

# Chapter 4

## “The Only Thing Oriental About Me Is My Face”: The True Picture of Madame Chiang Kai-Shek

Daniel Palm and Linda Chiang

### 4.1 Introduction

The oft-quoted statement that comprises this chapter’s title—perhaps somewhat jarring to modern ears—appeared in a letter written in 1917 by the youthful and vibrant Soong Mayling as she returned to Shanghai after a decade spent pursuing her education in the United States.<sup>1</sup> At the tender age of only 22, this young Chinese woman, whose face 25 years later would be known across the globe, and would later be assessed as “the most powerful woman in the world”—had already been fully immersed in western culture, literature, and manners.<sup>2</sup> And yet despite her youthful protest about their effect on her identity, Soong Mayling was clearly returning to the land of her birth to continue life as a Chinese woman and would make no effort to deny her Chinese ethnicity.

There can be little question that interest in Soong Mayling’s life story and significance is presently strong not only within academic circles, but in popular culture as well. In September 2013, on the 10-year anniversary of her death at age 106, the Republic of China on Taiwan issued a commemorative stamp in her honor. As reported by the Chinese-language newspaper *World Journal Daily*, public interest in the stamps was significant.

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When the stamp with Soong Mayling's picture became available for purchase [in R.O.C., Taiwan] on September 12, many people got in line at midnight outside the post office. Customers were limited to four stamps per person, and many people in China asked people to purchase stamps for them, with an original stamp costing 12 NT\$ selling for 500 RMB on the mainland.<sup>3</sup>

Release of the postage stamp offered the public, and those in the scholarly community who took notice, an appropriate occasion to reflect on Soong Mayling's life. Her remarkable life story was so well known to the American public during the WWII and early Cold War era. These should not be limited to the purview of a few historians, but will be of significant interest to a new generation of students and scholars born during her final decades of life, if they have instructors ready to encourage them in that task. Her own erudite and plentiful written works, and her early life, with significant time spent in two distinct cultural and educational settings, make her an excellent subject for cross-cultural study. Likewise her middle and later life, as a woman active in public and political matters, compel us to acknowledge her influence on world affairs. And, thanks to the aforementioned historians, writings from her close friends and biographers, it is possible to call a new generation of students' attention to this significant historic figure, and to grasp more fully her political and moral thought, and her own self-perception.

Soong Mayling's oft-quoted self-assessment used in our title suggests a starting point—that she comprehended differences between the East and the West, and that she understood herself, to a significant degree, as having been influenced by, and to have adopted some of the ways of the Occident, the West. But this raises more questions than it answers. To be not, or only minimally, “Oriental” would be, what exactly? The Occident during the course of her lifetime was informed by conflicting schools of thought, respecting religion, nationalism and political theory, empire and colonialism, and the role of women. It is easy to forget that the Progressive Era United States that Mayling experienced until 1917 included not only multiple varieties of Christianity, but active socialist and communist movements alongside the country's unique democratic republicanism. Which particulars of western culture affected her thinking the most?

One must be equally curious about how Soong Mayling used and understood the term “oriental.” Educated Chinese and Asian people of her early years appreciated then, as now, their many centuries of sophisticated and highly developed culture. China during her lifetime was characterized by intense political tumult—the decline and fall of the Qing Dynasty, her own father's prominent role in the 1912 Xinhua revolution, sectionalism (encouraged by Japan), widespread corruption and violence, followed by invasion, massacre, and war. Did she understand her “oriental” native culture as somehow problematic or “less-developed”, or simply different from the culture and life she had experienced in the US?

Further complicating the effort to understand Soong Mayling's self-perception is the fact that she wrote only minimally about her own sentiments, and when she did, that discussion took place in private letters and speeches. The bulk of her written work exists in the form of speeches and essays focused on China's economic and political challenges, the practical problem of building financial support for the

nationalist Chinese war effort, and, later, to protect the Republic of China on Taiwan. And, while popular press coverage of her visits to the US were characterized by breathless statements about her beauty, intelligence, and bravery, that material offers little in the way of substance about her self-understanding.

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, Madame Chiang is too interesting, significant, and intriguing a figure to let go. Well-educated in western literature and ideas, and born into a family that had fully embraced Methodist Christianity, yet returning to China in adulthood and at the center of China’s war against foreign invasion—and then also at the center of one of the world’s largest ever civil wars—her thought and work is worthy of continued attention. This is all the more true as the academy appreciates the often neglected role of women in political life, and the continuing emergence of China as a great power. From the spotlight of the public icon to the quietness of her retreat in old age, her life story offers a vivid picture for subsequent generations to remember. In this chapter we consider the question of Soong Mayling’s self-perception as woman with cultural and political connections in both China and the USA, and what current students of Chinese culture, sociology and politics might gain from a consideration of her remarkable life. Focusing on several themes prominent in Soong Mayling’s rhetoric about China, and statements by prominent persons who interacted with her, we aim to begin to understand how she understood herself, the better that she might receive a fair representation.

## 4.2 Answering the Critics

The arguments against including Soong Mayling in the present study concerning women in Taiwan are several, and each is worthy of consideration and response. First, she was born on the mainland, and Taiwan was her adopted home only later in life, and of course not by choice but political necessity. But this fact in itself hardly makes her irrelevant to the question of women’s rights on Taiwan as it was equally true of thousands of mainland Chinese women who fled to Taiwan during 1949. Taiwan’s demographic picture was one of upheaval, with all aspects of its politics deeply affected by the arrival of mainland refugees.

Second, for all her own skill in writing and public speaking, and for all her activity and personal interest in public affairs, Soong Mayling was without question prominent as the wife of a larger than life political figure, complicating efforts to measure and assess her own impact respecting and valuing women’s roles in Taiwan. But like the accident of her birthplace, the fact of her long marriage can hardly be held against her, and her contributions as Madame Chiang Kai-shek to the long-term improvement in conditions for the women of Taiwan deserve as fair an assessment and appreciation as is possible. Prior to her marriage, she had already proved herself as a capable and energetic thinker and public persona, as she did again later in life after her husband’s death.

Third, not only her public appearances, but her writings and speeches were in some instances edited and used by the Republic of China on Taiwan government

for political purposes. Soong Mayling was without question a partisan figure, identified as closely as one can be with political leadership and a political party during the most difficult and violent decades of the Republic of China on Taiwan, a factor inevitably complicating any effort to assess her contributions to Taiwan's women. Yet this charge as well concerns factors beyond her control, and the occasional politicization of her public life cannot fairly be used to discount or negate her larger contributions to women's rights.

The beginning point for appreciating Soong Mayling's role during her lifetime is to understand the extreme degree to which Chinese women were separated, by longstanding tradition and society's expectations from public life, and the gradual turn made possible through changes in politics and modern technology beginning in the late nineteenth century. This meant that the first steps toward public life, experienced by a few women in the early twentieth century and gradually by others, while minimal by today's standards, were nevertheless significant and hugely important at the time.

In her 2009 study, *Women's Movements in Twentieth-century Taiwan*, Doris T. Chang argues that Soong Mayling's public activity in Taiwan during the 1950s and later after Chiang Kai-shek's death must be understood in the context of the times. If she exemplified for the public a "supportive and complementary" role for women with respect to their husbands, this was in keeping with the expanded role for women offered by the New Life movement during the 1930s. While women were not understood as independent actors, neither were they understood as having no connection whatsoever to the nation and public life. Soong Mayling's role during the war in China, and later in Taiwan, was significant in this respect:

As a social feminist, she . . . urged all modern Chinese women to extend the love they felt for their families to their national community. In other words, a modern Chinese woman should love her nation as she would her family. To translate one's patriotism into action, she advocated that women should contribute their homemaking skills and nurturing capacity to enhance the patriotic cause of recovering the mainland from the communist occupation.<sup>4</sup>

This meant that every woman in Taiwan—not just those few women of privilege and status—had an important political role as “as active participants in the public domain and educators of future citizens at home.”<sup>5</sup> Again, this will certainly sound limited in scope to modern readers, but given the realities of life for the vast majority of women in China and Taiwan, Soong Mayling's example and rhetoric marked significant advances over the past.

### 4.3 Resources

With respect to the quantity and quality of primary sources available to us in attempting to comprehend our subject's self-understanding, Soong Mayling declined to write an autobiography or memoirs, responding once to an inquiry about

the subject that God knows it all [SOURCE?]. Her papers and archival material are held at her alma mater, Wellesley College.<sup>6</sup> It is surprising and disappointing that only a handful of her published speeches and writings are available online.<sup>7</sup>

A decade after her marriage to Chiang, and at the start of the worst phase of the Japanese incursion alongside the Chinese Civil War, Soong Mayling’s speeches were first published in English, first by Chinese and later by the US publishers. Under the title *Chiang Kai-shek*, published in the US shortly after her husband’s abduction in December 1936, is her essay entitled “What China Has Faced”, an apologetic frankly acknowledging the deeply rooted Chinese cultural patterns that inhibit its development, while taking pride in her country’s long history, and criticizing the powers that had taken advantage of its weakness. This was quickly followed by several publications produced during the war years including *War Messages and Other Selections By Mayling Soong Chiang* (Hankow, China, 1938) and *China in Peace and War: Selections from the Writings of Mayling Soong Chiang* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, Limited, 1940). *War Messages and Other Selections* was published in the US in 1943. With so much of her writing devoted to China and its population rather than herself, scholars aiming to gage her self-understanding will need to begin their search here, sometimes reading between the lines. She did write eloquently and frequently about her Christian faith, and its application to the dramatic events of her own life. After the war and the Communist victory on the mainland, several of her essays were published and promoted by the Republic of China on Taiwan government during the late 1950s and 1960s.

Alongside her own writing, scholarship respecting Soong Mayling may utilize the writing of significant figures that dealt with her directly during the War: Generals Albert C. Wedemeyer, Claire Lee Chenault, Joseph Stillwell, and George C. Marshall in particular. Each of these men interacted with the woman directly, with perceptions of her role and character that vary widely, but that cannot be ignored.

Public interest in China’s suffering from Imperial Japan, and in Chiang and Soong Mayling grew steadily during the late 1930s, all the more after Dec. 7, 1941. In 1943—the year of her widely publicized visit to the US—she and her sisters were described by author Emily Hanh in *The Soong Sisters*.<sup>8</sup> During the final years of Soong Mayling’s life, and after her death, several significant writings of her life and family have been published. These include Sterling Seagrave’s 1985 volume, *The Soong Dynasty*, with its in-depth discussion of Mayling’s role within what was arguably China’s most significant single family. Wesley M. Bagby’s 1992 study, *The Eagle-Dragon Alliance: America’s Relations with China in World War II* includes significant discussion of Madame Chiang’s role, as does Ronald Heiferman’s 2007 study of the *The Cairo Conference of 1943*. In 2007 Laura Tyson Li published *Madame Chiang Kai-shek: China’s Eternal First Lady*, alongside Thomas A. DeLong’s consideration of Mayling’s longstanding friendship with an American, *Madame Chiang Kai-Shek and Miss Emma Mills: China’s First Lady and Her American Friend*. An excellent recent 2009 biography of her husband, *The Generalissimo*, by Jay Taylor, includes extensive discussion of Mayling’s life and impact on her husband’s actions. The same year author Hannah Pakula published

*The Last Empress: Madame Chiang Kai-shek and the Birth of Modern China.* Chinese writers also published books on her life such as Wang, *The Beauty and Sorrow of Soong Mayling* (1995, Taipei), In 2003, Chin published *Soong Mayling*, and Chang, *A Century of Soong Mayling* (Taipei). Finally, stories concerning Soong Mayling appear in the autobiography of Chiang Kai-shek's second son, Chiang Wei-Kuo (2007). Each of these accounts offers factual information about her life, but little analysis of her own self-understanding as a cross-cultural human being.

#### 4.4 Perception of China in Crisis

By the time of her June 1917 commencement from Wellesley College and return to Shanghai, her two sisters had married—not without great family tumult in one case—to China's two most significant men.<sup>9</sup> Until her own marriage in 1927 she maintained an active social life, as dinner guest or host with Shanghai's elite on a near daily basis. As her biographer Hannah Pakula notes, her correspondence from this time period reveals that “her American education had not been wasted.”<sup>10</sup> Commenting in 1919 on the boycott of Japanese goods sparked by the May Fourth Movement's outrage over Article 156 of the Treaty of Versailles granting authority of Shandong peninsula to Japan, Mayling wrote to her friend and lifelong correspondent Emma Mills about the boycott:

I feel that this boycott movement is effective only in so far as it leads to a constructive program. You may be sure that Japan will hold everything regarding this movement against the Chinese, and when the day comes they will make us pay if they can. And if we are not ready to face them . . . we will get the worst of it. Therefore while I approve of this boycott movement, in that it shows to the world . . . the oneness of our eighteen provinces, I feel that boycotting is after all a passive state. . . . It is really discouraging when one thinks of the amount of history the students study, but not one jot of it is about China since the Revolution. Our oriental mind seems to be steeped in the glories and conquest of the past, and if something is not done to change this, we shall be a second Korea. . . . the Japanese are not afraid of our Government, for they know that it is weak and largely composed of self-interested men; . . .<sup>11</sup>

In these few sentences, the youthful Mayling reveals herself as an astute observer of this particular tactic's usefulness, but also the message about China's weakness that it implicitly carried, and the need to correct that weakness. China's great problem, she recognized, was a tendency toward inward-looking conservatism, and that by sticking to that course the country ran the risk of following the path of Korea, then often referred to as the “hermit kingdom.” The road to international strength for China, she argued, is a stronger and reformed government comprising some body of persons able to see beyond their own self-interest, and willing to consider ideas from the outside world.

With a decade of interacting among China's elite, upon her marriage in 1927 to Chiang Kai-Shek, Mayling may be said to have been as thoroughly prepared as is

imaginable for a life in the political spotlight. And with her well-obtained knowledge of the United States, she became the perfect voice for China during the war years. Visiting the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang in October 1942, former presidential candidate Wendell Willkie quite accurately (if also somewhat idealistically) praised her as possessing “brains, persuasiveness and moral force . . . with wit and charm, a generous and understanding heart, a gracious and a beautiful manner and appearance, and a burning conviction . . . Madame would be the perfect ambassador . . . we would listen to her as to no one else.”<sup>12</sup>

About China’s historic economic and political difficulties, Mayling recognized that China’s problems were massive, but hardly unique. Its problems in both realms resembled those of other developing countries, and the same reformist principles could be considered and applied. Educated in an elite American university at the peak of the Progressive Era, it is apparent in her writings that she absorbed the emphasis on history and social progressive thought as offering solutions to developing countries. In a 1937 broadcast speech entitled “Salvation from Within”, she argued that,

Everywhere there is widespread recognition of the fact that with the solution of the economic problem the political problem will automatically be solved. For this reason the Government is bending its energies toward giving the people an efficient, honest and progressive administration. Where carelessness and corruption have long held sway, this is not as easy as it first may appear.<sup>13</sup>

If by “carelessness” Soong Mayling understands a longstanding acceptance for the way things are, and that any effort to bring change would be futile, she has identified the same problems social scientists would years later identify as the essential problems to resolve in order to advance the population of developing countries. She has identified issues such as longstanding social codes and traditions alongside business nepotism, bribery, and political favoritism—all categories of the larger corruption—demanded resolution. In a 1940 collection of essays published in the US under the title *China Shall Rise Again*, Soong Mayling expands on this critique in an essay focusing on China’s “Seven Deadly Sins”, attacking traditional Chinese tendencies toward cliquism, lack of self-discipline, lack of accountability, complacency, defeatism, appointment of the unqualified to positions of authority, and ignorance of foreign languages.<sup>14</sup>

Alongside ridding China’s population of bad habits, she advocated cultivation of democratic habits and virtues. In a speech entitled “Finding the Voice of China” she argued that centuries of rule by an “official class” had left people in constant fear, causing them to lose “all interest in public life, in patriotism, and in the affairs of the country” applying themselves instead “solely to the task of protecting the interests and promoting the welfare of their families and their clans.”<sup>15</sup> A political system, in which any Chinese citizen could have some confidence, thereby restoring the long-lost patriotic sentiments and interest in public affairs, would have to be the goal of any forthcoming Chinese government. In this and similar speeches, Soong Mayling rarely mentions the US or other political systems as an example, preferring

instead to place her confidence in Chinese characteristics that she believes can be found beneath the corrupt surface.

## 4.5 Political and Educational Work

Madame Chiang's Chinese character and love of country emerges most fully in her charitable and philanthropic efforts accomplished both in wartime China, and after 1949 in Taiwan. Historically, the Chinese called the Emperor's wife "Mother of the Nation", and this title transferred to Soong Mayling as President's wife in the Chinese Republic. In 1932, Soong Mayling realized the need for China's defense forces to include a powerful air force, and she became "Mother of the Air Force." Armed aircraft in the hands of trained pilots could decisively increase the speed with which an enemy could invade and defeat defensive forces, representing a quantum leap over horse power or vehicles, and so the need for Chinese fighter pilots and aircraft was great. She was successful in persuading Chiang and designated resources and hiring personnel, fighting along the way endemic graft within the ranks of the Chinese officer corps.<sup>16</sup> In 1937 Soong Mayling invited General Chennault to serve as Instructor of the Chinese Air Force. Chennault recruited pilots from the US and they became the famous "Flying Tigers." In this she recognized the importance of a new technology for China's defense, bringing Chinese fighting practice up to international standards while simultaneously forging an important link with the US. Rightfully proud of this accomplishment, wartime photographs of Mayling almost always find her wearing her air force wings. [See photo #2]

With respect to her wartime speeches, delivered during the late 1930s and continuing on radio through the war with Japan, and culminating in her tour of the US and speeches to Congress in 1943, her twofold objectives were to boost morale at home and improve the chances for aid in the form of arms and money. In this, she clearly understood that her English language ability was a crucial centre for American leadership and the public. Her message concerning American support for China was simple: the two nations had a mutual interest in stopping Japan's ambitions to create a Greater East-Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. China would lose territory and become even weaker and the US would lose access to Chinese markets and resources. In delivering this message she always spoke as a Chinese national, trying to persuade her American colleagues of the need for action. The 1943 speech to Congress also had the effect of leading to repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

## 4.6 The Lady and the Generals

Surely remarkable if not unique in the history of politics and warfare is the extent to which Soong Mayling as wife of a political leader interacted directly with US military leadership, she served as interpreter and counselor with her husband as he



worked with no fewer than four major wartime US Army leaders. We thus have in the comments and memoirs of Generals Claire Chennault of Flying Tigers fame, Joseph Stilwell, and George C. Marshall interesting assessments of Madame Chiang.<sup>17</sup>

General Chennault first met Soong Mayling in May 1937 in her position as head of the Chinese Air Force, visiting China at the request of her own personal advisor, US Army Air Corps pilot Roy Holbrook. For her interest and support of air power—“pursuit” or fighter aircraft in particular as opposed to large bombers, as Chennault advocated—the General wrote in his diary, “She will always be a princess to me.”<sup>18</sup> The feeling was mutual—Hannah Pakula writes that Chennault’s strong support for Chiang’s requests for aircraft and money made him forever popular with Madame. Yet in his war memoir, *Way of a Fighter*, Chennault relates that even with this strong relationship, he had to resort to deception in dealing with her: “Supply problems remained my biggest headache until the end of the war. I finally developed a technique for dealing with Madame Chiang that proved effective. Instead of discussing my immediate problems, I approached her with a sad visage. . . .”<sup>19</sup>

General George Marshall’s biographer Leonard Mosley describes him as “a sucker for beautiful and intelligent women”, and Mayling’s suggestive comment to him at a formal dinner in Egypt in 1943 placed her, and by extension her husband and China, in a most favored category.<sup>20</sup>

General Joseph Stilwell, appointed commanding general of US Army Forces in the China–Burma–India theater by General George Marshall in January 1942, served as Chiang Kai-shek’s chief of staff. The relationship between Chiang and Stilwell, difficult from the start, and ultimately hostile, can be traced to personality and cultural differences between the two, but also to the corruption endemic in the Chinese political and military chain of command, and in Chiang’s immediate conflict against Japan, but his long-term aim to accumulate munitions for the eventual fight against Chinese Communist forces.<sup>21</sup> Stilwell had met Soong Mayling briefly in 1937 in Hankow as Japanese forces pressed westward, and had come away impressed at her remaining in the city to the last minute, and judging her “very charming, highly intelligent and sincere” and “doing a good job”, while also intensely political, free with “propaganda about the way the government is looking out for the common people.”<sup>22</sup>

His next meeting with the Generalissimo and Mayling took place in Chungking in Spring 1942, and his assessment of her in his diary includes significant attention to her cultural perceptions:

Quick, intelligent. Wants to get things done. Wishes she was a man. Doesn’t think too deeply, but catches on in a hurry. Very frank and open . . . Impulsive to point of precipitation . . . A clever brainy woman. Sees the Western viewpoint. (By this I mean she can appreciate the mental reactions of a foreigner to the twisting, indirect and undercover methods of Chinese politics and warmaking.) Direct, forceful, energetic, loves power, eats up publicity and flattery, pretty weak on her history. No concession to the Western viewpoint in all China’s foreign relations. The Chinese were always right; the foreigners were always wrong. Writes entertainingly but superficially, with plenty of sarcasm for

Western failings but without mention of any of China's little faults. Can turn on charm at will. And knows it. Great influence on Chiang K'ai-shek mostly along the right lines, too. A great help on several occasions.<sup>23</sup>

By late 1942, Stilwell's private papers reveal him becoming ever more doubtful about his own role in US-China relations, and Soong Mayling's role as her husband's adviser.<sup>24</sup> During the war, as his friction with the Generalissimo steadily increased, Stilwell became more skeptical of Soong Mayling as well, recognizing the charm he had noted earlier as a tool she used strategically. Leading a tour of Kunming and Chungking for five US Senators in August 1944 whom he hoped to influence respecting the corruption of the Kuomintang (KMT or the Nationalist Party) regime, he found his intentions thwarted: "May [Mme. Chiang] turned on the glamor and I don't know who won."<sup>25</sup>

Historian Barbara Tuchman assesses Soong Mayling's role as translator for her husband as having frequently softened the strong and quite direct tone from "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell and American military leadership, who sought more aggressive action from Chinese military against Japanese forces.<sup>26</sup> In this Mayling (alongside Chiang's other advisors), in keeping with Chinese traditions of indirect, face-saving communication, might well have made the disastrous situation worse.

President Roosevelt appears not to have spoken to his confidants or family about his impressions of Madame Chiang. However, close to the end of his life, Roosevelt revealed to Edgar Snow that he realized, too late, that his decisions during the war had been based on limited information: "I was never able to form any opinion of Chiang at Cairo. When I thought about it later I realized that all I knew was what Madame Chiang told me about her husband and what he thought."<sup>27</sup> This comment raises several interesting questions: Was Soong Mayling overly protective of her husband and, by extension, of her own position? Was she following Chinese courtly translation patterns from the past? Might Roosevelt have insisted on the presence of a trusted US translator to ease concerns and alleviate doubts?

## 4.7 Transition and Decision-Making

In 1949, when she was still seeking medical attention in the US Mao's Communist forces won control of the mainland. Soong Mayling might have remained in the US, and might even have persuaded the Truman administration to allow her and her husband to obtain refuge in the US indefinitely. Instead she chose to return to Taiwan:

I then determined that no matter what the future held, since I could do no more for my country in America, I would return to share the fate of my husband and my people on Formosa. All my friends tried to dissuade me. They were sure that death awaited my return. They pointed out that my sacrifice would be useless since it was only a matter of weeks, perhaps even days, before Formosa, too, would fall. I felt, however, that life was meaningless if I survived while China perished. How could I let me husband face the greatest set-back of his life without me at his side?<sup>28</sup>

This decision gave Mayling and Chiang Kai-shek a pathway to reestablish their credibility, and also rewrite their history with respect to the Republic of China. During these years, many policies on land redistribution, political reform, Taiwan’s unique geographic location helped secure regional stability in Southeast Asia. Soong Mei-ling continued to work alongside her husband and became the icon for Chinese women. An essential part of that work received expression through her own Christian faith, and her establishment of a prayer group that she explains in her short work published in 1955, *The Sure Victory*. Both a faith testimony and very likely the closest we will have to an autobiographical statement, the essay reminds us of her early upbringing in a Christian household, attending Sunday school and church alongside family devotions. She notes that she “sometimes rebelled against this rigorous schedule”, and that she was, even during the first years of her marriage, “merely a nominal Christian.”<sup>29</sup> But she also recognized that her parents’ strict regimen in the faith allowed her to have “absorbed” the ideals of the faith, and to have enjoyed, while at Wellesley, a certain advantage over Americans in their own self-understanding:

[T]he Bible was blood and bone of the American homesteaders who settled the land, and it became part and parcel of their cultural foundation. Perhaps I, as a foreigner, could see more clearly than my American schoolmates how closely the make-up of the country had followed the principles of Christianity. Somewhat vaguely, I connected God’s abundant blessing of American whatever its foibles and sins, with the keeping of the Lord’s teaching.<sup>30</sup>

Her faith would lead her—not without great internal struggle—to include the concept of forgiveness in her wartime speeches to US audiences, most notably her Madison Square Garden speech in 1943:

There must be no bitterness in the reconstructed world. No matter what we have undergone and suffered, we must try to forgive those who injured us and remember only the lesson gained thereby. The teachings of Christ radiate ideas for the elevation of souls and intellectual capacities far above the common passions of hate and degradation. . . . He taught us to hate the evil in men, but not the men themselves.<sup>31</sup>

It is perhaps noteworthy that in her discussions about her faith, she does not describe Christianity as a western phenomenon, but as a faith any human being can accept.

## 4.8 Charitable Work in Wartime China and in Taiwan

Madame Chiang’s wartime efforts were hardly limited to public speaking. Often accompanying her husband to the front, she experienced several dangerous situations. But the bulk of her work involved promoting female material support for ROC army troops and rewarding model behavior of patriotic women. She is perhaps best remembered, however, for her work in creating several orphanages for children whose parents were killed in the conflict. Madame Chiang took a keen and

direct interest in these orphanages, selecting teachers and staff, and raising money for the cause. One author of this chapter recalls from her childhood memories that some of her teachers filed their official documents to indicate that Chiang and Mayling had registered as their parents.

Following the escape of the KMT government to Taiwan in 1949, Madame Chiang continued her pattern of charitable work in education. By 1955 a number of orphans required housing, and she established that year an orphanage for elementary age children in Taiwan. In 1956, the name of the school was changed to Hua Shing Secondary School, housing also was provided for soldiers and veterans. She was active in the 1960s in promoting Little League Baseball players and their acceptance at the school. Later in life, from her retirement in New York, she supported the establishment of a deaf school for girls with the Women's Cultural Foundation, as well as helping to raise \$2 billion for a Children's Leukemia Center.

In 1950, the previously established Female Association became the Female Anti-Communist Union. One of the Union's chief efforts was to support the troops, including sewing and repairing uniforms in the Soldiers' Garment Factory which operated for 42 years.

## 4.9 Conclusion

One popular account published by biographer Basil Miller in 1943 described Soong Mayling at her graduation as "a finished product of her college, having assimilated its atmosphere of culture, dug deep into its educational courses, and above all having become thoroughly Americanized in mental outlook. She said of herself at this time in her life, 'The only thing Oriental about me is my face.'"<sup>32</sup> To Miller, the transformation appeared nearly complete, yet her energetic personality compelled her to a life of action directed at transforming her homeland:

She had become an American in thought, in speech, in Southern drawl and in the zest with which she was able to color her talk with picturesque slang. The adaptation of mind and body, mental outlook and spiritual perspective had become perfect. In fact, too perfect, for when it was time to return to the land of her childhood, old Charlie found that he had "overdone his hand" in giving his youngest daughter an American education, and he warned a friend against following in his steps. He said, in making the admonition, "When they come back they want everything changed."

Mei-ling had already been changed by her long residence amid Occidental splendor and American frankness. She had caught a glimpse of free women whose minds were able to cope with the brilliance of their brothers. She could not be content to remain in America when once she envisioned the possibilities of transforming China with the knowledge she had gained while in our land. Like a magnet she was drawn to her homeland where tremendous movements were in the making. At the time little did she realize the part she would play in carrying those movements to fruition.<sup>33</sup>

Her own early protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, and despite all the clear influence the West had on her thinking, it would be fair to conclude that

throughout her lifetime Madame Chiang remained essentially Chinese in character and essence. In her attire and artistic work, in her defense of China’s population and her clear interest in the well-being of its children, her devotion to her country remains clear. It might be argued that this carried over to her quality and style of attire—her understanding that a woman in a prominent position required clothing and lodging. But alongside this one must note that she remained throughout her life in some respects modest, and perhaps even humble, as evidenced by her unwillingness to appear to promote herself through an autobiography.

Critics have argued that Madame Chiang’s fluency in English made her too easy for Americans to appreciate, and that she became the image of what they hoped China would become. Whatever differing opinions people have of her, she deserves continuing recognition in having deepened communication between the US and China, and having done her best to ensure that China would become a unified, modern nation. Her philanthropic efforts in rescuing war orphans and in establishing orphanages in Taiwan remain admirable work that should serve as inspiration for today’s youth. While she left no full statement of her self-understanding, her essays, her legendary work and the stories of her life now retold in recent biographies, and commemorated on a postage stamp, will keep her story alive. If this chapter has provided its readers with some additional insights on this truly historic woman, its authors will be gratified.

In sum, no better assessment of Madame Chiang may exist than the judgment of American diplomat Sumner Welles in his 1944 book *The Time for Decision*:

Few individuals have in recent years created so profound an impression upon American public opinion as Madame Chiang Kai-shek. She has an amazing knowledge of the elements which determine public opinion in the United States and a keen appreciation of the very real admiration and friendship which the American people have for the people of China. Her quiet dignity, her beautifully modulated eloquence, and her apparent frailty mask an ardent national fanaticism and an unquenchable faith in the future destinies of her people. But more than that, she is, in the most real sense of the word, a citizen of the Far East as well as a citizen of China. She is no less a citizen of the world.<sup>34</sup>

## Notes

1. As quoted in Nicolay (1944). See also, DeLong (2007).
2. Fenby (2003).
3. “Madame Chiang Kai-shek Stamps for Sale”, *World Journal*, Sept. 21, 2013.
4. Doris (2009).
5. *Ibid.*, 66.
6. For a survey of the Soong Mayling collection, see Papers of Mayling Soong Chiang, 1916–2003: a guide. MSS.1. <http://academics.wellesley.edu/lts/archives/mss.1.html>. Her husband Chiang Kai-shek’s diaries are presently held at the Hoover Institution.
7. The authors of this paper express the hope that this project—making Soong Mayling’s published speeches and essays widely available via web archive—could be undertaken in the near future.

8. Hahn (1943).
9. Ai-Ling became wife of China's then richest man, H.H. Kung in 1914, and Ching-Ling wife of Sun Yat-sen in 1915.
10. Pakula (2009).
11. June 5, 1919 letter of Mayling to Emma Mills, as quoted in Pakula, 81.
12. Wendell Willkie, Oct. 1942, as quoted in Tuchman (1970a). General Stilwell was notoriously skeptical of the Chinese war effort, to the point of openly mocking Willkie's naiveté.
13. Soong Mayling, "Salvation from Within", (Radio broadcast from Nanking to the United States, Feb. 21, 1937), as reprinted in *China in War and Peace*, 9–10.
14. Chiang (1940a).
15. Chiang (1940b).
16. Li (2006).
17. A fourth candidate for inclusion would be General Albert C. Wedemeyer, Commander of US forces in China, and Chief of Staff to Chiang Kai-shek after Stilwell's recall in October 1944, though for all his good relations with Chinese officials, Wedemeyer's published work includes no significant commentary on Soong Mayling.
18. As recounted in Seagrave, 360.
19. Claire (1949).
20. Mosley (1982).
21. See Tuchman (1970b). See also "The Feud Between Stilwell and Chiang" *Saturday Evening Post*, Jan. 7, 1950.
22. Tuchman, 193.
23. As reproduced in Pakula, p. 387.
24. Stilwell, Entry for July 1, 1942, *The Stilwell Papers*, 120–121.
25. As reproduced in Tuchman, 387.
26. Tuchman, 493–495.
27. As recounted in Sterling Seagrave, *The Soong Dynasty*, 404.
28. Kai-shek (1950).
29. *The Sure Victory*, p. 9.
30. *The Sure Victory*, pp. 11–12.
31. *The Sure Victory*, p. 19.
32. Miller (1943).
33. *Ibid.*, 30–31.
34. Welles (1944).

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