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# **THE SOONG DYNASTY**

*Other books by Sterling Seagrave*

**Yellow Rain**

**Soldiers of Fortune**

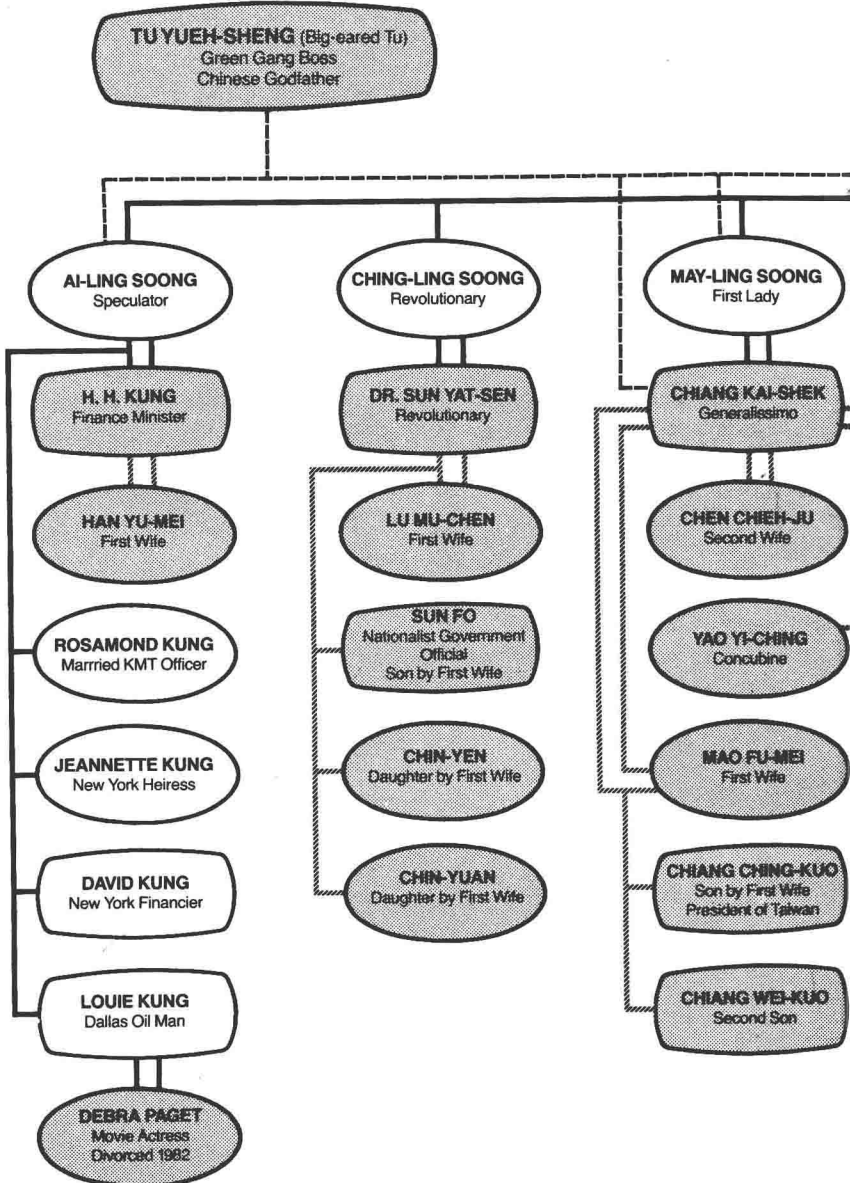
The Soongs were made for China, not China for the Soongs.

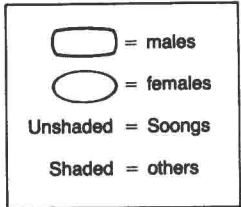
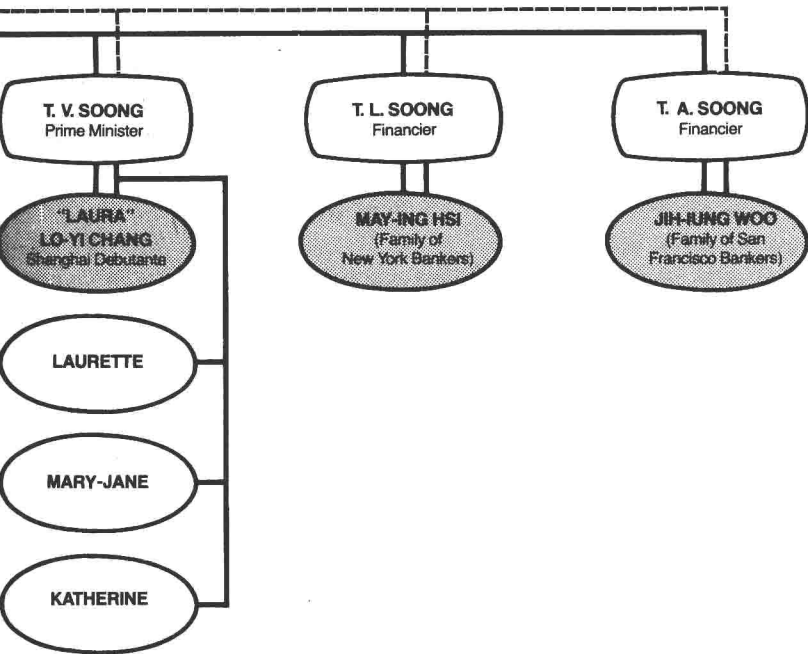
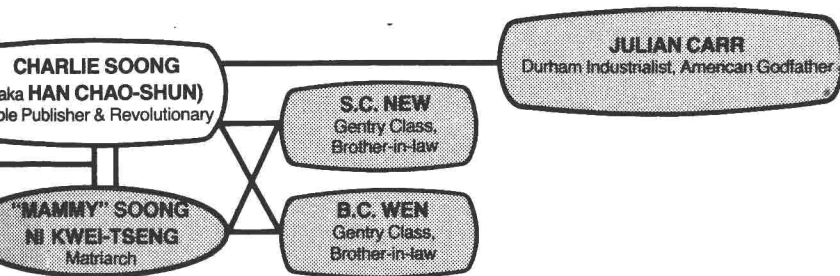
—Soong Ching-ling  
(Madame Sun Yat-sen)

The most difficult problem in Sino-American publicity concerns the Soong family. They are . . . the head and front of a pro-American policy. It ill befits us, therefore, to go sour on them.

—Henry R. Luce  
(Time Inc.)

# THE SOONG DYNASTY





## ***A NOTE ON NAMES AND SOURCES***

To avoid confusing readers, the Chinese names in this book are rendered very casually in the way they were most familiar at the time. The new Pinyin system is used only for reference to locations on recent maps. Sources for the information on which the book is based are listed and described in the Notes, which begin on page 467. Readers seeking further elaboration may find the extensive Bibliography useful.

# **THE SOONG DYNASTY**



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*Illustrations follow pages 180 and 340*

## *Prologue*



## SHANGHAI TAPESTRY

Shanghai no longer smells like the Mysterious East. The realization came as a shock to my nostrils, which had expected to be indulged on the long drive out the Nanking Road—past the old British Concession race course, now the People's Park, through leafy tunnels of dappled sunlight from the canopy of plane trees, and into the vaulted arbor of the Avenue Joffre, once in the heart of the old French Concession, now called simply Huai Hai Middle Road. The tired sedan, built in one of Shanghai's ubiquitous people's factories, pulled up before the high wooden gate of a small brick villa, identified by Chinese characters on a plaque beside the gate. The gate cracked open cautiously to reveal the drowsy face of a young People's Liberation Army soldier, wearing forest green with vermilion flashes. His blank look was replaced instantly when he found himself confronted by a bearded round-eye. Two decades of militancy looked out, flanked by centuries of suspicion.

Yes, he admitted reluctantly, in a Shanghai whisper, this was once the home of Vice Chairman Soong Ching-ling, as clearly proclaimed by the plaque. But I was not permitted to enter. The mansion was now occupied by a senior party official.

When I suggested a stroll instead through its carefully tended gardens, where in my mind I could hear the click of croquet balls and the 1920 laughter of the little doctor Sun Yat-sen, the guard's eyes narrowed and he drew himself into the stance called Stork-Strides-to-Distant-Mountain. Old men practice it along the Bund during each morning's T'ai Ch'i exercises.

Disappointed, I stared over his shoulder, trying to memorize the bushes and flowers, the tidy gables, the turn of the window casements, hearing faraway voices through the foliage from the old servants' quarters in the back. He raised his shoulder to block my view. It was no use telling him that what I was looking for had not been there for half a century.

Nothing was there any longer, except the place where it all began. The old Shanghai, that "sink of iniquity" with its 668 brothels, was gone. The old British Club, home of the celebrated Long Bar, where the great taipans once sipped their "stengahs," and where the Japanese occupation forces had to cut down the legs on the tables and chairs for their bantam officers, was now a hostel for merchant seamen.

One night I went searching for the city's ghosts, to be sure they had left. If they were still around, they would be in the old Chinese city—the walled town now bounded by Chunghua Road. It was remarkably quiet. A century ago, even half a century, I could not have strolled the narrow alleys so peacefully. Once the streets were crowded with people elbowing each other, constantly hawking to spit, while beggars sprawled in the gutters like wounded spider monkeys. A few "cash" could purchase a nine-year-old virgin for an hour of unnatural acts—or put a meat cleaver through the shoulder tendons to keep a man from ever again lifting anything for a livelihood.

But the ancient smells were not there and neither were the ghosts. Even the old Chinese city was scrubbed clean, tidy, healthy, attractive, unthreatening. I might as well have been in Lyon, Manchester, or Omaha. Except that the people of Shanghai were friendlier. Gone were the vigilante mobs of Red Guards who raced through the cities of China in the 1960s, tarring and feathering foreign diplomats in the streets of Shanghai, dragging members of the Communist party Politburo into Peking stadium with dunce hats on their heads, to confess their guilt for plotting against Chairman Mao. One man in a dunce hat was the former Minister of Public Security, General Lo, whom I had admired for his commendable aphorism "It is better to confess than not to confess." He was given a chance to practice what he preached, fulfilling the Orwellian prophecies. Those same hysterical mobs, stirred up by Madame Mao and the Gang of Four, had vandalized Vice Chairman Soong Ching-ling's house—the pretty little villa on the Avenue Joffre, where she had lived as a girl before she eloped with Dr. Sun, and which she

had acquired after the Communist victory as a place for her old age.

Why was everybody now so friendly? In the Chinese villages along the border of Yunnan Province, where I had grown up, the poor people were always friendly and full of earthy humor. But it was hardly expected in Shanghai. While Russia and America vied to put the first man on the moon, the Chinese boasted that they would put a new man on the earth. Had they succeeded? If so, what better place to put him than in this city once considered the most sinful on the planet? Because it is the setting of our story, and its personality contributed so much to the Soong legend, the evolution of Shanghai requires a brief summary.

In the early 1800s, just before the Soongs came on stage, the old Chinese city was just a village on the muddy banks of the Whangpoo River, seventeen miles from the Yangtze River estuary. The name Shanghai means nothing more romantic than "by the sea." Along a towpath on the embankment, barge men pulled cargo junks upriver when the wind failed. For miles around, the countryside was flat, prone to flooding. But the site commanded all trade up the Yangtze for a thousand miles into the interior.

Foreigners were until then confined to trading at the southern port of Canton. Great Britain had been trading with China through the East India Company since the late 1700s. But early in the nineteenth century she had a severe cash-flow problem. Her imports of Chinese teas and silks were far greater than the value of her exports to China; there was little demand for expensive British manufactured goods such as woolens, cotton, and metal products. With the mercantile conquest of India behind them, British traders were confident that they could develop another vast market in China if a few ports other than Canton could be opened to foreign exploitation. The lever Britain used to pry them open was opium.

The primary source of opium then was India and the Middle East, monopolized by the British East India Company. Proper Englishmen like Dr. William Jardine, one of the greatest opium merchants, purchased raw opium from India growers for niggardly sums, and resold it to the Chinese through Hong Kong for ten times the amount.

For a while, the British were successful in financing their imports of tea by smuggling opium to China, but as tea consumption rose, opium traffic had to be increased accordingly. Since the Manchu regime had banned opium trading, British ships carried their loads to the Portuguese

colony of Macao, at the mouth of the Pearl River, unloaded the drug there, then sailed innocently into Canton harbor with legal cargoes. Later, when enough Manchu officials had become partners in the illicit trade, the opium was shipped directly into Canton, where it was stored brazenly in warehouses along the riverside.

The Americans became involved in the 1820s, and dignified firms such as Perkins & Company and Russell & Company of Boston engaged in immense opium traffic by clipper ship. British and American traffic increased from 5,000 chests in 1821 to 39,000 chests in 1837. Britain's share of this growth again balanced her imports of silks and teas, and stemmed the outflow of her silver. But not without hazard to China. The increased consumption of opium, despite imperial bans, was causing social calamity. More and more people, from landlords and aristocrats down to soldiers and prostitutes, became addicted. The seduction of Manchu officials into the trade caused government corruption to spread. Eventually, the silver flow was reversed, and Chinese silver began to rush toward Great Britain in alarming quantities.

National pride and sovereignty were as much at stake as silver and opium. When Chinese officials crucified an opium smuggler in front of the Canton warehouses in December 1838, the foreign devils rushed out and broke up the wooden cross. Ten thousand Chinese rioted. The Westerners appealed to a powerful merchant they called Houqua—the Chinese kingpin of the opium traffic—and he bought off the local mandarins, setting a pattern for a century to come.

The Chinese government then insisted that all British captains must sign a bond that they would not carry opium into the country. Secretly, Americans began to carry British opium or to let British ships fly the Stars and Stripes into Canton. The last straw came when a crew of drunken British sailors killed a Chinese villager in an argument. Their consul refused to allow them to be tried by a Chinese court. To retaliate, the Manchu government ordered all provisions to the British cut off. Great Britain declared war on October 1, 1839.

British opium merchants had campaigned long and hard for this war, and they were its chief beneficiaries. A fleet led by the thirty-two gun paddlewheeler *Nemesis* made short work of the Chinese navy. Humiliated, China paid a huge indemnity, opened five additional ports to British trade and residence, and exempted British subjects from Chinese justice.

Of all the new treaty ports, Shanghai was the gem. It was only a

squalid coastal enclave when the British arrived in force. Captain George Balfour of the Madras Artillery was the first resident British consul; he was accompanied by a translator, a surgeon, and a clerk. Balfour selected a marshy site just north of the walled Chinese town because the river there provided the best anchorage.

"There our navy can float," he said, "and by our ships, our power can be seen and, if necessary, promptly felt. Our policy is the thorough command of this great river."

Not only did Shanghai command the mighty Yangtze for the movement of agricultural produce; it was connected by canals and lakes to the silk capital of Soochow, and by the Grand Canal to Peking. All the goods of China could easily flow out there, and all the goods of Europe and America could flow in.

Foreigners were slow to settle at first, but a handful of missionaries and merchants came up from Canton, accompanied by their shrewd Chinese business agents. The United States negotiated a separate treaty, allowing Yankees a concession of their own, plus most-favored-nation status and exemption from Chinese justice. An American consul, Henry Wolcott, raised the Stars and Stripes on the north side of Soochow Creek—the first foreign flag to fly in Shanghai because no British flagpole had yet been erected. Taken aback, Consul Balfour planted the Union Jack on the south side, and hastily built his consulate there. Eventually the Americans asked the British to handle police and other matters for them, and this led to the amalgamation of the two concessions as the International Settlement. The French remained aloof, establishing their own concession up the riverbank.

In the beginning, America was represented by zealous missionaries, not merchants. Many of them were puritan fundamentalists, full of New Testament virtues. "The Chinese are a hopeful race," they said optimistically, "and need only the transforming influence of Christianity to rise almost immeasurably above the rest of Asiatic nations."

Where once there had been just a towpath, a row of warehouses, or hongs, now stood, each in a handsome garden. Upstairs was the office of the taipan, or boss, and his assistants. These were hard men who came to Asia to make their personal fortunes first, and the profits of their companies and nations thereafter. No women accompanied them. Shanghai, in those days, was no place for a lady.

With no companionship but each other, the taipans led a life of leisure modeled on that of the English country squire. They rose late,

breakfast heavily, visited their hong's to go over accounts kept by Western office managers called *griffins*, then adjourned for a lavish lunch of Chinese delicacies washed down with English ale and Dutch gin. In the afternoon, they sipped whisky on the verandah and observed the loading and unloading underway on the river, smoking cigars with amiable friends till supper. This repast featured Spanish sherries, French clarets and sauternes, exquisite Chinese fish and fowl, imported roast beef and mutton, augmented by Indian curries, pastries, cheeses, champagne, coffee, and more cigars. In everyone's mind was the urgent need for a club.

Shanghai began to boom. An atmosphere of freebooting capitalism took hold, and the role of cutthroat merchant gentleman was played to the hilt. Criminals and swindlers disembarked in great numbers. It was said that the only way to tell the criminal from the capitalist was by the size of his purse. Lancelot Dent and his partner, T. C. Beale, of Dent & Company were the first serious rivals to Jardine and his partner Matheson. Both firms used fast sailing ships to pick up their mail in Calcutta or Hong Kong and race north to Shanghai ahead of the sluggish British mail ships. In this manner they learned the latest commercial news from Europe a day or two ahead of would-be new rivals—and made fantastic killings. The leading American hong's were Russell & Company, Heard & Company, Wetmore's, Olyphant's, and Wolcott, Bates & Company. Among these, the most powerful was the established opium trade Russell & Company, linked to the famous Yankee merchant clans of Roosevelt, Delano, and Forbes.

But, if all was going brilliantly for the British and Americans, it was going very badly for the Manchus.

Britain's triumph in the First Opium War revealed the vulnerability of the Manchu dynasty, which had ruled China since 1644. The alien Manchus had never fully conquered South China. Conspiracy always simmered there, and anti-Manchu secret societies spread through the countryside. The brutal methods of the Manchus had long delayed a popular uprising, but the British opium victory disclosed that Manchu strength had rotted away over the centuries into profound weakness and corruption. It was only a matter of time before the anti-Manchu movement would pull together and topple the imperial government.

The Manchu throne was in a dilemma. If it devoted its energies and resources to resisting foreigners, it left itself exposed to internal revolt.



If it suppressed internal revolt, it left itself open to foreign demands. Both the Chinese secret societies and the Western nations took advantage of this dilemma. The West sought to keep the Manchu government off balance, but not enough to cause its downfall. The secret societies provoked trouble between the Manchus and the Westerners by attacking missionaries. Each outrage caused Western governments to bring new pressure on Peking.

Ironically, it was ferocious Old Testament Christianity that brought the matter to a head in one of history's great cataclysms—the Taiping Rebellion of 1850. In South China, a disappointed candidate for the Manchu civil service turned to Christianity for solace. He had visions that he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ. With him as its Messiah, a Society of God Worshippers (Christians, by their own estimation) rose up to smite the Manchus. Their objective was to put the government back in Chinese hands, and to establish common ownership of land. They also were hellbent on putting a crimp in prostitution, opium smoking, drinking, adultery, gambling, footbinding, slavery, and cruelty to women. They were quite ahead of their time. A mighty Christian army of famine-stricken peasants and workers swept north to establish the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace (T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo—hence simply the “taipings”).

This sort of Old Testament eye-for-an-eye violence was not really what the New Testament missionaries from the West had in mind for China. Some of them were also a bit offended by the suggestion that Jesus Christ could have a Chinese relative.

For fourteen years, the Taipings battled the Manchus, ravaging twenty provinces of China, while sending twenty millions souls to heaven. Then they made the mistake of attempting to seize Shanghai from the foreigners; they succeeded only in taking control of the native city for two years. They were driven out finally by the French, and then were set upon by an American soldier of fortune named Frederick Townsend Ward.

A ne'er-do-well from Salem, Massachusetts, Ward was bored working as a sailor on the Yangtze. The prospect of easy pillage appealed to him. In the pay of the Manchu throne, he organized a force of mercenaries to fight the Taipings. Ward called his troops the “Ever Victorious Army,” but it accomplished little. Although Ward himself was no real danger, and he was soon killed in battle, he was succeeded by a peculiar and very dangerous military misfit, Charles George Gordon.