漢口扶輪社

THE ROTARY CLUB OF HANKOW

Ladies' Night 女賓夕 -- 30 September 1938

What forms of service the women of China have been engaged in during war

Speech by Madame Chiang Kai-Shek



Ladies and Gentlemen:

After the excellent program which we have had this evening, I feel that anything I have to say will be, as we Chinese would say, "to embroider on brocade", just too much of a good thing. Mr. Baguelly has said that his speech is a swan song to the Hankow Rotary Club; mine is therefore a maiden speech.

Speaking to you this evening I feel as though I were back in our schools for the children of the revolution in Nanking. One day we had a very distinguished visitor from abroad and so we decided to give the children a special treat in his honor. After the feast the distinguished guest spoke to the children and it was translated to them. One of the boys expressed our appreciation and thanked the speaker, following which the visitor turned to the children and said, "What part of it did you like best?" meaning the speech. The children all yelled, "The eats!" Without any reflection upon the galaxy of talent already displayed, I fear it may turn out to be somewhat similar this evening.

I confess, however, that when I was invited I at first declined, because, although it is said that women like to hear themselves talk (and it may be true), it is also said that when women talk, they talk the left arm off a wooden idol. But when I learned that the motto of the Rotary Club is "Service Above Self", I feel that I must come.

It has occurred to me that you might be interested in knowing what forms of service the women of China have been engaged in during the past year of war. We, too, have been striving to serve our nation during this crisis. Shortly after the Lukouchiao outrage occurred, I organized a national society of women pledged to work for the welfare of the soldiers. Branch offices were quickly opened all over China, and wherever Chinese reside in foreign countries. The work done by this society is quite note-worthy and covers a wide area. Up to date we have received over $1,000,000 in contributions collected by our branch offices, in addition to large quantities of drugs for the use of refugees and wounded soldiers.

Last March we organized the committee for the care of refugee children, familiarly known as the "warphans". You must be particularly interested in the "warphans" because your Club has been so very kind and thoughtful to our children.

Perhaps some of you, like some of us, have been under the impression that all mothers will be delighted to entrust their children to our care, and that all "warphans" are fairly easy to care for. To our amusement and sometimes to our aggravation we find that these little ones are not angels. When the first batch of children came to us, we were quite inexperienced. We began by cutting their hair, bathing them, and giving to each little tot two suits of clothes, say, "Now these suits of clothes should last quite a while." Before long we found some of that clothing was in the pawnshops. Some of them thought we had not given enough sweetmeats, so they pawned their clothes to buy them.

One evening we found that when it was time to turn on the electricity there was no light. We wondered what had happened and upon investigation discovered the bulbs in another pawnshop. Some of these children have apparently been neglected and allowed to roam about the country for many months. They have developed a liking for the free and easy life and prefer it to their homes. Some of them suddenly disappear. One boy, however, disappeared in the morning but returned the same evening followed by twenty other children whom he had collected. He thought the home was such a fine place that he wanted other children in similar plight to receive its benefits.

One boy, after eating five bowls of congee and four *mentao* (Chinese bread), still continued eating. The teacher, thinking that was more than his tummy cold hold, said he had enough and took him out of line. The teacher stepped into the next room, and, lo and behold, there he was again in line! We finally decided that he knew his wants better than we, so we let him eat all he wanted.

There are some very pathetic cases that come to us. When we were gathering children in the country districts one old lady, well over 70, brought ten duck eggs and a package of tea, and gave them to the worker say, "It is very kind of you to take my grandson. For twenty years I have not travelled beyond my own district. My son is dead, so please take these eggs and the package of tea as my contribution to the work you are doing."

Frequently we find children on the roadside, and in the war zones we pick them up sometimes screaming with terror and quite bewildered over the loss of their parents. Our workers hear children pleading, "Oh, father, oh, mother, please do not leave me; I won't cry again." We now have under our care over 12,000 orphans, and on this Kiangsi front the military headquarters is begging

us to send somebody to get the children out, somehow, and as quickly as possible.

In Kwangsi, Kiangsi, Chekiang, Shansi, Hunan and Hupeh we have groups organized to train young women to go to the villages to teach our people the meaning of national resistance. They instruct the women of the villages in the things that they can do to help win the war.

Up to May of this year we had many women's organizations, but no one authority under which to correlate the different lines of work. For that reason a conference of fifty woman leaders coming from thirteen provinces was held at Kuling in May, some of the delegates coming from places as distant as Kweichow and Szechuan. At that conference woman leaders, who had left their work in answer to my call, discussed how best we could offer ourselves to our country in this hour of need. We discussed such important questions as how to mobilize women for war service, and how to encourage women to increase the production of foodstuffs. Ways and means of securing complete cooperation between the army and the people, as well as the correlation of all the work of the various women's societies, were discussed during the five days that we spent on the mountain top.

At the conference we decided to center our activities around the Women's Advisory Committee of the New Life Movement, the Secretary-General, Mrs. William Wang, being present with us this evening. So on July 1st following the first truly indigenous national conference of Chinese women we started our work anew. Not the least benefit that has come to us out of this conference has been the opportunity for getting to know each other better.

In Szechuan we now have a committee working on the problem of how to increase production of foodstuffs in the rear, and, at the same time, to enlarge the output of home and village industries. As you know, since the war started, most of our cotton mills have been taken over by the Japanese army. Some have been transported to Japan in the form of scrap-iron, until now we have very few textile spindles compared to the number that we had before the war. Our women are continuing to weave and to spin in the old-fashioned way, while experiments are being carried on with the purpose of improving both methods and machinery.

We are also training girls to mobilize the women of the villages, so that they can take some part in the war. Two months ago we commended training courses for graduates of high school and college, so that they might volunteer their services for work in the country districts. The other day I was in the villages inspecting the work of one of these teams. As I tramped with these girls, it was raining, so we waded through---gooey, sloshy mud and slippery cobblestones. It felt like chewing gum on our shoes. The girls stood for hours in the rain, showing the women the elements of first aid and sanitation, and then began talking to them how best to help out, and what we women might do as citizens of our country in this time of crisis. I had adequate clothes and was wearing rubbers, but the youngsters had on thin cotton dresses with cotton soled shoes. On parts of the road the mud case over their ankles. Did these youngsters complain? Not a bit! They were full of enthusiasm for their work and the part that they might play in the war. I did not hear one of the sneeze.

How eager the village women were to learn to help! One old woman came to me, and not recognizing me, said, "We are poor and have no money. How can we go away when the Japanese come?" One worker replied, "Didn't we tell you the other day that you do not have to run away?

If you people of the villages help to keep the roads in repair, the enemy will never get here."

In another hsien which I visited much further toward the rear, we found that whereas many of our country women right at the front were helping the army, those somewhat in the rear had not thought of doing anything for our boys as they marched by. The girls of our rural service teams, knowing that troops were coming, took their flags and marched down the road to meet them. They prepared plenty of hot tea and songs. The next morning when the reinforcements started off again the magistrate himself gave them a send-off and travelled six or seven li by rickshaw down the road to show his interest. The morale of any army is higher when the men know that they have backing at home.

We have already trained 50 girls for this work. Beginning October 1st, we will train 100 more. As I visited with the village people and saw the conditions under which they live, particularly in some of the districts where the flood has been so bad, I felt that the task is almost beyond this generation. But as I went through the villages with our girls, the so-called intellectuals of our country, and noted how they are giving themselves whole-heartedly to this work, I was greatly encouraged.

These young people are allowed $20 per month out of which they provide their own food and clothing. At one center I asked whether the money was sufficient and received the reply, "Anything is sufficient so long as we can help to save our country." Out of the $20 per month in one place the workers each took one dollar to buy candy for the children as prizes. The long existing barriers between the educated and the masses are slowly being removed by the devotion and hard work of groups such as those who comprise our rural service teams. With such a desirable development China can never be conquered.

Another aspect of our work is that right here in Hankow we have been able to evacuate thousands of women workers formerly employed in the cotton mills. We have not only evacuated them, but we have helped the Ministry of Communications and the Ministry of Economics to transport the machinery into the interior. During this time we have housed thousands of factory girls in the Yokohama Bank, as a temporary shelter and training ground. These factory girls are trained to understand that New Life means, in terms of their own problems of livelihood.

You have probably read in the papers of the work-corps that we have established on the third floor of the Yokohama Bank, where women are making warm garments for refugees and soldiers. By the way, there are many ladies here, foreign friends and others, and I hope that those who have not joined us in this work will do so---tomorrow. Those of you remaining in Hankow under these trying circumstances, whether foreign or Chinese, must have an intense love for our country; otherwise you would have long ago moved away. It is only fair that each of us should pull his own weight.

One of the mottos of Rotary is: "He profits most who serves best". Just before I came here tonight I was reading a book by Miss Muriel Lester, entitled "It Occurred to Me", and in it she says something which I think is of great value. It is: "Fools can destroy anything; to create it takes a real person." Sometimes some of us feel that the world is topsy-turvy; that everybody is frightened by force, or, in the case of Japan's attack upon China, bluffed by force. We do not have the courage to stand up for the principles to which our governments have subscribed. If it is true in personal life

that "He profits most who serves best", it must also be true in national life. As Mr. President has said, you have over 100,000 Rotarians all over the world. It seems to me that your motto could be applied to national life and policy as a whole as well as to individual life and policy. I see, too, on tonight's program the words, "Bridging personalities and nationalities". On reading that I thought of something I have recently been discussing with my husband. We were talking of the development of character. To me this is what character means: Under normal circumstances an ordinary wooden bridge is good enough, but when typhoons and floods come, as they do in the Yellow River, and when earthquakes occur, as they do in Japan, we need not wooden bridges but steel bridges, because steel alone can stand the strain. In everyday living it does not show so such, but during times of crises weaknesses quickly appear. The person who has character will stand any test that may come.

Personality and national character go together. Is national character, after all, not an aggregate of personal or individual character?

There is only a small group of Rotarians present here tonight, but your influence might extend far and wide, providing that you are prepared to do everything in your power to help your governments see that to be foresighted and courageous in the present crisis in China, means not merely deliverance for China but the preservation of civilization itself. We are so bound together that what hurts one hurts all of us, and we cannot escape the consequences of failing to cooperate with our neighbors.

The staff of the Women's Advisory Committee of the New Life Movement feel that it is not enough for us to organize this and that group to work; we feel that it is up to ourselves to participate personally in caring for the wounded soldiers. We have a slogan in China which is very popular: "Those who have strength give strength; those who have money give money and strength."

We have also started to mobilize the "housewives" of Hankow. Last week we invited 100 young women within one hour to go and call on the housewives to urge them to join our work-corps, either by coming to the bank regularly, or by doing the sewing at home. To those of my own compatriots who are here I would say that we must live up to the Rotarian ideal; do our share not merely in carrying out this ideal in business and personal life, but also in national life as well. It is necessary for every Chinese citizen to put his heart and soul into the work. Remember, if we become slaves of Japan we will no longer even have homes.

In conclusion I would like to quote Bacon: "Little minds and a great empire go ill together." Japan's leaders, at least, have not shown such magnanimity. I do not blame their soldiers for what they have committed on Chinese territory so much as I do their leaders, for the former are merely expressing the attitude of their superiors. Let us then be magnanimous, and remember that the motto, "He profits most who serves best", applies to nations as well as to individuals.

超我服務
SERVICE Above Self





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Madame Chiang Kai-Shek (Soong Mei-Ling 宋美齡) (1898-2003), was a Chinese stateswoman, diplomat, and the wife of Chiang Kai-Shek (蔣中正), the leader of the Republic of China (中華民國) (ROC) and head of the Nationalist government.

She married Chiang on 1 December 1927, becoming the First Lady of the ROC, a position she held from 1928 until his death in 1975, serving initially on the Mainland and later in Taiwan after the Nationalists' retreat in 1949.

Educated in the United States at Wellesley College, where she graduated in 1917, Soong was fluent in English and leveraged her Western ties to advance Nationalist interests, particularly during World War II when she conducted a successful diplomatic tour of the United States in 1942–1943. There, she addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress---the first Chinese citizen to do so---and rallied public and governmental support for China's resistance against Japanese invasion, securing military aid and fostering Allied cooperation, including efforts to procure aircraft and personnel for the Chinese Air Force.

Domestically, she promoted social reforms through initiatives like the New Life Movement, emphasizing Confucian ethics, hygiene, and women's education; founded hospitals and orphanages; and advocated for women's mobilization in wartime efforts, such as sewing uniforms for soldiers.

A devout Methodist Christian from a prominent family---the youngest of the influential Soong sisters---Soong exerted significant behind-the-scenes influence on policy, including anti-communist strategies, while her public persona symbolized the ROC's international legitimacy amid civil war and geopolitical shifts. Her longevity allowed her to witness the ROC's transition to Taiwan, where she remained a revered figure until her death at age 105 in New York City, U.S.A. Despite criticisms of authoritarianism in the Nationalist regime, her diplomatic acumen and resilience defined her as a pivotal actor in 20th-century Chinese history.

This article was edited by Rotary China Historian Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒)
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