

CHAPTER 4

Normal Life – the 1950s

The new family home in Taipei was in Changan Dong Road (長安東路), close to Zhongshan North Road (中山北路), the city's main north-south artery. It was an old-fashioned Japanese house; the family furnished it in a modest style. They lived in it for 18 years, until 1967, when it was demolished as part of a road-expansion project.

It was the centre of Faina's universe; she was a homemaker who devoted her energy to her family and children. Because of CCK's status, the family was given domestic staff. But Faina insisted on doing many of the household chores herself; she was house-proud, cleaning the curtains and the sofas. She made food, especially the dishes that her four children liked. She raised chickens in the back garden, to provide eggs for the family. The house was close to a railway line. This made the windows dirty with dust and soot – neighbours could see Faina cleaning the windows.

The house was within walking distance of downtown Taipei. This meant that the family could have something of a “normal” life – as normal, that is, as it could be for the second most powerful person in the land. When



Faina plants a tree. (Courtesy of "Academia Historica")

CCK was not busy, he and Faina walked with the children on nearby streets, full of shops, restaurants and small food stalls. Both loved American films. Sometimes, after dinner, they took the jeep out of the garage and went to a local cinema. They queued to buy tickets and sat down in the middle of the audience.

They went to local restaurants, sometimes without bodyguards. While CCK had a driver assigned to him, he often liked to drive his car. "His driver was constantly complaining that he could not find him," said Chiang family bodyguard Weng Yuan in his autobiography (*My Years at the Side of Chiang Kai-shek and his Son*, page 263). CCK did not enjoy the constant surveillance and sometimes wished to meet people privately, without others knowing.

The couple enjoyed performances of Beijing Opera, for which Faina had developed a taste in the mainland. Faina enjoyed this proximity to ordinary people and ordinary life. In the evening, the couple entertained friends and their wives at home or at a guest house in Yangmingshan (陽明山), a mountain area overlooking the city to the north. CCK often wore a long Chinese gown and served the dishes. At the arrival of each dish, the guests toasted it with rice liquor. Most became tipsy and some fell to the floor; after years of training in the Soviet Union, CCK could hold his liquor as well as anyone. Taiwan could not import liquor like vodka directly from the Soviet Union; but

friends ordered large quantities from Hong Kong, so that Faina could enjoy it with her husband. She could hold her liquor as well as, or better than, he.

In the late 1950s, CCK and Faina would also attend staff parties at the club of the U.S. in Taipei where they had to wear the designated costume, such as cowboy shirts.

She did volunteer work to help local schools. Her small circle of friends embraced Chinese and foreigners, including White Russians. She liked smoking; she stored packets in the clothes cupboards, to hide them from her children. But they discovered the hiding places and took packets to school. It was an era when few Chinese women smoked; it was better not to advertise the fact.

After their arrival in Taiwan, Faina and her husband put much energy into learning English. The United States was the principal ally of the Republic of China (Taiwan's official name), so they met many Americans for work and social activities. CCK hired the wife of the military attaché at the U.S. embassy to teach Faina. Both reached a good standard. In Taiwan, it became Faina's most important means of communication with the outside world; she followed domestic and foreign news through the English media.

A keen sportswoman in Sverdlovsk, Faina took up ten-pin bowling at a nearby centre. According to Chiang family bodyguard Weng Yuan (翁元), she excelled at bowling but, after a short time, stopped going for reasons that were not clear (*My Years at the Side of CKS and His Son*, by Weng Yuan, page 225). Then she took up golf and went with friends to the Old Tamsui course (老淡水高爾夫球場), north of the city; it is the oldest and most prestigious course in Taiwan, founded by Japanese in June 1919. It is in a hilly area near the mouth of the Tamsui River and winds from the sea make it a challenging course. Her husband encouraged her to play.

“But, after several weeks, she also stopped playing. Probably it was because of her asthma (氣喘) and the difficulty of finding partners. So she stored her golf clubs away on a high shelf and lost interest in the sport.” The asthma was due in part to her smoking; later doctors advised her to give up smoking because of the asthma and other lung conditions.

CCK rose at dawn; he did exercise and took a shower. At 06:30, his staff brought him files to read. He went to the kitchen and had a breakfast of congee with pickled vegetables, and sometimes poached eggs. Once he went jogging on Yangmingshan, he got lost because he was not familiar with his new environment. Alarmed, his father had to send staff to look for him. After that, he was accompanied by

bodyguards. In the early years in Taipei, CCK went jogging through the city streets; but his security staff told him it was too dangerous. So his main exercise became long walks in the countryside and on Yangmingshan.

CKS did not like his son living in Changan Dong Road; he considered it not secure enough from possible attack. Assassins could be sent by the rival party or Taiwan people angry at the martial law that CKS imposed when he moved to the island. The KMT dealt ruthlessly with anyone suspected of supporting Communism or independence for Taiwan. According to official figures, the security forces arrested 29,407 people under martial law between 1949 and 1987, when it was lifted; about 15 per cent of these – 4,500 – were executed. In the mid-1950s, there were more than 10,000 political prisoners on Green Island (綠島), offshore the southeast of Taiwan.

In the 1950s, CCK played a key role in the administration of Taiwan's military and internal security institutions. In 1951, he set up a Political Staff College (政治作戰學校) in Peitou (北投), north of Taipei, to train political officers for the armed forces. He held senior posts in intelligence and sent his staff to the Taiwan Garrison Command (臺灣警備總司令部), the agency in charge of enforcing martial law. So he was one of the authors of the "white terror" which the government considered necessary to consolidate its rule in these early years in Taiwan.

Faina knew little of her husband's work. Things had greatly changed since their time together in Gannan in Jiangxi in the late 1930s. There she had shared many of his professional activities and hosted people in their home. His status in the government there was modest – the chief of a rural area with a population of two million. But, after they moved to Chongqing in 1944, his position changed abruptly – he became a close advisor to his father, the President. He told Faina not to inquire about his work; she accepted this and did not ask. He did not want her to be used by those who wanted favours from him.

So Faina concentrated her energies on the home, the family and the children. One of them, Chiang Hsiao-yong, said: "As Father's responsibilities became more onerous, he asked Mother not to inquire about them. She considered this reasonable and completely obeyed him. She became a simple housewife. She became a different person from the very active one she had been in Gannan. She did not like to appear in public places nor speak to strangers. Her character became quiet and sometimes a little lonely." (*Biography of Chiang Fang-liang*, by Wang Mei-yu, page 47). In this, she was a sharp contrast to Soong Mei-ling, the most famous Chinese woman in the world. She loved the spotlight and maintained a wide network of friends and contacts, Chinese and foreign. In the West, Madame Soong had a bigger profile than her husband. She advised him on many issues, especially foreign affairs.

Another thing Faina knew little or nothing about was the fact that her husband had arranged the transfer of his twin sons by Chang Ya-juo to Taiwan. They lived with their grandmother and uncle in a small house in Hsinchu (新竹), a town 90 kilometres southwest of Taipei.

It was a different world from the gilded cage of the Chiang family in Taipei, surrounded by servants and bodyguards. Hsinchu had a mixed population, including Taiwanese and Hakka, who each spoke their own language. The twins became fluent in both languages, as well as Mandarin which the Nationalists had brought from the mainland and made the official language. The Aborigines who lived in Taiwan before the arrival of the Han Chinese also spoke their own languages.

By contrast, their half-brothers and sister in Taipei grew up in a world dominated by mainlanders who spoke only Mandarin. CCK kept his promise to have no direct contact with the twins; the topic was taboo in the family home. He did not want to hurt the feelings of his wife who had stayed loyal to him through his affair; nor did he wish to be reminded of his own infidelity. At the same time, he sent a trusted advisor to Hsinchu to know how the family was doing. The exchanges were not smooth; Ya-juo's brother believed that her sister had been murdered and was suspicious of the government.

In the late 1950s, the two sons chose English names – John for Hsiao-

yen (孝嚴) and Winston for Hsiao-tzu (孝慈). At that time, their grandmother informed them of the identity of their father; previously, they had believed that he had been left behind in the mainland and was unable to escape to Taiwan. She told them not to reveal the truth of their paternity to anyone. So they understood that the Chiang family would not acknowledge them. CCK is rumoured to have had affairs with women during the 1950s; but these also did not disturb the atmosphere in Changan Dong Lu.

Home from home – Astoria Café and Bakery

One of the favourite haunts of Faina and her husband during the 1950s was the Astoria Café and Bakery, the first Russian restaurant in Taipei. It opened for business on October 30, 1949 at 7 Wu Chang Street (武昌街) in downtown Taipei, close to the city's main railway station. The owners were six Russians who had, like the Kuomintang, escaped from the Communists in the mainland. They were among 100 White Russians from Shanghai who had come to Taiwan; it was their second exile – the first followed the Bolshevik revolution in their homeland in 1917. The largest cities of White Russian settlement in China were Harbin and Shanghai.

Among the arrivals in Taiwan was George Elsner Constantin Enobche.



Chiang Ching-kuo and Faina (far left) attend a party at the Astoria Café. (A framed photo on the café's wall shot by Mark O'Neill)

Born in 1893 into a family related to Tsar Nicholas II, he served in the guard force protecting the Tsar. During World War One, he was an officer in the Imperial Russian Army fighting the Germans; then in the White Russian forces fighting the Red Army in the civil war. After the Soviet victory, he moved to Harbin, where he lived for three years. Then he settled in the French concession of Shanghai; he worked in the Public Works Department, responsible for construction of new homes for the French military. He spoke Russian, French, English and Spanish.

The life of Elsner and the other Russians in Taiwan was difficult. They had lost their nationality and found it hard to get work; they lived in humble circumstances and had few assets. Few spoke Chinese or knew anyone in Taiwan; they needed help from local people. After 1949, the Republic of China (RoC) became a strong ally of the United States in the Cold War and fiercely anti-Communist. One national slogan was “Oppose Chinese Communists and the Soviet Union” (反共抗俄); this made employers reluctant to hire Russians, even though they themselves were refugees from Communism. They also could find nowhere to eat Russian food.

Then Elsner had the good fortune to meet Archibold Chien (簡錦錐), a young Taiwanese who spoke English. The two became good friends. Born in 1932, Chien made a visit in 1940 with his elder brother to

Shanghai; he saw the Astoria Confectionery and Tea-Room, close to the Astor House Hotel, next to the Suzhou Creek. It sold buns and bread loaves, caramels, candy and French and Russian cakes; the staff were mainly Russian and Chinese. Elsner and Chien put their heads together and decided to set up a similar establishment in Taipei, also called the Astoria.

Karen Chien (簡靜惠), the daughter of Archibold Chien, remembers: “My parents set up the Astoria Café and Bakery in 1949. When the KMT government came here in 1949, about 100 White Russians came from Shanghai at the same time. They had no nationality, having fled from the Soviet Union in 1917, and could not return home. My father was very interested in art and culture and developed a strong feeling for these Russians. My parents learnt the Russian language from them, and many other things. My parents gave some of them a home in our house in Zhongshan North Road (中山北路). Russians had no income and depended on my parents, who were very kind to them. The 1950s and 1960s was a period of the campaign ‘Oppose Communism and the Soviet Union’ (反共抗俄). Sometimes, if anyone spoke Russian on the street, the Russians were abused. But my parents were not afraid; they had the courage to help them. My parents installed fans in the café to keep people cool during the summer. The Russians helped them in designing the cuisine. Astoria served the first chocolate cake in Taiwan. It became the Russian community for Faina

after she moved here.” (Note: interview with Karen Chien, Taipei, 17/12/2018)

The six shareholders were white Russians, including Elsner. Chien found the premises for the café. It was a building opposite a temple that no Taiwanese dared to rent, for fear of attracting evil spirits. The landlord was reluctant to sign a lease with Russians, such was the intense anti-Soviet atmosphere of the time. But Chien persuaded him by showing him documents that one of the six had become a naturalised Chinese and most had served in the Nationalist army – they too were refugees from Communism. Convinced, the landlord signed a lease with the six, for a monthly rent of NT\$2,000 (US\$65.50, using the 2019 conversion rate). Chien invested US\$500 for the purchase of kitchen equipment and building materials.

The Astoria had a bakery on the ground floor and restaurant on two floors above. Elsner and Chien became close friends; the Russian became a father figure to the young Taiwanese, who was fascinated by his extraordinary history. He had started life at the opposite end of Russian society from Faina – attending a school for the nobility and going to serve in an elite unit protecting Tsar Nicholas. In his military career, he had fought the German and Austrian armies on the Eastern Front. Then he fought the Red Army, before moving to Harbin and Shanghai. He showed the young man photographs of the Tsar and his



Karen Chien (簡靜惠) and her mother Chien Hwang Bi-hsia (簡黃碧霞) in front of the Astoria Café (明星咖啡館) (Photo by Mark O'Neill)

family; he kept these and other precious souvenirs of his homeland in a small wooden box he carried throughout his long odyssey. Now in Taipei, he had no nationality, few friends and few assets – while Faina was married to the son of the president and lived in a comfortable house with servants and bodyguards.

The café became an important meeting place for the white Russians and other expatriates in Taipei. It served full Russian meals, with soups, biscuits and pastries. This included a soft candy once available only to the Tsar and his family and Mazurka walnut cakes. The Russians loved to go there – they could speak their mother tongue, eat their favourite foods, listen to Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff, drink wine and forget the tragedies that had driven them so far from home.

Soon after she arrived in Taipei, Faina started to go there with her husband. Like the other Russians, she was dislocated; she had spent 12 years in mainland China and knew it better than the Soviet Union. Then, suddenly, she had to move again. Taiwan had a wet, humid climate unlike any she had experienced before. Most of its people spoke Taiwanese, which was incomprehensible to her. The 1950s were a decade of tension and uncertainty. Fearing a land invasion and air attacks from the mainland, Taiwan invested heavily in its military; government institutions built tunnels and underground shelters where people could take refuge in the event of attack. The media was heavily




蔣方良女士的最愛 明星俄羅斯軟糖

西元 1949 年由 5 位白俄人與台灣
簡錦錐先生合夥於臺北市武昌街開設
『明星西點咖啡』，店內這道俄羅斯軟
糖就是俄羅斯沙皇專屬的御用點心。
俄羅斯軟糖用手指輕輕剝開白泡泡的軟
糖，ㄉㄞㄞ、ㄉㄞㄞ觸感吃起來超彈牙，
甜而不膩，也是蔣經國夫人蔣方良的最
愛。純手工製作不含防腐劑，冰凍過後
別有一番風味，無須解凍即可食用。這
就是全台絕無僅有的俄羅斯軟糖。

明星西點咖啡 台北市武昌街一段七號 www.astoria.com.tw

Notice of Faina's favourite dishes at the Astoria (Photo by Mark O'Neill)

censored; people were careful what they said. Visits to the Astoria were an opportunity to put all those things out of the mind. Faina often went with her husband; there they were not called by their Chinese names but Nikolai and Faina. "The relaxed atmosphere in the café enabled her to avoid the gaze of being a member of the first family," wrote Archibold Chien in his autobiography (*Café Astoria*, page 119). "She became a regular customer. Sometimes she brought Nikolai (CCK) to take part in gatherings of Russians. Sometimes she brought the four children to eat borscht (羅宋湯) and western food ... Always she had a broad smile and walked with a light and happy step."

Karen Chien said that Faina and her husband came for a regular weekly meeting of the community, to drink, eat, dance and meet the other Russians. "The two spoke both Russian and Chinese to each other. She spoke with a strong Ningbo accent. She had a good capacity for liquor, better than her husband. The Russians could not find jobs in Taiwan. Some emigrated and some passed away." (Note: interview with Karen Chien, Taipei, 17/12/2018)

The biggest day in the calendar was the Russian New Year in early January. From the early morning, chefs prepared chicken, steak, suckling pig and many kinds of cakes and drinks. Around 2200, the guests started to arrive, dressed in traditional costume; they said their prayers and extended New Year greetings to their friends. Some played

musical instruments. When the clock struck midnight, everyone toasted the others and emptied their glasses. “Sometimes, Nikolai drank several glasses of vodka and danced with great fervour, to the cheers of the audience. Faina could not hold back and sang Russian folk songs. The energy and enthusiasm of the two were like that any of young couple.” (*Café Astoria*, page 120). So it was for Faina’s first 10 years in Taipei.

Spartan life

In the late 1950s, as CCK was taking more senior posts in the government, he instructed Faina to avoid extravagance. So she sent a letter in Russian to the Astoria: “Because of the post held by my husband, in future I will not be able to attend private parties there.” After that, she and CCK never attended a New Year party there. Her appearances were restricted to occasional visits to drink coffee and eat cakes. She remained good friends with Archibold Chien and his family; they visited the homes of the other and sometimes went to the cinema together.

Her first grand-daughter, Chiang You-mei (蔣友梅), went to the same primary and junior middle school as Chien’s daughter Karen (簡靜惠); the two became close friends. Karen often stayed over at Faina’s

house. In 1969, CCK became “Vice Premier” and the family moved to the Seven Seas villa in northern Taipei; it was a long distance from the Astoria. Faina’s social life became more restricted. She did not go to the coffee house any more; but she sent her driver to buy borscht and Russian bread.

By now, many of the White Russians had left Taiwan and settled in other countries. Chien became the sole owner. In 1964, he added two Chinese characters Ming Xing (明星 , meaning “famous star”) over the front of the cafe, to reflect its new character. It became a favourite place for Taiwan authors and artists; they liked its European ambience and the fact that they could sit for several hours over one cup of coffee.

A Remarkable Woman

Karen Chien retains a strong memory of Faina: “I was at primary and early middle school with Chiang You-mei, from the ages of two to 13. She was my best friend. So I often met Faina. She was easy to get along with, not like the wife of an official; she had no airs. She was very sociable.

“The house had a large kitchen; she would go in, check and taste the dishes, to ensure the quality. Her family were very kind to me. I often

went to their house and slept over. It was close to our house. I called Faina ‘Grandma’. She treated me like a grand-daughter; she made the food I liked, gave me chocolate and gifts on my birthday. The family included me in activities at their home and invited me to travel with them. They treated me like a member of the family. They loved me as I was.

“When I was seven years old, I saw the film *Ben Hur* at their house. I also saw a performance of Chinese Opera at the home of President Chiang Kai-shek. All these experiences made me what I am today. Until I was 13, I did not know they were the first family. For senior middle school, You-mei went to the U.K. to study and I saw less of the family after that. Personally, Faina was a loving, remarkable grandma. I truly miss her and respect her from the bottom of my heart.” (Interview with Karen Chien, 17/12/2018)

Thinking of home

Most people who leave their home country and live abroad like to keep contact with the family and friends they left behind. Who knows how long the exile will last and whether it will be a happy one?

Like thousands of others who left the Soviet Union, voluntarily or

involuntarily, Faina was a victim of the Cold War that followed World War Two. The RoC joined the U.S.-led alliance that opposed the Soviet Union and its allies all over the world. Fiercely anti-Communist, the RoC was against not only its enemy in mainland China but also Beijing’s main backer, the Soviet Union.

Moscow and Beijing were close allies. This meant that no direct contact with anyone in the Soviet Union – or China – was allowed, however innocent. Letters to the other side were intercepted by the police in Taiwan and the Soviet Union; they wanted to know why the author had contact with anyone in the enemy country. So letters could only be sent through third countries and carried by people in whom the sender had complete confidence. Faina’s sister and friends lived in Sverdlovsk, a closed military city where foreigners were not allowed; its residents had no right to contact someone abroad.

An additional obstacle for Faina was the prominent position of her husband. He had spent 12 years in the Soviet Union where he knew many Communists, both Russian and Chinese. In January 1926, Deng Xiaoping had studied in the same university class in Moscow; they had walked beside the Moscow River discussing politics. CCK had to be “whiter than white”; so his political opponents could not accuse him of being pro-Moscow or sympathetic to Communism. The many American representatives in Taiwan were also watching him

closely, as the man likely to become the next successor: would he be as friendly to the U.S. as his father and step-mother? This was another reason to keep Faina out of the public eye and any political activity, so that no-one would ask why he had a Soviet wife. In an era when the government had complete control over the media, this was easy to do. People were afraid to ask sensitive questions.

Those in Taiwan with relatives and friends in the mainland – of whom there were hundreds of thousands – sent letters and parcels to them via Hong Kong or Japan; the courier had to be someone on whom they could rely to keep the delivery confidential. It was even more difficult to send anything to the Soviet Union. In the 1950s, the colonial government in Hong Kong refused Moscow's request to open a diplomatic office there. So, with the encouragement of her husband, Faina gradually lost touch with her family and friends at home. He kept her out of the public eye. Most Taiwan people knew little or nothing about her.

"I think Faina spoke good Chinese but I never heard her voice," said Lin Kuo-keung, a Taipei taxi driver. "She stayed out of the limelight. She was foreign, not Chinese; she was a housewife, mother and wife." Wang Chi-gang, a second taxi driver, said: "We knew nothing about her. The media carried nothing about her. It was martial law. Who dared to ask such questions?" Some even believed that she was a

member of the Tsarist royal family banished to Siberia, where she met her husband. "She was a handsome Russian lady," said Lin. "But it was an anti-Soviet period, so her husband did not allow her to be seen in public. Many Taiwan people did not know about her. She had a Chinese name, so some people thought she was Chinese."

In the 1960s, a U.S. Congressman met Faina and asked her if she was "White Russian" or "Red Russian". She answered: "I think you could say that I was born as one and later became the other." (我想你可以說，我生下來是一種人，後來卻長成另一種。)(*The Generalissimo's Son*, by Jay Taylor, Chinese version, page 304)

If, somehow, Faina received a letter from her sister Anna or her friends in Sverdlovsk, how could she know that they had actually written it? Or was it composed by them under duress from the KGB for a political purpose? So, for at least the first 30 years after the move to Taiwan, Faina could not contemplate a visit to her home country. In November 1970, CCK received through an emissary a letter from Faina's sister Anna, whom she had not seen in 33 years. She was the person in the Soviet Union who meant the most to her. After reading it, CCK threw it into a bag for classified documents that were to be destroyed. He told his staff not to mention the letter to anyone. It seems that CCK decided that the letter would only make his wife unhappy, in thinking of her only family member and the person who

had brought her up.

The destruction of the letter tells us about how CCK saw his wife. Her role had to serve his interests, including his political ambition. In Taiwan, no less than in the mainland, he would not allow her Soviet background to have a negative influence on his career; best for her was to have no contact with anyone from the Soviet Union, official or personal. Any such contact, however innocent, could be detected by Taiwan or American intelligence and considered suspect. CCK wanted Faina to become a Chinese wife and cut all ties to her motherland; he succeeded in this, and she accepted the role.

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