this framework too she was ever-alert for China's equality.

In countries of what is now called the Third World, she already had many contacts when they were struggling against colonial masters. From those times, she knew Jawaharlal Nehru of India and Ho Chi-minh of Vietnam, both of whom she was to meet again as leaders after independence.

While living in exile with Sun Yatsen, she made friends with some early Japanese supporters of his cause. Against Japan's invasion of China she fought relentlessly. After the founding of the People's Republic some of her old friends helped towards establishing normal and equal ties between the two neighbor countries—possible only after the defeat of Japanese militarism and the rise of a truly independent China.

In the worldwide struggle against reaction and fascism, she joined, from early pre-war days, a galaxy of international notables of the time.

Whatever the country, throughout her long life she resisted attempts to dominate others, and urged cooperation in equality. Towards all peoples, she was friendly and hopeful.

Awareness of the Chinese and world history of her time is indispensable to understanding this remarkable woman. But this is a biography, not a history. Paying due attention to the second I have guarded against letting it drown the first. Actually, the two were inseparable. Such was Soong Ching Ling's (Mme. Sun Yatsen's) relevance to wider problems, and her combination of personal qualities, that many people in China, in confused and troubled times, looked to see where she stood and took their own position accordingly.

Abroad, many people of her generation saw her as a figure both gentle and indomitable. "China's conscience," some called her. Chinese or foreign, those fortunate enough to know her were inspired and warmed.

Naturally, all this made her more of a thorn in the sides of foes. Threats were made against her life. Plans were hatched to destroy her. Friend after friend was felled by assassins and executioners, sometimes with the express purpose of frightening her, but nothing did.

The aim of this biography is to have the reader meet her face to face. Wherever possible, her story is told in her own words—drawn from her available writings, including numerous letters. Some 200 were addressed to this author and his late wife, Elsie Cholmeley, between 1939 and 1981. Hundreds, some dating back to 1913, were supplied from other sources. But her extant letters, despite their abundance, do not reflect the full content of her correspondence. Habits acquired in long years of the revolutionary underground made her wary of committing details of activity to paper, and when she had to she would ask the recipients to burn them. Those that have survived cover relatively limited ground, though they do express her character and moods.

Wider context is provided from contemporary history, the testimony of participants and eyewitnesses in scores of interviews and memoirs, and from

my own recollections of Soong Ching Ling over more than four decades. In 1938-41 and 1942-44, I saw and worked with her regularly—sometimes daily. At other periods, up to her death in 1981, the contact was more sporadic.

In her last years, she expressed several times the hope that, after her death, I would write her biography. She first did so in 1975.* In September 1980, in two letters, she wrote, “I request you to write my biography when I die,”** and, “Ego dictates all autobiographies. So let it be my biography by my trusted friend.”***

Although mentioning death, she did not see it as something close. In view of her long resilience in the face of bodily ills, and the vigor of her mind, neither she nor I could have expected the end to come so soon. Tragically it did—before we could have the systematic consultations we had planned, and so often put off because other work seemed more urgent. Giving priority to what needed doing in the present, she was less prone to falling back into reminiscences than many younger than she. I have worked hard to fulfill the responsibility with which she honored me, with what success it is for the reader to judge.

A word about method. There will not be found, in these pages, any quotation marks around words by Soong Ching Ling which she did not actually say or write, or which were not put down by the hearers. Some biographies are “enlivened” by imagined conversations or episodes, but these are permissible only in historical fiction. In this book, conjectures or interpretations, at times necessary, are identified as such.

On the other hand, an effort has been made to avoid academic language and over-studding with footnotes that might impede the average reader. For those who want them, sources for all data and statements beyond what has long been common knowledge are to be found at the back of the book.

Because Soong Ching Ling died so abruptly, even some minor questions, which she could have cleared up within minutes, were left unanswered. For

*, ** and *** SCL, letters to author dated respectively May 28, 1975, and September 17 and September 25, 1980.

some, answers were found only after months of research, for others none. This has added to the difficulty of the work, and of course to its shortcomings. Moreover, it is my first attempt at biographical writing, and seventy-plus is not a good age for a beginner. But I have done my best.

May this book help people who never knew this great woman to better know and understand her, her times, her country and people. Hopefully, it will ease the way for more and better books to come—as they are bound to do, not in our generation alone. If it impedes superficiality, misinformation or misinterpretation, that too will be useful.

Written in English and appearing simultaneously in Chinese, this account aims at two audiences. So it may sometimes give one or the other a feeling of redundancy—since historical and personal references familiar to Chinese readers may require explaining for foreign ones, and vice-versa.

Foreign readers will have the advantage of finding here many of her original words, in English, the language in which she expressed herself most easily on paper—though of course the same writings, were usually published and quickly seen, or even at first seen, in Chinese. But only a tiny few of the letters she wrote in English to foreigners or sometimes to Chinese—for instance to Liao Mengxing—have ever printed before, in either language, so will be new to all readers. This biography's wide use of both Chinese and foreign sources may round out the picture of Soong Ching Ling in her international and bi-cultural aspects. By this I do not mean dualism. Though she was bilingual, and well-informed in many directions, everything she wrote for publication, from her teens to her eighties, at home or abroad, was concerned with China.

Hers was a life with patriotism—love and respect for her own country and people—as its innermost core. At the same time, she was free of assumptions of either superiority glorification of everything Chinese as opposed to everything foreign, or inferiority—admiration of the foreign while despising one's own. As a Chinese, she stood on an equal plane—never doubting her country's ability to climb the heights of achievement and knowledge. Current lags and defects she recognized clearly and referred to plainly. But she

saw such recognition as a spur to improve, not a damper to discourage. Moreover, her patriotism was democratic. To her the country meant its people, not just some upper layer (though she herself was born in one) but its entire toiling mass.

Long experience and much thought gave her the firm belief that the future in China, as in the world, lay in socialism, and that in China the core force for progress was the Chinese Communist Party. This was not sloganizing, but a conviction she acted on, through thick and thin, over many decades.

She never wavered in the value she attached to knowledge and education, and trust in a future powered not only by revolutionary spirit and but by the most advanced science.

From youth to old age, she fought for the right and duty of women to participate as full equals in all fields of the nation's advance, and for recognition by society of its duty to facilitate this. Her utmost love and concern was for the children, for their physical and moral health, for their education as worthy heirs of progress in the past and confident builders of the socialist future. Many things could wait, she said, but work for the children could not.

China is modernizing. Soong Ching Ling was a truly modern Chinese—this was true in her girlhood and her whole life, and I daresay will continue to appear true for the present generation, and many to come.

All the above are questions of our time. They are also reasons for getting to know Soong Ching Ling—for Chinese readers since she is their countrywoman, for the foreign readers because China is a fifth of the human race. Understanding of this great woman will help towards understanding of much else in our contemporary world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the collection of material over several years, many institutions and individuals have given generous help, for which I am thankful. In this preface, to keep it from undue length, only some can be named. In the notes, however, all sources are acknowledged. The Soong Ching Ling Foundation Research Department and Soong Ching Ling Memorial Residence in Beijing not only helped with data but enabled me to use that residence, in her environment and ambience, as a place to do my writing. Warmly helpful, too, were the China Welfare Institute, the Sun Yatsen and Soong Ching Ling Memorial Residences and Municipal Archive in Shanghai, the Cultural Section of the Guangzhou City Government, the Sun Yatsen Memorial Museum in his native place in Zhongshan County in Guangdong Province, and the Soong Ching Ling Foundation of Wenchang County, the home of her ancestors in Hainan Island (now a province in its own right).

Among friends in China, who gave interviews and other assistance were the late Liao Mengxing (Cynthia Ljao)—an old fellow-worker in the wartime China Defense League, Zhang Yan—former first deputy editor-in-chief of *China Reconstructs* and correspondent of the *Beijing People's Daily* in Washington who shared with me the fruits of his visit to Wesleyan College for Women, Macon, Georgia, and Mme. Fu Wuyi and Ms. Zhang Airong of the SCL Foundation who also made available much research material they brought back. The late Zhang Ke, of Zibo, Shandong, shared with me his invaluable memories of working with Soong Ching Ling in Wuhan, Moscow and Berlin in 1927-29 (Mme. Gu Jinxing of the Chinese Red Cross brought us together).

Dr. Chen Hansheng, now in his middle 90s, supplied recollections going back to the 1920s. For the 1930s, the same was done by Li Yan—once Soong Ching Ling's contact with the Communist Party, the veteran journalist Lu Yi, and Yang Xiaofu, son of Soong Ching Ling's assassinated colleague in the China League for Civil Rights. For later times there were Shen Cuizhen—venerable long-time head of the China Welfare Institute, her colleagues Chen Weibo and others, and Zhang Jue, for several years Soong Ching Ling's English secretary.

In Japan my sincere appreciation is due to the Soong Ching Ling Fund of Japan, Mrs. Hiroko Kubota—who has done research on Soong Ching Ling for many years and is translating this book into Japanese, and the heirs of Sun Yatsen's faithful friends Miyazaki Toten and of Sokichi Umeya—Tetsuro and Suwako (Mr. and Mrs.) Kosaka. Both families generously opened to me their extensive collections of letters and other memorabilia of Sun Yatsen and Soong Ching Ling. The meticulous, almost miraculous, preservation of these items through our wartorn century is itself testimony to the devoted friendship between the Japanese and Chinese peoples.

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Finally, I am grateful to *China Reconstructs* for giving me much time off from my magazine duties, and Chen Xiuzhen, Zheng Mouda, Li Zhenguo, Zhang Xiaojiang, Lin Liming and others of the *New World Press* which undertook to publish the book, tolerated my repeated corrections, and waited patiently for its completion. This is a very partial list and by no means lessens my gratitude to others.

For work on the Chinese edition, I want to thank the translator, my old colleague Shen Suru, who made valuable editorial suggestions and caught some of my errors and clumsinesses “above and beyond the call of duty,” and the editor, Ye Jianhua of the People’s Publishing House which brought it out, with the other workers concerned. In my own family, during the decade spent on the book, I have had the forbearing cooperation and unstinted help of Elsie Fairfax-Cholmeley, my late wife of forty years and who like me worked with Soong Ching Ling, and Huang Wanbi, my present wife and co-worker on *China Reconstructs*, which Soong Ching Ling founded. Without them, too, I could not have completed this book. Acknowledgment of authors and works cited is made in the text or the notes.

A NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

In general, in rendering Chinese names, the standard *pin yin* system of transcription, now used in China and by most foreign students of China, is employed in this book.

An exception is made for some transcriptions in (or close to) the Wade-Giles system formerly used in English-speaking countries, which have become habitual there. For instance, Soong Ching Ling (her own spelling) if given in *pin yin* would be Song Qingling, Chiang Kai-shek (transcribed from Cantonese dialect) would be Jiang Jieshi, which many people would not recognize. In a few such cases I have stuck to the familiar. Personal and place names within citations from earlier writings in English have also been left as they were but followed, where necessary, by the *pin yin* version in square brackets.

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