



**Swaying between Grace and Pomposity: The Imagined Modernity of
Soong Mayling**

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Abstract

This paper is centrally concerned with the inconsistencies between the practices of the Orientalized modernity and the Chinese indigenous sociocultural situation in the Republic of China. I focus on Soong Mayling, the first lady of Generalissimo and President Chiang Kai-shek, by tracing her early education in the US, marriage life, as well as her political involvement after returning to China. I examine Orientalized figures' attempts and possibilities to reconcile the discrepancies that existed between western countries and China. I argue that Soong and her husband endeavored to take outer forms of the West to construct their imagined naive modernity. Their ignorance of Chinese culture and a complete adaptation of linear (evolutionary) ideology cut their reforms off from Chinese people's sentiments. Their reforms were inconsistent with China's socio-cultural situation and found no echo in people's hearts. Failure was inevitable. For sources, the core of the paper is mainly drawn from the speeches, written works, and diaries of Soong Mayling and Chiang Kai-shek, while a major portion of this paper includes news from both China domestic and worldwide newspapers and magazines. I have also supplemented this information with the works and diaries of several intellectuals such as Hu Shih, Sun Yat-sen, and Lin Yutang to enrich my portrait of Soong Mayling.

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“Orient was almost a European invention.”¹ – Edward Said

Introduction

Soong Mayling (1898-2003) has been a subject of much debate among scholars.² Indeed, she appeared as a figure of paradox, who called attention to rapid transitions happening in China in the early twentieth century. She was born to a cosmopolitan Christian family, and her father’s unmatched wealth enabled her to study in the United States at a very young age, while most Chinese people were struggling to adjust to the changes wrought by Western imperialism. Accordingly, after returning from the U.S., her upper-middle-class values, languages, and behaviors, acquired through her education from childhood through college at American private schools, made her a stranger in China. To disentangle Chinese values from the American spirit in Soong is as difficult as winnowing modernity – regardless of whether it was imagined – from tradition in early-twentieth-century China.

Many studies have only confirmed and accentuated Soong’s achievements in dealing with international relations and initiating modernizing reforms. However, it is significant that no matter how nationalistic she was both as a Chinese citizen and the first lady of Generalissimo and President Chiang Kai-shek, Soong still embodied social values and habits obtained from her American education.

This paper is centrally concerned with the collisions between western cultures and Chinese indigenous society that Soong experienced in the Republic of China. My understanding is that Soong, as a product of two polities, societies, and cultures, provides a window into the

¹ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: London : Penguin, 2003, 1979,P.14

² I used romanized letters Soong Mayling in accordance with Soong’s used name in the US.

ruptures China encountered after opening its borders in the early twentieth century, when rampant Western and American imperialism expanded in order to control China.

The analysis of this paper is aided by Saidian perspectives of Orientalism, which today remains the most influential work in understanding Orientalism. I employ Edward Said's concept of Orientalism to refer to a formulated and crafted understanding of non-Western people in accordance with European and American imaginations. In this paper, I consider Orientalism primarily as an ideological instrument of domination in politics, despite the fact that academic, ontological and epistemological meanings of Orientalism also play a pivotal part in its form and function.³

I argue that Soong – who grew up with an American's perception of China and Chinese people – was Orientalized by American Orientalism. She experienced the conflicts of her Orientalized values and Chinese identity after coming back to her motherland. Then, Soong's national identity motivated her to internalize Orientalism along with her husband by taming China's wildness in accordance with the Orientalized perspective of their imagined modernity – either consciously or unconsciously. She accepted an Orientalist negative view of China as genuine belief. But she also fitted into a self-Orientalizing role and used a strand of Orientalism as dependent needing help. Her transforming agenda was proceeded by either mimicking American's modernization movement (e.g., New Life Movement, Feminist movement, Christianity popularization) or performing Orientalist preferences (e.g., homogeneity, femininity, fashion). The effort might have gleaned partial accomplishment (e.g., international recognition of China) and procured certain benefits (e.g., financial, material, and military support from Western

³ Ibid.

and American governments or organizations); nonetheless, it did not mesh with the sociological and political conundrum in China. The imagined modernity could never be turned into reality; China would become modern, but not through an Orientalized, modernized approach.

On the other hand, I also seek to decipher the relationship between Orientalism and progressive history through the New Life Movement, a signature project initiated by Soong and her husband. I aim to demonstrate that in the process of internalizing Orientalism, Orientalism and privileging history were accepted as ways to articulate the imagined modernity. Hand-in-hand, they formed their hegemonies. Soong and Chiang further strengthened the mechanism of Eurocentric determinism through their transformation agenda for China.

This paper is divided into four parts. The first part tracks Soong's early life, in which I explore how she was shaped and influenced by American Orientalism; it also provides a context of Orientalism against the backdrop of the early twentieth century in order to help readers grasp Soong's Orientalized self-awareness. The second part deals with her return and how she gleaned her national identity. The third part delves into attempts – she and her husband as Orientalized entities – made to transform the Republic of China into her imagined Western modernity within the nexus of Chinese traditional norms and Western values; it tries to illustrate how she commenced the New Life Movement and a series of related reforms to stiffly build Westernized modernity. The fourth part considers Soong's diplomatic obligation to present an American, Orientalized China as Americans and Europeans expected her to give into her husband's political power. Within these parts, I also examine how Soong experiences a divergent conflict between the Chinese and Americans, which reflects Orientalism and Self-Orientalism's inherent inconsistencies with early-twentieth-century China. My goal is to reveal a much richer and more

complete image of Soong Mayling, in which interactions and tensions between the West and East figured prominently in her legendary life.

The core of the paper is mainly drawn from the speeches, written works, and diaries of Soong Mayling and Chiang Kai-shek, while a major portion includes news from both China domestic and worldwide newspapers and magazines. I have also supplemented this information with the works and diaries of several intellectuals such as Hu Shih, Sun Yat-sen, and Lin Yutang to enrich my portrait of Soong Mayling.

Chapter One – Early Years

Soong Mayling was born in March 1898 in Shanghai to Ni Kwei-Tseng and Charlie Soong, a wealthy businessman.⁴ Before gaining his prominence by devoting himself to the publishing industry, he was educated at Vanderbilt University and Duke University with a major in theology.⁵ Charlie Soong's wealth, knowledge, and experience led him to decide that his children would travel to the United States to study, especially considering China's unstable and complex political environment.⁶

Before proceeding to examine Soong Mayling's early times abroad, it will be necessary to understand China's threatening situation from the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, great demand for silk and teas from China resulted in Great Britain's trade deficit. To balance this trade deficit, British capitalists associated with the government began to sell opium to the Chinese. Subsequently, China's internal structure disintegrated due to rising crime, along with a decrease in agricultural productivity, caused by the Chinese people's growing addiction to opium. Surely, huge rebellions and corruption in the late eighteenth-century China also were attributed to the collapse. The Qing government implemented several measures to prohibit the importation of opium after realizing their severe situation, which led Great Britain to initiate the Opium War (1839-42) and the subsequent Anglo-Chinese War (1856-60) against China to protect its trade.

⁴ Karon, Tony (October 24, 2003). "*Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, 1898-2003*". Time. Retrieved August 12, 2017.

⁵ *Songzhijiazhu Mujiren Songyaoru*, chinanews.com. China News Service. Retrieved 17 October 2011.

⁶ Tyson Li, Laura (2006). *Madame Chiang Kai-shek: China's Eternal First Lady*. New York: Grove Press. p. 5.

With only underdeveloped military technology and infrastructure in its arsenal, China lost both wars and was forced to pay heavily in territory, fines and, foremost, its autonomy. China's borders began to open to an increasing number of foreigners and missionaries from the United States and Europe. As Soong wrote in one of her articles. She wrote, "China opened to the world, [and] relations between the East and West may be divided into three stages. In the first, the weapon of the West towards China was always force. By pointing the gun at her (China), she was made to suffer humiliation after humiliation. All her port cities were opened in an actual as well as a metaphorical sense, at the point of the bayonet."⁷ As a result, Chinese people had to struggle with cultural invasion and economic challenges, as well as a grueling sequence of aggressions.⁸

Having discussed Soong Mayling's family background and her father's decision to send the Children to the United States for schooling, the following part of this chapter focuses on how Soong's education had influenced her. In 1907, when she was nine years old, Soong left China for the U.S. to attend private schools. She had an enjoyable time in the United States. She recalled her educational life in middle school in a letter to her friend: "I could not be happier here. Surprisingly, many of my classmates are adults who came from poverty-stricken areas. They have worked for many years in order to save enough tuition for Piedmont College. They expressed enormous interest in me, but I have just begun to know them, who have to work for a living on their own. Interacting with students who are not born with a silver spoon made me

⁷ Soong Mayling, *Will Dawn Come From the East*, 1943.

⁸ Xu, Xiaoqun, 1954-. *Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Individualism in Modern China: The Chenbao Fukun and the New Cultural Era, 1918-1928*. Lanham: Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014], 2014.

realize their values and virtues.”⁹ That is to say, she was largely inspired by her classmates’ passion for studying, and became aware of her privilege.

Her American education enabled her to become a prolific writer-speechmaker and extraordinary figure in her post-graduate life. As a child, she displayed great intelligence, which was illustrated by the fact that she earned the highest grade possible in her philosophy and natural science classes, and also by her progress in English writing. Meanwhile, her English education also gave her direct exposure to American ideas and values, which shaped her likable personality and led to her being favored by Americans.

Specifically, she was fully surrounded by the holy Christian spirit, which had a long-lasting influence on her. She detailed the Christmases she spent at Piedmont in reverent terms. “We decided to show our benevolence and express our hearty gratitude to celebrate Christmas. We donated twenty-five cents each to purchase some potatoes, milks, burgers, steaks, apples, and oranges for disadvantaged families. I was greatly delighted by an unprecedented philanthropic love.”¹⁰ With religious and family support, Soong enrolled as a student at Wellesley College in 1914 and graduated in 1917 with a degree in English literature and a minor in philosophy.

Despite the fact that Soong had been devoted to the Christian wonderland, Soong witnessed brutal racism inherent in American society along her way. In his memoir Owen Lattimore, Chiang’s American advisor, recorded a story Soong told about her father: “Several times, she spoke to me very bitterly about her father, who had gone up in the world through working for American missionaries, having always been treated by Americans as a Chinese

⁹ Chiang, May-ling Soong, 1897-2003, *Wei Yuan, Liping Wang, 1897-2003* 蒋宋美龄, 袁伟, and 王丽平. *宋美龄自述 = Meiling Soong China / Song Meiling Zi Shu = Meiling Soong China. Beijing Shi*; 北京市: Beijing Shi : Tuan jie chu ban she, 2004; 北京市: 团结出版社, 2004, 2004, P.49.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

[man] of poor origin. He would travel in the interior and visit Chinese Christian communities, distributing religious materials and tracts. When he came back and reported to the missionaries in Shanghai, he would have to stand in front of the White people who were sitting. They never invited him to sit down... he was treated more like a servant than a colleague. She thought that the American attitude to herself also had always been ‘Oh yes, she is clever of course, but after all she is only Chinese.’ She felt that the American attitude was racist and condescending, and she bitterly resented it.”¹¹

Soong herself also quickly realized that “Westerners seemed to be constitutionally unable” to treat China as an equal. She noted in her later works that Westerners embodied an innate superiority and arrogant belief. It is exactly this “die-hard” attitude that caused the foreign country’s mischievous relationship with China.¹² To some extent, racism motivated Soong to step forward and speak up more for her motherland. In one of her latter speeches, she explicitly credited China’s undefeated resistance against Japan to “the spiritual heritage of the Chinese race”, to fight against the inherent racism.¹³

However, the fight against racism is not uncomplicated as it has been rooted in the existing world for centuries. So far this chapter has focused on Soong’s experiences in the US. The following part will discuss the emergence of Orientalism, its divisions (European Orientalism and American Orientalism), and, in particular, American Orientalism’s sociocultural impact. Racism towards Asians was flagrant in early-twentieth-century America, mainly accompanied by the ideology of Orientalism. The incipient form of Orientalism derived from

¹¹ Lattimore, Owen, 1900-1989 and Fujiko Isono 1918-. *China Memoirs : Chiang Kai-Shek and the War Against Japan*. Tokyo: Tokyo] : University of Tokyo Press, c1990, 1990,P141.

¹² By MAYLING SOONG CHIANG (Madame Chiang Kai-shek)CHUNGKING [By Wireless).*New York Times* (1923-Current file); New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y]19 Apr 1942: SM5.

¹³ Ibid.

early-nineteenth-century European colonialism, from “a particular closeness experienced among Britain and France and the Orient.”¹⁴ As a derivative of European Orientalism, American Orientalism was burgeoning after the arrival of immigrant Europeans in North America during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. American Orientalism differs from European Orientalism because Americans normally associate the Orient with “the Far East (China and Japan, mainly), while European Orientalism was more an imagined invention in accordance with “the Orient’s special role in European Western experiences.” Namely, American Orientalism has fewer historical legacies and is a more “realistic, sober awareness.”¹⁵

A similarity shared by Orientalism and American Orientalism is that they both imagined Asians to be exotic, primitive and irrational. In defining Orientalism, Edward Said considers Orientalism to be interdependent, and it “expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.” In other words, it is a diffusive discourse in which Europe exercises its power on the Orient politically, economically and culturally. Accordingly, Orientalist attitudes were institutionalized in the United States from the mid-eighteenth century onward. Orientalism was normally dominated by the country that “demonstrated greater strength of the Occident.” Blending European values, norms, culture and, foremost, superiority, an imagined Orient – from culture and society to people – was invented by European imperialism to serve their expansion.

Additionally, Orientalist perceptions, to some extent, played a pivotal role in shaping Americans’ identity. From the turn of the century through the 1920s, the United States gradually

¹⁴ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: London : Penguin, 2003, 1979,P.14.

¹⁵ Okihiro, Gary Y., 1945-. *Margins and Mainstreams : Asians in American History and Culture*. Seattle: Seattle : University of Washington Press, c1994, 1994.

became the core power in the new world order and attempted to achieve global dominance through expansion, for which it galvanized widespread acceptance of Orientalism in order to justify its arbitrary quests for either resources or labor as civil missions. Correspondingly, through a variety of channels Orientalism was embedded in many levels of cultural expression throughout the country.¹⁶ In 1845, Manifest Destiny asserted a divined mandate for the U.S. to rationalize its political, economic and cultural dominance. Rhetorically the doctrine emphasized rhetorically American masculinity and strength in building a new world order, which laid the crucial groundwork for future interactions between the United States and China.¹⁷

Whereas the Oriental world was perceived by Westerners as an alien and distant land with a decadent, despotic and immoral culture, neither Europe nor America was superior regarding polity, society or culture. The ideology of the “Orient” has served as a templated justification for Europeans and Americans, who later adopted the idea to impose their power inequalities through colonization, imperial expansion and territorialization.

To be sure, in the perspective of Said, “Ideas, cultures and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely, their configurations of power, also being studied.”¹⁸ To put it another way, this powerful relationship of “domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” shaped the “Orient” conceptually and Orientalized the Orient to be the Orient as they expected and desired. Orientalism is not merely a vernacular ideology invented by individuals.¹⁹

¹⁶ Reimers, David M. *Unwelcome Strangers : American Identity and the Turn Against Immigration*. New York: New York : Columbia University Press, c1998, 1998.

¹⁷ Leong, Karen J., 1968-. . *The China Mystique : Pearl S. Buck, Anna may Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism*. Berkeley: Berkeley : University of California Press, c2005, 2005.

¹⁸ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: London : Penguin, 2003, 1979.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Most importantly, China was simultaneously confronted with a disadvantageous dilemma in the early twentieth century. As a newly developed nation-state, China sought international legitimacy for its international role but continued to be seen by American Orientalists as primitive, slavish, exotic, manipulative and amoral, while Americans viewed their own country as modern, free, civilized and trustworthy. Chinese labor was regarded as having “no character”. Chinese workers were deprived of the right to enter the United States because they were believed to be unhealthy and a threat to American labor.²⁰

Having discussed what Orientalism is and its far-reaching influences, we now turn to examine how did Soong, as a western orientalized individual, struggled to deal with her identity. After almost twenty years of study in the United States, Soong had become accustomed to the power relationship between the Occident and the Orient. Understanding this relationship, Soong returned to China the same year of her graduation.

Although she had left China at a very young age, her Chinese was still fairly decent. Because she studied it as part of her adjustment to China after returning. As Soong recalled, “Both my parents felt that as I had been away from the country for so long, I should devote all my time to studying Chinese seriously before undertaking any work.”²¹ After studying eight hours a day for several years, she began to venture out in public more often.²² Soon, her family’s prosperous status as well as her personal charm made her a radiant star in Shanghai.

Shortly after returning to China, Soong realized that “with the exception of the Christian Church, the policy of the West and the whole world seemed to be to get as much as possible

²⁰ Ibid.P10.

²¹ Hahn, Emily. *The Soong Sisters*. New York; LaVergne: New York : Open Road Integrated Media, LLC Sept. 2014 LaVergne : Ingram Publisher Services Distributor], 2014.

²² Talmey, Allene. *Vogue*; New York Vol. 101, Iss. 8, (Apr 15, 1943): 34, 35, 36, 37.

from us by force and to give nothing in return that it could withhold. The superiority complex was a cardinal point in the creed of the Western powers in their dealings with all things Chinese and this was insisted upon in season and out.” She also realized that China’s cultural contributions – artistically, philosophically, and in literature – had been largely overlooked in her American education.

Her Chinese identity began to reorient her Eurocentric perspective. She started to dedicate herself to translating Chinese stories into English.²³ She felt that “the knowledge of Chinese literature and philosophy was, however, making some progress among Western scholars” and that leading minds would acknowledge that “China had, culturally, a great contribution to make to the world”. She had since then decided to translate “some of the greatest works of Chinese writers and make them accessible to the Western world.”²⁴ Here, she worked as a translator to bridge the English-speaking world and China, in order to educate more foreigners about China’s condition.

On the one hand, we can see her celebrated Chinese writing displayed effortlessly in references in her latter works and speeches, in which she infused Chinese classics, legends, and history with Western knowledge to bridge the two cultures and “correct the misconception which the West had forced on China”.²⁵ In another of her articles, she cited Laozi(老子) to depict an ideal state of international relations, stating that “the obligations of nations towards each other have been one of the central themes of philosophic thought in China for thousands of years. One of the greatest of our age, Laozi, taught that humility, a bitter medicine to proud nations, would

²³ ²³ Ibid, P114.

²⁴ Soong Mayling, 1943, *Will Dawn Come From the East*.

²⁵ MAYLING SOONG CHIANG (Madame Chiang Kai-shek) CHUNGKING [By Wireless]. *New York Times* (1923-Current file); New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y.] 19 Apr 1942: SM5.

bring its own undying reward. He who is great must make humility his base. He who is high must make lowliness his foundation.”

“If a great kingdom humbles itself before a small kingdom,” she continued, it shall make that small kingdom its prize. And if a small kingdom humbles itself before a great kingdom, it shall win over that great kingdom. Thus, the one humbles itself in order to attain, the other attains because it is humble... But in the case that both may have their desire, the great one must learn humility. ‘The reason why rivers and seas are able to lord over a hundred mountain streams is that they know how to keep below the pressure. I have three precious things which I hold fast and prize. The first is gentleness; the second is frugality; the third is humility, which keeps me from putting myself before others. Be gentle. And you can be bold; be frugal and you can be liberal; avoid putting yourself before others, and you can become a leader among men.’”²⁶ From these words, we conclude that Soong quoted Laozi’s statement to better formulate her opinion so as to prompt healthy international relations from a traditional Confucian perspective.

On the other hand, many of her pieces are brimming with her brilliant western literacy and artistic touches, such as her references to the Latin word ‘resurgam’ to inspire the Chinese people. She wrote that the meaning of resurgam is “I shall rise again”, which was an especially important message during the difficult time when “the barbarity of the invaders has murdered multitudes and has uprooted their (Chinese people’s) homes” as well as businesses and farms. Eastern provinces that used to be China’s “richest possessions in agricultural production and cultural development” began to suffer “so grievously from enemy attacks.” However, she continued, China “will make up for more than it has lost, for we shall build faster and surer upon

²⁶ Ibid.

the foundations already laid, and erect the edifice of a rejuvenated nation – a new, strong, and robust China.” She ended by saying that “(Chinese) are resurgam – ‘I shall rise again’ – and they embody the spirit that is China.”²⁷ Additionally, she also often borrowed quotes and phrasing from Gobineau, Houston Chamberlain, Marguerite of Navarre, Catherine Cybo, Loyola, Sapor, Augustus, and Valerian to demonstrate her mindset.²⁸ It is clear that her transcultural wisdom provided a solid foundation for her future of active political participation.

The coexistence of both cultures in her writing, a product of her dual education, permeated Soong’s works throughout her life. For instance, she coined the phrase “warphans” (war orphans) to depict the tragic situations of children in China in order to raise the largest amount of funds possible.²⁹

²⁷ Soong Mayling, *Wo Jiang Zai Qi*, [Resurgam], The Weekly Digest.

²⁸ Talmey, Allene. *Vogue; New York* Vol. 101, Iss. 8, (Apr 15, 1943): 34, 35, 36, 37.

²⁹ Barnes, Nicole Elizabeth, 1975-. *Intimate Communities : Wartime Healthcare and the Birth of Modern China, 1937-1945. Oakland, California: Oakland, California : University of California Press, 2018*, 2018,p83.

Chapter Two – Married life

In 1927, Soong married the Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975), who became the president of the Republic of China ten years later. Until recently, Soong's marriage with Chiang, had not seemed worthy of new examination, since additional materials only appear to confirm their ostensibly courteous life as a couple. After Chiang Kai-shek's diary was released in the past few years, Soong's Orientalized inconsistencies became more apparent.

In her marriage with Chiang, Soong was not only younger and richer, she was also heavily influenced by the version of modernized womanhood that prevailed in the U.S. Her refusal to be restricted to the stereotypical Chinese model, as a “self-sacrificing woman” who was supposed to hold female virtues, bothered Chiang.³⁰ In his diary on December 29, 1927, he wrote, “I felt singularly unpleasant and lonesome because Soong was not at home after I returned from work (外出寂寞，心甚不乐.”Chiang was a revolutionary born into a village merchant family, and he still held traditional Chinese societal values that a woman's obligation was to contribute to the family and serve her husband and children. Soong did not express regret and shame when Chiang expressed his unhappiness; rather she was offended by Chiang's cantankerous temper and went back to her parents' house (niangjia). Chiang labelled Soong as

³⁰ Duara, Prasenjit. *Sovereignty and Authenticity : Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*. Lanham: Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, c2003, 2003. P145

“certainly spoiled (娇矜)”.³¹ He felt that Soong did not belong to him like a traditional Chinese wife.

Soong stood as a contrasting archetype against the traditional Chinese Paradigm, in which women were nothing more than virtuous wives who managed their households and provided constant companionship. It is not hard to discern from Chiang’s diary that Soong was particularly independent in mind, not bound by stereotypical Chinese feminine rules. For instance, she celebrated Spring Festival, regarded as one of the most important festivals in Chinese culture, with her parents instead of her husband. Commemorating Spring Festival with one’s husband’s family used to be an unarguable issue in China, but Soong’s bold behavior forced the leader of the nationalist government to change his attitudes and opinions of women. There was nothing he could do but declare, “Nobody knows how a man in such a dominating status can be so desolate.”³² He went on to state, “I was so horribly alone and had no family (孤苦伶仃，举目无亲). I am the poorest man in the world.” In 1931, he “welcomed” another lonely Spring Festival.³³ From Chiang’s diary, we can confidently observe Soong’s maverick personality through her advocacy of women’s independent role within the family, which made her “almost un-Chinese.”³⁴ Nonetheless, Soong remained indispensable and beloved by her husband Chiang.

³¹ Chiang Kai-shek, *Chiang Kai-shek's Diary*, December, 1927.

³² *Ibid*, February, 1929.

³³ *Ibid*, February, 1931.

³⁴ By NATHANIEL PEPPER. *New York Times (1923-Current file)*; *New York, N.Y.* [New York, N.Y.]21 Apr 1940: 85.

Chapter Three – The Imagined Modernity Transformation

New Life Movement

The collision between Soong's Westernized values and behaviors and enduring Chinese traditions was not only embodied in her marriage with Chiang, but also epitomized publicly through her highly active political involvement. I propose that as Madam Chiang, she was able to wield her husband's power to advocate, from an Orientalist perspective, for a series of reforms to transform China into a modern nation-state. Namely, Soong – either consciously or unconsciously – internalized Orientalism to create a revitalized modern China in accordance with her imagination and aesthetic of a nation-state – a process I call Self-Orientalism.

This agenda accidently benefited Soong and her husband as it consolidated Chiang's government, although the progress was short-lived. This result affirms Edward Said's view that Orientalism is contingent on reality, instead of a mere essential idea or a completely imagined ideology.³⁵

Ironically but unsurprisingly, as a prototypical project enacted by General and Madame Chiang Kai-shek to tame China's wildness, the New Life Movement inherited the most distinct feature of Orientalism – blunt repressiveness. Both middle-class behavior and westernized institutions were set as the sole standard of modernity.³⁶ Poor people were demarcated as beyond the pale of modernity. Accordingly, the goals and guiding policy of the nationalist agenda were all formulated based on their Orientalized understanding. Consequently, centralized discipline destroyed alternative modes of living and created a monolithic hegemony; numerous shantytown

³⁵ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: London : Penguin, 2003, 1979.

³⁶ Barnes, Nicole Elizabeth, 1975-. *Intimate Communities : Wartime Healthcare and the Birth of Modern China, 1937-1945*. Oakland, California: Oakland, California : University of California Press, 2018], 2018,P83.

residents, beggars, vagrants, prostitutes, and street dealers had been appropriated, repressed and reconstituted. On this basis, Chiang and Soong's reforms suppressed Chinese and reinforced European and American dominance.

Most scholars believed that Soong's concern with China's customs, appearance, outlook, morals, and spirit, which she discerned through visiting tours with Chiang, prompted this movement. In one passage from her writings, she described the scene: "Taking my traveling experience with my husband as an example, I am more disturbed as I traverse the crowded and grimy city." She continued to point out that "my primary concern is to improve the life standard of the Chinese...The schools I established are aimed to train students to be better citizens."³⁷ Soong had an unshakable belief that the cultural and moral rupture between Western civilization and the Republic of China could be alleviated only by transforming China into a nation of Western modernity. In one of her letters with her friend Emma Mills, she mentioned her feelings about cities in China. "It is an awfully dirty place, absolutely terrible.... There is no decent hotel here...So I am establishing a government hostel where foreign guests of the government may be entertained...I have been here only ten days, but I see where a lot of work needs to be done, and I am going to see what I can do."³⁸ From Soong's grievances to her friends, we can perceive that she had faith in her mission and had great ambitions to modernize China. Despite this, her planned changes were superficial and were designed primarily to meet the needs of westerners.

³⁷ Chiang, May-ling Soong, 1897-2003, Wei Yuan, Liping Wang, 1897-2003 蒋宋美龄, 袁伟, and 王丽平. *宋美龄自述* = *Meiling Soong China / Song Meiling Zi Shu* = Meiling Soong China. Beijing Shi; 北京市: Beijing Shi : Tuan jie chu ban she, 2004; 北京市: 团结出版社, 2004, 2004,P.6-11.

³⁸ DeLong, Thomas A. *Madame Chiang Kai-Shek and Miss Emma Mills : China's First Lady and Her American Friend*. Jefferson, N.C.: Jefferson, N.C. : McFarland & Co., c2007, 2007.

Her limited Orientalized perspective shaped the whole modernizing project. According to Soong, the New Life Movement was “the sublimation of social science.”³⁹ She believed that “the key to China’s national salvation lay in hygienic activities to purge the unhealthy habits of the body and mind of the Chinese people”, and the New Life Movement was instrumental in the revealing of the true Chinese nation.⁴⁰ Although Chiang made decisions regarding political policies, Soong was his indispensable advisor and counselor who had enormously confidence in her opinions. As a result, in 1934 the KMT (Nationalist government, KMT) mobilized the New Life Movement to reform the country institutionally and doctrinally.

From Soong’s words, it is apparent that even before the New Life Movement, she had already adopted a categorization of the Other through the lens of Orientalism. Orientalism assumes a difference between the West and East in order to deliver a coexistent relationship between the two, as they redefined and reinforced each other mutually and synchronically. Soong’s vision of the ideal city was formulated during her studies in the United States; hence, any other cities in China, regardless of cleanliness, could not meet her expectations. Indeed, through the movement, Soong constructed many modern schools according to “American standards.” In an observer’s eyes, schools initiated by Soong were “up-to-date American colleges...right in the heart of China”.⁴¹

In addition, the New Life Movement considered the culture of middle-class behavior and other modes of being to be diametrically opposed. That is to say, “all other modes of being” were

³⁹ Chiang, Mayling Soong. *Social Science; Winfield, Kan.* Vol. 17, Iss. 3, (Jul 1, 1942): 308.

⁴⁰ Arif Dirlik, “*The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution,*” *Journal of Asian Studies* 34, no. 4 (August 1975): 945.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, P119.

inferentially considered deviant and inferior.⁴² For instance, poor people were regarded as “criminals and guilty of indigence”.⁴³ The removal of this section of society was the top priority of the nationalist agenda and everyday life needed to conform to the principles of conduct and attitude of the middle-class.

Specifically, from Chiang’s speeches, we can easily discern how he wholeheartedly supported the movement by contributing to the building of civil hierarchies. He implied that only enlightened civilizations have rationality. In one speech, Chiang implored the Chinese people to obey the guidance of the movement in one such speech by stating a Neo-Confucianist philosophy. “The way to revive our nation and save our country does not require complex doctrines. Instead, we can achieve the goal practically by keeping it clean, neat, and orderly. Let us create a new era that is guided by Propriety, Righteousness, Integrity, and a sense of shame(礼义廉耻).”⁴⁴

Thus, the West’s “proper way of life” and “instillation of discipline” led their prosperity.⁴⁵ He explained this approach further throughout the speech: “How can we measure a nation’s civil morality, whether the nation is civilized or uncultivated? What are representations of civilization? Where should we start to improve national knowledge and morality? (I think it is with the) basic necessities of life, namely clothing, food, accommodation, and transport (衣食住

⁴² Barnes, Nicole Elizabeth, 1975-. *Intimate Communities : Wartime Healthcare and the Birth of Modern China, 1937-1945*. Oakland, California: Oakland, California : University of California Press, 2018], 2018,P83.

⁴³ Chen, Janet Y., 1972-. *Guilty of Indigence : The Urban Poor in China, 1900-1953*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton N.J.] : Princeton University Press, c2012, 2012.

⁴⁴Chiang Kai-shek, *Xinshenghuo Yundong Zhi Yaoyi, [Principal points of New Life Movement]*, Taiwan Zhongyang Wenwu Gongyingshe, Taipei, 1913.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

行). The four fundamental aspects reflect our everyday life. No one is able to live without participating in these aspects. Everyday life mirrors individual and national spirits, knowledge, and thinking, as well as morality. How is a foreigner's modesty in dress? What are their table manners like, where do they live, and how is their transportation? Those of you who have already been to foreign countries must have an answer. Others who haven't been abroad can detect and observe from foreign settlements, churches, or other clusters of foreigners that all behaviors of foreigners from clothing, food, accommodation, transport, and all other behaviors all meet the requirements of modernized citizens. Their behaviors express their deep patriotism and nationalism. In general, all their conduct conforms to Propriety, Righteousness, Integrity, and A sense of shame. They do not wear clothes that betray integrity and the sense of shame (廉耻), they act with etiquette and manners. Their habits, customs, and every action all have rationality which is accordant with the universal law. They are exemplary models – that display the civil knowledge and morality of a modern nation – to teach Chinese people how to be a civilized human.”⁴⁶

Chiang then offered two examples to extend his argument. In his eyes, the way Japanese citizens used cold water to clean their faces and consumed meals with cold-served rice indicated the national spirit of Japan, in which Japanese people were courageous enough to bear any hardships. He urged the Chinese to imitate the Japanese way of living.⁴⁷ He also tried to suggest

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

that until the Chinese abandoned their values in favor of Westernized modernity, they would not be regarded as worthwhile citizens.

Without doubt, Chiang adopted a binary ideology by demarcating the standard to evaluate national morality as either “civilization” or “barbarism”, which exaggerated the difference between the East and West. Chiang inherited the fallacy of Orientalist ideologies, which was a deliberate dichotomy and regarded the modernity of Western society as the sole path to advancement. This dichotomous closure denies the dynamics among different areas, races or nation-states and the intelligibility of “people without history” in order to efface the dynamics of non-Westerners. In this case, Chiang’s rigidity repressed other classes, minorities, and traditional Chinese customs.

Chiang’s pedagogic guidance connoted that he also deemed himself a Westernized product and superior to Chinese citizens. His attitude inevitably made him aloof, oblivious to the plights of the Chinese people, resulting in a loss of closeness with them. He criticized the Chinese for unkempt appearances, disorganized households, and generally being disgustingly dirty.

Before proceeding to examine the underlying reason of Chiang’s adoption of linear ideology, it will be necessary to turn to the linear narrative’s historical roots in China. The willing acceptance of Orientalized values was not uncommon in Chinese history. From the Qing period on, China had witnessed a rise of this evolutionary narrative. Linear history suggests that “time overcomes space, a condition in which the Other in geographical space will, in time, come to look like earlier versions” of Westerners. In other words, only antecedent causes produce

effects on incidences.⁴⁸ While Orientalism denotes the difference between the Orient and Occident, linear history belies the dynamics of the Other by destroying and domesticating its existence. Evolutionary historiographies were mostly constructed from a European perspective of conquest, modernization and industrial development. The concept of evolutionary history was first popularized by historian Liang Qichao in his *New Historiography* (xin shixue) in the Republic of China. His work thoroughly repudiated China's traditional historiographies, as they did not benefit the country's nation building. The adoption of the enlightenment mode of history in China not only affirmed the nation as the central subject of historiographies, but also regulated race, nationality and history according to the Social Darwinism of the Chinese intelligentsia.⁴⁹

Having demonstrated the persistent Orientalism and relevant Linear history, it is now necessary to explain briefly the discourse of Social Darwinism in order to fully understand them. My understanding is that Orientalism's dichotomous ideology helped the development of Social Darwinism, which theoretically derived from evolutionism. Its incipient meaning was "theories of social and cultural change implied by the theory of natural selection." However, as a monster-child, it unexpectedly distorted the political and societal meaning of Darwin's theories and exercised enormous power over the non-Western world by the end of the nineteenth century. Social Darwinism created a sphere of the "Other," in which the modernized nation-state would bring enlightened civilization to "backward" races, justifying imperialist exploitations and racism.

Inherent racism is very obvious in the totality of societal evolution. Historically, the universal history had been "a record of the superior races and, by that standard, the stagnant,

⁴⁸ Duara, Prasenjit. *Rescuing History from the Nation : Questioning Narratives of Modern China*. Chicago: Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1995, 1995,P19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, P19.

backward races could be said to have no history, and hence, no nationality”.⁵⁰ For example, in Hegel’s view, Africa “is no historical part of the world” because it has “no movement or development to exhibit”. He relentlessly concludes that Africa is “unhistorical”.⁵¹ As a consequence, many cruelties were rationalized by this evolutionary history; for instance, look to the Opium War, which was led by the British to transgress the national boundaries of China and was commented on by Hegel as inevitable and necessary because it was a war between civilization and barbarism. Nonetheless, a clear linkage between race and civilization remains blurred in Hegel’s history. Europeans aggrandized racism at the end of the nineteenth century. Europeans began to declaim that only superior races had nationality and rights. As a result, nationalism, racism and evolutionary history were tied together.

In similar fashion, in Soong’s eloquent speech to American audiences, she stated that even when wars with Japan had exhausted national efforts, they still “followed the path pointed out by Dr. Sun Yat-sen in his principles for the livelihood of the people.”⁵² Indeed, Sun Yat-sen, who was also Soong’s brother-in-law, argued in his article that the motivation to invade China with Western imperialism was the conclusion that China could not competently rule itself. Aggressors saw China’s inability to cultivate the moral self, regulate the family, maintain the state rightly and make all peaceful (修身，齐家，治国) . According to Sun, the Chinese people’s unkempt lifestyles contributed to invaders’ contempt of China. Sun raised several examples, such as how Chinese people farted and spat in public. These uncivil performances

⁵⁰ Ibid, P22.

⁵¹ Hegel WF (1899). *The Philosophy of History*. Trans. J. Sibree. New York: Dover Books, 1956. Print.

⁵² Chiang, Mayling Soong. *Social Science; Winfield, Kan.* Vol. 17, Iss. 3, (Jul 1, 1942): 308.

gave foreigners the impression that the Chinese were inferior and savage; therefore, they undermined Chinese society and dared to intrude China wantonly.⁵³

Christianity

Whereas Chiang was keen on Neo-Confucianism, Soong promoted cultural reform based on Christianity. Despite the fact that Soong was a sincere Christian, she performed a self-aggrandized Christianity, as the Americans expected, to weave in American hope, in order to obtain economic, material aid from America and display a form of modernity. Namely, she, to some extent, instrumentalized Christianity. Christianity 's linkage with modernity can be traced back to the fifteenth century and Soong fully understood the status of Christianity in Western modernity. As Owen Lattimore pointed out in his memoir, "Madam Chiang very quickly realized the political usefulness of showing off their Christianity to get the support of U.S. voters."⁵⁴

Soong claimed that many doctrines in Christianity were especially instructive for the New Life Movement. According to her, "Christianity not only proclaims humans are sacred and respected spiritually, it also cares for a person's social welfare. Meanwhile, only religious faith and the community spirit of Christianity can shape the rational customs and social contribution consciousness of citizens. The ultimate goal of the New Life Movement is to accomplish humans' supreme goal, which is making progress with faith. Besides, both society and individuals should act passionately. This goal is in accordance with the calling of Christianity."⁵⁵

⁵³ Sun Yat-sen, 1986, *Sanminzhuyi, [Three principals of the People]*, Zhonghuashuju, Beijing, (90), P 248-249.

⁵⁴ Cited in Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 119.

⁵⁵ Chiang, May-ling Soong, 1937, *Jidujia Yu Xinshenghuo Yundong*, Xinyun Daobao,(7);5.

She put her beliefs into practice by instructing the Bible Association(圣书公会) to print Bibles for propagation in order to stimulate the development of the New Life Movement.⁵⁶

As Chiang endeavored to consolidate his rule through the New Life Movement, it was also pivotal for him to address the material needs of the Republic of China. Religion had played an important role throughout Soong's political engagement, as Soong, at the same time, conceived that the linkage between Christianity and American Orientalism could be beneficial for China in seeking aid and assistance. As a daughter of Christian parents, Soong was also a faithful Christian, which made her an ideal person to work with missionary organizations.

At that time, "sentimental imperialism" occupied American missionaries in China, who also worked as agents of American Orientalism and were mostly satisfied with their roles as moral and political guardians of weak China against the European imperialism of Britain, France, Japan and other imperialistic acquisitiveness. Meanwhile, Christianity often accompanied and sometimes justified American expansionism, and it is the "more humane" imperialism that made it reasonable for the United States to expand.⁵⁷ Hence, missionaries were eager to increase their influence as protectors in their beloved Republic of China.

Indeed, in March 1934, Soong published "What My Religion Means to Me" in *Forum*, an American magazine. This article equated Christianity and nationalism and fully displayed American Orientalism in an attempt to develop Americans' sympathy and inspire a distorted benevolence. In one notable passage, she wrote, "Generally, I think religion is not hard to comprehend. The meaning is that I should do what God guided me to do with my devout heart,

⁵⁶ *ShenPao*, February, (08).

⁵⁷ Hunter, Jane, 1949-. *The Gospel of Gentility : American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China*. New Haven: New Haven: Yale University Press, c1984, 1984,P7.

staunch willingness and greatest effort. God employed me to dedicate myself to the country and to the people. In Jiangxi, where I am currently located, once fertile farmlands are now ravaged. Countless people lost their homes. Although China (the Republic of China) is facing unprecedented challenge, I'm no longer depressed and pessimistic. I believe God has enormous power to help us. His grace is beyond our imagination. While I was writing this article, danger threatened my life at any time. But I believe nothing bad will come to me before I have finished my destiny.”⁵⁸ It is clear that Soong wanted to shape and broadcast an optimistic Christian image to Americans. She remained sanguine, hopeful and – most importantly – faithful in response to tremendous challenges.

Furthermore, she also displayed Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's connection with Christianity and revealed how her devout Christian mother had converted and guided her non-religious husband to God. She described the event publicly, saying, “My mother's religious spirit had a significant influence on Chiang. I realized that spiritually I was failing my husband.” Soong presented Chiang as a devout Christian figure who “studies the Bible every day.”⁵⁹ The craftily religious image of Chiang not only helped Americans – especially missionaries – develop a fondness for China, but also, to some extent, deepened China's weak and Orientalized portrait, in which the Chinese nationalist leader Chiang-Kai-Shek was a coward who not only depended on his wife to tackle international relations, but also depended largely on her for

⁵⁸ Chiang, May-ling Soong, 1897-2003, Wei Yuan, Liping Wang, 1897-2003 蒋宋美龄, 袁伟, and 王丽平. *宋美龄自述* = *Meiling Soong China* / Song Meiling Zi Shu = Meiling Soong China. Beijing Shi; 北京市: Beijing Shi : Tuan jie chu ban she, 2004; 北京市 : 团结出版社, 2004, 2004,P.6-11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, P6-11.

religion. That is to say, Oriental men were weak and needed strong Christian Americanized wives.

We can discern her success through the following words of a missionary, William Richard Johnson, cited by Leong in her book. Johnson spoke fondly of Soong as “[t]he General’s wife.... who takes her Christianity seriously” and he shared that he could “more than fill this letter with stories of her activities and helpfulness in Christian work”. He also mentioned several of Soong’s practices and reforms, including how she established women’s clubs in order to take care of foreign and Chinese soldiers wounded in wars. She initiated a Protestant committee to revive governmental hospitals and planned to reconstruct rural areas ruined by natural disasters and wars with churches.⁶⁰ As such, Soong showed China’s Christian potentials to the U.S., a possibility enabled by the cultural transcendence of Christianity. Her success also served as a sign of China’s modernity.

Women’s New Life Movement

Guan Zhiguang asserts that, to some extent, Soong’s impact on the New Life movement even overshadowed Chiang’s. Indeed, as the guiding light of the New Life Movement (Xinshenghuo Yundong), Soong was not only the founder of the Women’s New Life Movement (Funvjie xinshenghuo yundong), but she held several leadership roles as well. For instance, she was the Honorary Chairwoman of the Women’s Advisory Council of the New Life Movement (Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zonghui funuzhidao weiyuanhui).⁶¹

⁶⁰ Leong, Karen J., 1968-. . *The China Mystique : Pearl S. Buck, Anna may Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism*. Berkeley: Berkeley : University of California Press, c2005, 2005. P118.

⁶¹ Guan Zhigang, *Songmeiling Yu Xinshenghuo Yundong, [Soong Mayling with New life Movement]*, Shenzhen Daxue Xuebao, 2018.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, women and numerous women-focused organizations in the United States fought valiantly for rights and reform on societal, economical, and political grounds. Womanhood and women's participation in public affairs were widely considered an epitome of modernity.⁶² In a letter from Lin Yutang (1895-1976) to Soong Mayling, Lin described America as a country "ruled by women".⁶³ In the following response from Soong, it is clear that she, as an educated woman, heartily supported women's rights. She stated, "Women's social status and national status signify a country's progressiveness. We can deem a country as progressive only when most women have the rights to attend institutions and live decently." She continued by depicting the current harsh situation of women to explain the necessity of the Women's New Life Movement. "Unfortunately, a majority of women in China not only have no rights to be educated, they also are still confined by Chinese stereotypical prejudices. (Therefore), the New Life Movement in any cities ought to ameliorate women's living conditions and build their knowledge in a short time. It is a significant part of the New Life Movement."⁶⁴

Soong was a proponent of women's positive involvement in public affairs. In September 1937, she spoke with a reporter from Reuters about Chinese women's responsibilities in the New Life Movement and during wartimes. During the interview, she stated that women should come to the public and "should bear the brunt of carrying on at the rear," so that "men at the front can secure and protect our country". For these reasons, she explained that, "Theoretically, women are

⁶² Allison Sneider (July 2010), "*The New Suffrage History: Voting Rights in International Perspective*". *History Compass* 8#7 pp. 692-703.

⁶³ Lin Yutang, Cited in Zhou Zhiping, *Zhangchi Zai Quanwei Zhijian*, [*Between freedom and authority*], Luxun Yanjiu Yuekan, 2016, (120).

⁶⁴ *Xinshenghuo Yundong Zhi Yaoyi*, [*Principle points of New Life Movement*], Taiwan Zhongyang Wenwu Gongyingshe, Taipei, 1913, P 109.

fighters as much as are men and should fight at the front; however, personally, I doubt that the female body's uniqueness can support an intensive fight.”

Soong intended to expand women's status by offering new roles to women. She advertised broadly several types of contributions, which included entering public spaces as doctors, nurses, school administrators or volunteers to aid the war effort, so that “patriotism and enthusiasm can surely encourage men to defend our country.” She asked for women's commitment in the New Life Movement, saying, “Women constitute half of our citizenry, and it is incumbent upon us to fight for our country. If women can follow the right path steadfastly and not shirk their duty, the progressiveness of our country is right around the corner.” To be more specific, Soong listed in detail what women could do, such as household cleaning and donating to the New Life Movement.⁶⁵

Soong was also a constant presence in the press to promote her biggest advocates. *ShenPao* – an influential newspaper that circulated from 1872 to 1949, also known as Shanghai News – posted on January 17, 1933 that “Madam Chiang Soong Mayling is gathering funds from leaders and celebrities regardless of their occupations.⁶⁶ Madam Soong will travel to the frontier herself to comfort wounded soldiers who are currently fighting for us in the most frigid northeast (of China) and deliver the funds and materials.”⁶⁷

At the same time, Soong attempted, foremost, to generate sympathy from women in the United States and Europe. She criticized Japan's violence, stating, “I should make sure that women in Britain and America know the current catastrophe in China. International treaties and

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual, Revised, and Enlarged* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2000: ISBN 0-674-00249-0), p. 967.

⁶⁷ *ShenPao*, Dec 1933, (05).

agreements have been overturned (by Japan). Japan's invasion not only destroyed my country, but also damaged many businesses of foreign businessmen. Nowadays, Japan has already reached inland China. The same calamity has the possibility of happening in your country anytime... We women, worldwide, should throw energy into efforts to secure the survival of the world."⁶⁸

Yet even though Soong inspired Chinese women to follow her lead to contribute to the war, her initiatives continued to press women into limited categories. In Soong's article, *War and China's Women*, which was published on October 6, 1937, she depicted how women were fighting for the country. "Women across classes sewed and washed military uniforms," and they "comforted hospitalized soldiers and raised funds spontaneously for our country." In general, she effusively praised women who took part in "emotional work".⁶⁹ She urged women's activity in pushing ahead the program. Just like the New life movement with the help of her husband Chiang, the Women's New Life Movement ended up with a paradox essentially, in which the modernized idea of labor equality between women and men was denied.

Consequently, the success of the Women's New Life Movement remained limited. It is true that millions of donations were gathered from women's clubs and social associations to support women and children in the Republic of China temporarily.⁷⁰ Bureaucratically, a large number of women's organizations and committees boomed in many provinces (e.g. Shanxi, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Hunan, Shanxi, Qinghai, Guangdong, Nanjing, Shanghai). The Women's New Life Committee enacted a chain of rules and standards to regulate the movement. In addition, the Women's New Life magazine was founded and published monthly to propagate the Women's

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Chiang, May-ling Soong, 1937, *Jidujia Yu Xinshenghuo Yundong, Xinyun Daobao*,(7);5.

⁷⁰ Ibid, P137.

New Life Movement. Yet, even though Soong overlooked woman's potential abilities, women were gradually recognized by society. Moreover, Soong's presentation of the possibilities of modern womanhood as well as progressive social reforms not only had positive impacts on propaganda work abroad, but also countered negative news in the United States about her husband's dictatorial power.⁷¹

However, Soong's reforms were a product of outwardly mimicking "American progressive tradition, in which she had been instructed" by her American education.⁷² That is to say, reforms in education, hygiene, bureaucratic efficiency and behavior carried by Soong in the New Life Movement paralleled foreign critiques, especially American judgments of China; in other words, these reforms endeavored to perform modernity in accordance with American perceptions in response to Soong's Orientalized values. Additionally, Soong also internalized the West's interpretations of China to either stimulate foreign powers' participation against Japan's vicious, aggressive invasion or raise the maximum amount of funds.

Soong once explained that the New Life Movement was inspired by her school life in Georgia and her interactions with her classmates.⁷³ The more differences she found between the Chinese and Americans, the more she was determined to modernize China. Hence, the New Life Movement was based on an imagined modernity without adapting to China's real circumstances. No wonder it was destined to fail.

The New Life Movement faced the skepticism of Hu Shih, a world-renowned intellectual who I will introduce in more detail in the following paragraph. Shih once commented on the

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ DeLong, Thomas A. *Madame Chiang Kai-Shek and Miss Emma Mills : China's First Lady and Her American Friend*. Jefferson,, N.C. : McFarland & Co., c2007, 2007.

nationalist agenda, saying, “We cannot exaggerate the impact of the New Life Movement. Because it is neither ‘a panacea for saving the country (救国灵方)’ nor ‘a miracle to revive the country (复兴民族的奇迹)’. It is definitely not a good way to ‘execute vengeance (报仇雪耻) as well’. Descendants will laugh at us if we overstate excessively the influences of this movement(遗笑于世). The improvement of customs is not merely an education question or a moral question, rather it is more like an economic question. Countless unsatisfactory norms and manners are the product of poverty. If the national economic circumstance remains displeasing, the Chinese’s behaviors will be understandably disappointing.”⁷⁴

Indeed, many ridiculed “improvements” were championed during the New Life Movement. In 1938, the agenda was implemented through biopower, the state mechanism. In Yunnan province, the state government offered rewards for the capture of mice in town. In the beginning, this was in order to ameliorate the municipality’s appearance (市容). As declared by a state law: “A house load should deliver five mice to the government, and ten for each restaurant and school. One is allowed to pay in money for delivering mice that fall under the regulated number.”⁷⁵

In the meantime, the formalistic movement was harshly criticized by citizens. Not only did it not offer real financial support for the capital’s poorest people, it also denied their existence and repressed their life and their own means. As a result, poor residences were forced

⁷⁴ Hu Shih, *Zhongguo Wuducai De Biyao Yu Keneng*, [*The necessity and possibility of anti-totalitarianism in China*], Duli pinglun, (130), P2.

⁷⁵ Wu Tong, *Minguo Xinchenghuo Yundong Naxie Huangdanshi*, [*These ridiculous affairs in the New Life Movement in the Republic of China*].

to move to bamboo shelters until police discovered them. Indeed, as the press called attention to these impacts of the New Life Movement, critics noted how Soong skipped over “the tough economic aspects of the social reconstruction,” while “much of modern China leaves her far behind.”⁷⁶ The American news omitted the dynamics of China. Nonetheless, it did point out that Soong was hurrying to construct a superficial, imagined modernity. The public referred her as “Madam Dictator” because of her unbeatable influence on Chiang. People complained about her with the saying “If Mayling were at the bottom of the Yangtze, then China would suffer less.”⁷⁷

A primary student once wrote in his diary, “Yesterday when I had just got home from school, I heard that the supervisor will come again soon for a cleanliness inspection. Every household was vexed and hurried back home to clean because no one expected punishment.”⁷⁸ Government officials, of course, used the movement to exercise their power rapaciously at the expense of people’s misery. A local newspaper in Tianjing province reported that a policeman went to the home of a citizen, Mr. Zhao, to deliver a flyswatter to him in the name of the nation. However, the officer asked for a payment. When Mr. Zhao refused the deal due to a lack of money, they abused him for ruining “public hygiene” and threatened to arrest him (到局子里坐坐).⁷⁹

As Huang Jinlin pointed out, “the New Life Movement employed a persuasive and irksome tone to denounce and patronize Chinese people’s way of life. The New Life Movement

⁷⁶ By NATHANIEL PEPPER. *New York Times* (1923-Current file); New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y.]21 Apr 1940: 85.

⁷⁷ ⁷⁷ DeLong, Thomas A. *Madame Chiang Kai-Shek and Miss Emma Mills : China's First Lady and Her American Friend*. Jefferson, N.C.: Jefferson, N.C. : McFarland & Co., c2007, 2007.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

degraded Chinese life and deemed the indigenous life of the Chinese as hampering China's modernization agenda."⁸⁰ As such, Chiang and Soong enlarged the fissure and inconsistencies between Westerners and the Chinese.

The adoption of the enlightenment mode of the narrative manifested considerable Orientalist legacies. Chiang and Soong were ardent supporters of taming the Chinese into the imagined modernity that they both learned abroad. The total acceptance of evolutionary history differentiated the Chinese intellectual's melancholic desire for national sovereignty from its semi-colonized position in global imperialism.

Unquestionably, the nature of both history and the human mode of being was contested. Many thinkers, from Paul Ricoeur and Hadyn White to Michael de Cohen, have proved that the nature of history is metaphysical and multivocal.⁸¹ Chiang awkwardly applied his irrational and imagined modernity to China, which made the movement ironic. He conducted a nationwide movement without even being able to describe the goal with clarity. He spoke about his imagined modernity in rather vague terms. "I attended school and received military training in Japan. Despite the fact that they do not discuss much about morality, their manners fit properly the moral standard! Decades, years of education made the powerful Japan we see today."⁸² He considered the Japanese a self-respecting culture full of worthwhile citizens and failed to recognize the contributions and values of Chinese society. It is obvious that Chiang himself could not articulate what modernity actually was but still endeavored to transform China into a metaphysical modernity.

⁸⁰ Huang Jinlin, 1998, *Chouguai De Zhuangban: Xinshenghuo Yundong De Zhanlue Fenxi*, [*Analysis of Strategies of the New Life Movement*],(6), P163-203.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

Liang Qichao, Sun, and many other public figures in early-twentieth-century China, internalized Orientalist ideologies and regulated the Chinese. Their reform was modeled on a linear totality, that if China did not develop into a civilized country in accordance with Western standards, foreigners would regard them as barbarians and imperialists' expansion would be justified. They were obsessed with the justification created by Westerners. Their attempts to modernize the country were doomed to crash. This was not only because the inherent Orientalized hegemony contradicted the nature of history and our mode of being, but also because their believed rationale opposed the welfare of the Republic of China.

Chapter Four – Performed Homogeneity and Femininity

Recognizing the shortage of financing, Soong frequently appeared before domestic and foreign audiences in order to raise funds for wartime China. In the following section, I will further demonstrate how Soong internalized Orientalism by appropriating it to perform her designed image homogeneity and femininity through diplomatic relations.

Orientalist ideology played a crucial part in the nation-building of the United States. In 1845, Manifest Destiny advocated for a divine mandate for the United States to achieve political, economic and cultural dominance. The doctrine's rhetoric emphasized American masculinity and strength in accordance with America's emerging role as a cultural and political force globally.⁸³

Soong embodied a highly visible homogeneity and femininity of the Republic of China with the purpose of finding powerful allies in the United States and Europe for her husband's government. In Nicole Elizabeth Barnes's view, Soong "belied her powerful role in Chinese domestic politics and employed an Orientalist notion of China as a defenseless country beset by the rapacious Japanese and in need of protection from the progressive and powerful United States"⁸⁴. Building on Barnes's view, I argue on the other hand, that Soong, in fact, not only represented the femininity of China to Americans and Europeans, she also displayed a firmness to meet American's expectations of an Americanized leader.

Namely, Soong internalized this American Orientalism to create new tailored images for her, her husband and the country. While Chiang Kai-shek solidified his political power as leader

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Barnes, Nicole Elizabeth, 1975-. *Intimate Communities : Wartime Healthcare and the Birth of Modern China, 1937-1945*. Oakland, California: Oakland, California : University of California Press, 2018], 2018.

of Nationalist China, Soong became increasingly involved with American social and Christian charities in order to raise the largest amount of funds.

As Owen Lattimore wrote in his memoir, “[Generalissimo] Chiang was able to make good use of her because of her standing in the United States.” It is true that in Chiang’s diary, he also noted this: “Yesterday, my wife passed out after six speeches in New York. How tired she must be physically and spiritually. I should not let her confront all the burden alone, but I believe it will largely benefit our country.”⁸⁵

Certainly, Soong was competent and deserved Chiang’s trust. She had revealed her dual affinities for the United States and China. Before her return to China, Soong defined herself as a Chinese citizen whose “only thing Chinese about me is my face.”⁸⁶ Although Soong was known worldwide as Madame Chiang Kai-shek, she was more regarded a true political leader of China compared to her husband because she appeared in the news more frequently.

To Americans, she symbolized not only the first lady of the Republic of China, but also China’s new womanhood and a new China. Nathaniel Peffer, a reporter from The *New York Times*, once described her as “a legendary figure in America.”⁸⁷ Indeed, Soong had enviable prestige in the U.S. She was “gracious, beautiful, dignified, courageous – she was in the star role and no one could ‘steal the show.’ She has rightly captivated the hearts of the American people through her feminine tenderness, and I think has accomplished in one visit what centuries of

⁸⁵ Chiang Kai-shek, *Xinshenghuo Yundong Zhi Yaoyi*, [Principle points of New Life Movement], Taiwan Zhongyang Wenwu Gongyingshe, Taipei, 1913.

⁸⁶ DeLong, Thomas A. *Madame Chiang Kai-Shek and Miss Emma Mills : China's First Lady and Her American Friend*. Jefferson, N.C.: Jefferson, N.C. : McFarland & Co., c2007, 2007

⁸⁶ NATHANIEL PEFFER. "Madame Chiang Kai-Shek Speaks for China." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Apr 21, 1940.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

formal friendship between China and America could not do...She has made Americans realize that the Chinese are like us: our differences superficial, our similarities fundamental... there are the educated, the cultured, the beautiful, the tolerant, the Christian in China as well.”⁸⁸ Indeed, Lin Yutang illustrated Soong’s influence as well, stating that Americans “are crazy about a woman celebrity who has achieved things on par with the best of men.”⁸⁹ She was hailed in the American press as the daughter of America.

The active and powerful figure delivered by Soong made Americans believe that the Americanized beautiful lady with a Christian spirit was the product of their cultivation. Americans considered her speeches “always exact” and believed they had a “disciplined cleanness”.⁹⁰ In Americans’ eyes, Soong attempted to convert China into something more Christian, modern and American, and this was their contribution as well.

Soong presented as an Americanized figure, and to Americans, her “most American and least Chinese” figure epitomized “the most modern of modernity in China.” Americans began to link modernity with Soong and had faith in China, as they stated “How much of China is that and how permanent? It is still too early to say; but on all contemporary evidence, it foreshadows what China will one day be”. To them, Soong’s social reforms were learned from the mentality of pre-war America when she spent her formative years. However, in this particular article, Westerners still showed inherent racism. A reporter said Soong’s American education was unfortunately combined with “mellowness and patience that are her radical inheritance. If she

⁸⁸ Cited in Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 119.

⁸⁹ Lin Yutang, Cited in Zhou Zhiping, *Zhangchi Zai Quanwei Zhijian, [Between freedom and authority]*, Luxun Yanjiu Yuekan, 2016, (120).

⁹⁰ Talmey, Allene. *Vogue*; New York Vol. 101, Iss. 8, (Apr 15, 1943): 34, 35, 36, 37.

believes in getting things done. She has the illusion that they (Chinese) can be done quickly.”

While Americans recognized Soong, they only viewed her as an American rather than Chinese.

She challenged this in a speech, saying, “Western countries – please tell me, why is your apathy inconsistent with Christian civilization, with humanity, with morality? Can I regard your indifference to Japan’s violence as a harbinger of your weakening? If you [countries] remain aloof to Japan’s cruelty and completely abandon international treaties, I have nothing to say.”

The masculine tone was obvious in her content and delivery when her normal mode of speech making is to feminize China.

The strategy was effective. In 1938, *ShenPao* posted that tens of millions of Americans protested Japan’s invasion of China. This raised more than one million dollars for civilian refugees in China.⁹¹ Soong instantly expressed her appreciation to the U.S. In her speech to Americans, she illustrated how indebted the Chinese people were in response to “America and other friendly nations.” Their “generous assistance” lightened the burden on the Chinese in wartimes.⁹²

As a result, Soong’s active participation in Chiang’s government and international propagation managed to make the public believe that her husband worked hand-in-hand with his wife, who had American spiritual and educational values, leading China into modernization and the transition to a Westernized nation. Her designed figure of herself and Chiang not only helped

⁹¹ *ShenPao*, June, 1938 (02).

⁹² Chiang, Mayling Soong. *Social Science*; Winfield, Kan. Vol. 17, Iss. 3, (Jul 1, 1942): 308.

Chiang obtain Western acceptance of his leadership, but also facilitated numerous collaborations between the Nationalist government and American organizations.⁹³

It was especially true after the Xian incident, in which Chiang was detained by his associate, Chang Hsueh-liang, known as the Young Marshal, to force Chiang to shift his focus from attacking Chinese communists to securing the nation. In Soong's memoir about the Xian incident (xianshibian huiyilv), she recalled how she negotiated with Chang Hsueh-liang in order to disentangle her husband from the mess: "When I got off the plane, I demanded associates of Chang Hsueh-liang not to search my body. Chang was frightened and said, 'Madam, how dare I!'" She described the scene when she finally met Chiang: "When I entered my husband's room, he was astonished and shocked, and he said, 'My wife is really coming for me? Here? In the opponent's camp (huxue)?' His body trembled as he cried...My husband said, 'Although I have consistently persuaded you not to come to Xian, I knew it was a futile attempt. This morning, I saw the sentence 'Lord will create a new thing on the earth, a woman will protect a man,' then here you are.'"94

Accordingly, Soong's image as an independent and active woman captured millions of Americans' hearts. A newspaper described Soong's influence on "Los Angeles club women, who have found a new inspiration, urging them to greater effort in their self-appointed war tasks... they have a feeling of kinship toward this woman who expresses the finest of all womankind."⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid, P123.

⁹⁴ Chiang, May-ling Soong, 1897-2003, Wei Yuan, Liping Wang, 1897-2003 蒋宋美龄, 袁伟, and 王丽平. 宋美龄自述 = *Meiling Soong China* / Song Meiling Zi Shu = Meiling Soong China. Beijing Shi; 北京市: Beijing Shi : Tuan jie chu ban she, 2004; 北京市: 团结出版社, 2004, 2004, P.49.

⁹⁵ Cited in Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), P119.

Clearly, Soong – as a woman with engrossing femininity – was considered by Americans as the true brain of her husband’s government and was the symbol of a modern China, an American Orientalized China and a self-Orientalized China, whereas her taciturn husband, who symbolized the awkward traditional China, was dependent on his wife to interpret and negotiate and “did not even speak English.”⁹⁶ Many people think Chiang knew more English than he admitted, however.⁹⁷ As noted in a magazine report from the time, “Mayling is the youngest of the Soong sisters. Except for her sister, no woman in China is as influential as her worldwide. Since her husband became the leader of the nationalist government, she became a true First Lady.”⁹⁸ During the late 1930s, although the U.S. had seen China as subordinate, China still considered assistance from the U.S. as necessary and found itself in desperate need of being rescued from other nations by the United States. Soong was deemed by Americans as the symbol of its rising power throughout the world.

Apart from her display of American characteristics, she also showed spectacular femininity in front of the world. In her broadcast talk on September 12, 1937, which was circulated by international broadcasting stations, Soong mainly elaborated on China as a feminized, weak country that sought shelter from the heteronormative and masculine America. China was waiting for the U.S. to exercise its power. She started by saying, “In today’s speech to Americans, I feel too ashamed to speak any words, because a chain of unfortunate incidents happened in the [Republic of] China that cost many innocent Americans their lives. Many Americans were wounded in Japan’s brutal invasion...In recent years, China struggled to develop from a state (minzuguojia) to a modern nation-state (guojia). In China, we were slowly

⁹⁶ Ibid, P128.

⁹⁷ Gunther, John. *Current History (New York)*; New York Vol. 50, Iss. 2, (Apr 1, 1939): 40.

⁹⁸ Wang Fu. *Meiguo Ji, Kouzhong Zhi Songmeiling: Tianwentai*, 1936, 16. P1.

but steadily advancing the practical application of social science when in 1937 there came the rude interruption of war. However, Japanese imperialism's consistent violation opposed our progress. Japan forced war upon our country when we were particularly vulnerable; they are rampant in my country by leading destructive wars." She severely denounced Japanese imperialism's barbarity and savagery and did not forget to hit Westerners ironically, by pointing out that the West's sympathy grew only after China was attacked. She articulated that "China was immediately applauded (by Westerners); perhaps, at first, rather condescendingly."⁹⁹

However, Soong "was entirely different from the person the Western world pictured her to be. She was no angel of mercy," according to Ilona Ralf Sues. Sues considers Soong "not a sentimental Good Samaritan, not the widely publicized pious Bible-quoter, not the bluestocking reformer, but Madam Chiang Kai-shek the Fighter – for a powerful government, for an efficient administration, for a modern China."¹⁰⁰ Certainly, Soong garnered favorable public and diplomatic aid for Chiang, not merely by her fluency in English; rather, she appropriated and internalized Orientalism, especially American Orientalism, to show a powerless nation that needed help and guidance in order to prompt an alliance between the U.S. and the Republic of China.

As we mentioned before that the Orientalized representation was irreconcilable with indigenous Chinese values, Soong became a favorable figure perhaps more in the United States than in China. For the American press, Soong was doubtless a less prominent figure in Chinese eyes than in American ones.¹⁰¹ She was regarded as a fashionable icon in the U.S. In the eyes of

⁹⁹ By MAYLING SOONG CHIANG (Madame Chiang Kai-shek) CHUNGKING [By Wireless]. *New York Times* (1923-Current file); *New York, N.Y.* [New York, N.Y.] 19 Apr 1942: SM5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, P147.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, P147.

Americans, she had “the same clothes understanding as a great actress.” American press kept applauding her for her chic instinct, noting that she also always dressed using certain elements as “as props, for effect.”¹⁰² They analyzed every outfit that Soong wore, such as “ a sable coat, diamonds in her ears” for the Congress speech, “black with gold embroideries” for the speech in Madison Square Garden, “brilliant blue velvet” for her speech at Wellesley, her old college.¹⁰³ Soong’s clothes, hair, and even nails began conversations in the U.S. Every item of clothing was obsessively commented on in US news media.

As a matter of fact, Soong’s chic image had been criticized sharply by the Chinese. In a magazine, one writer pointed to one of Chiang’s speeches in his homeland Fenghua. Chiang talked about his experiences in rural areas with Soong when they were young. He looked back on old days when they had to clean up the dung bucket themselves. Undoubtedly, Chiang intended to give a diligent and frugal impression to the audience; however, the author commented ironically on the speech, musing that “if Soong can truly bear that, that’s astonishing and is worthy of her name as a first lady, but I wonder if she wore exquisite high-heel shoes or workable straw sandals.”¹⁰⁴

Soong’s upper-class way of acting was intolerable for countless Chinese citizens. For example, she had been chastised for fancying extravagant velvet ankle strap heels and for her appearances in public with elegant dress Qipao (旗袍), while she imposed moral demands on citizens to fulfill their duties and stop the habit of consuming luxuries.¹⁰⁵ Straightforwardly,

¹⁰² Talmey, Allene. *Vogue*; New York Vol. 101, Iss. 8, (Apr 15, 1943): 34, 35, 36, 37.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Chong Guang, *Women De Hua Songmeiling Taifentong: Taosheng*, 1932, 22. P1.

¹⁰⁵ *ShenPao*, 1939, (07).

despite the fact that Soong's stylish image reshaped foreigners' view of China, Chinese citizens who were still worrying about their next meal and survival could not appreciate that.

In another dispatch from a newspaper called "A tale of Soong Meiling's Shoe Purchasing", a reporter noted that when Soong Mayling appeared in a newly opened women's shoe store, the salesman proffered her "the most lavish high-heeled American platform shoes as a gift."¹⁰⁶ The article continued on how sumptuous she was. Another article in the following edition gossiped about her gemstone, the cat's eye, stating, "Soong Meiling's chrysoberyl cat's eye has the highest limpidity. I could only describe it as a flooding clear river, reflecting dazzling light in a single band. If it is for sale on the market, the price will be at least up to two hundred thousand (20 wan) approximately. How such a treasure came to the hand of Soong, of course we are uncertain."¹⁰⁷ Another article at the same time reported that Soong bought a pair of French-made high heel shoes priced at a thousand yuan.¹⁰⁸ As recorded, Chiang's monthly salary was a thousand yuan.¹⁰⁹ Commentators denounced her lavish life regardless of her status and her representation of China to the world.

A newspaper also spoke briefly of her personal maid who only took care of her hairstyle to ensure it flowed like a wave.¹¹⁰ Despite Soong dismissing her associate because he posted a notice for her missing cat in the newspaper – Soong scolded him for being too swanky – people's resistance to her lifestyle remained unchanged.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Bai Ke, *Songmeiling Gouxie Ji*, *Shanghai Huabao*, 1930, 559,P2.

¹⁰⁷ Songmeiling De Maoyan Zhi Ershiyuan, *Leyuan*, 1930,6, P10.

¹⁰⁸ Unnamed story, 晚清期刊全文数据库(1833-1911). / Wan Qing Qi Kan Quan Wen Shu Ju Ku (1833-1911). Shanghai Shi; 上海市: Shanghai Shi]: "Quan guo bao kan suo yin" bian ji bu]; 上海市]: 《全国报刊索引》编辑部

¹⁰⁹ Gunther, John. *Current History* (New York); New York Vol. 50, Iss. 2, (Apr 1, 1939): 40. P42.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Not only her stylish life was judged – her diplomatic contribution was also doubted. The press began to censure her, suggesting that her diplomatic charm was no longer prepossessing. In the following quote, a reporter recorded that Soong went to seek support in America and did not gain her expected optimistic outcome. Additionally, it also pointed out that “Soong encountered a car accident and hurt her feet; however, Soong’s crew circulated the rumor that it was as a conspiracy designed by Japan in order to harvest sympathy worldwide. This strategy is extremely tedious.”¹¹²

Additionally, Soong’s Orientalized representation, we have seen, also stood in contradiction with the beliefs of Chinese intellectuals. Hu Shih (1891-1962) was a pivotal intellectual in early-twentieth-century China president of Peking University, a key initiator of the May Fourth Movement and widely regarded as one of the main pioneers of Chinese liberalism and language reform.

During the 1920s, Hu began to publish political newspapers and journals, and accordingly occupied a central role in Chinese academia.¹¹³ As an intellectual, he embodied independence, indignity, and a spiritual firmness in the face of danger. He published many papers related to the politics in China, in which he was never afraid of criticizing Chiang. His complex relationship has been discussed widely among scholars.

An article, titled “Chiang Soong Mayling- Hushi’s Strong Backing(蒋宋美龄为胡适抱腰)”, said, “No one can doubt Hu’s eminence as a celebrated intellectual. Many people have

¹¹² *ShenPao*, February, 1943, (6).

¹¹³ Zhou Zhiping, *Zhangchi Zai Quanwei Zhijian*, [*Between freedom and authority*], Luxun Yanjiu Yuekan, 2016, (120).

been influenced by his sensational publication related to political opinions in *New Moon* (a magazine established by Hu and his friend). It (Hu's publication) prompted conversation among citizens nationwide. Hu Shih felt proud of his accomplishment. However, many readers are worried about him. His choice of words (in articles) and the content (of those articles) unavoidably make him a highly visible target for Chiang. Surprisingly, Hu has stayed safe."

Thus, it is not hard to grasp that Hu had a far-reaching influence on his readers. And his words frequently nettled Chiang. Despite Chiang's connivance with Hu, keeping him safe might be attributed to Chiang's concern that Hu's punishment could trigger people's widespread protest. Many people surmised that Hu's safety had been protected by Madam Soong. Whenever Chiang was exasperated by Hu, Madam Chiang always said nice things about Hu. She praised how he was a genius and how talented Hu was. Chiang, hence, cast out his plan to penalize him.¹¹⁴ It is true, Chiang also calculated that an attack on Hu would bring widespread criticism.

Whereas Soong had grown fond of Hu, he did not conceal his loathing for her. In his diary, Hu Shih recorded one of Soong's speeches in the United States on March 2, 1943, when he had just been recalled by Chiang as a former ambassador to the U.S. He wrote, "I went to Madison Square Garden to be in the audience for Madam Chiang's speech. There were roughly two thousand people. She did convey some sympathy and enthusiasm, but her speech was completely inadequate, I'm speechless." What I am suggesting is that Hu was annoyed by the content of Soong's stirring speech and foremost the national image represented by Soong. Because according to American press, the same speech in that "blue-flagged hall" (Madison

¹¹⁴ Chunqiu, *Soong Mayling Wei Hu Shih Baoyao*, Shanghai Press, 1931, (1), P15.

Square Garden) was a huge success. Mayor LaGuardia was even so emotionally captivated by Soong, he exclaimed, “Madam Chiang, we adore you!”¹¹⁵

Hence, it is highly possible that it is her use of her advantage as a thin, beautiful woman to deliver heartbreaking emotion that annoyed Hu. Feminized diplomatic representation had been a burden on male elites’ shoulders, especially for intellectuals like Hu Shih who were holier-than-thou and morally lofty. Certainly, the articulated national image of a frail woman irritated Hu.

Two days later, Hu received a call from Huang Renquan, an associate of Soong, telling him he was invited by Soong to visit her at 5:50 PM. Hu was astonished by Soong’s way of conducting the meeting. He wrote, “I asked, if Consul Yu’s tea party will begin at five o’clock, how can she meet me at 5:50? Huang answered that she will not go downstairs (to the party) until 6:15.” He continued his diary with descriptions of his meeting, saying, “After a while, she (Soong) came (into the living room), very presumptuous with rosy cheeks. She asked for a cigarette right after sitting down!” Interestingly, on March 23, 1935, *ShenPao* posted news that Soong donated five thousand yuan to establish a women’s smoking cessation institution, while Soong herself had great cravings for cigarettes¹¹⁶

Hu continued to complain about Soong by saying, “ She said her speech is designed for intellectuals who have profound influences on the public. Her quote of Huangzhong’s fall (黄忠马失前蹄)[a section from one of China’s four great classic novels, the Romance of Three

¹¹⁵ Talmey, A. (1943, Apr 15). People and ideas: May ling soong chiang. *Vogue*, 101, 34-34, 35, 36, 37.

¹¹⁶ *ShenPao*, March, 1935, (06).

Kings] was arranged to gratify intellectuals! Her arrogance came out of nowhere (虚骄) and made me feel disgusted.”¹¹⁷ Hu used exclamation marks twice in this section to express her extreme disdain for Soong.

Even so, we should also be aware that criticism of Soong could be the result of the conflicts between the nationalist government and Chinese Communist Party. Another newspaper made it clear that the “Chinese Communist Party punctured Madam Soong as the biggest of four principal capitalist families and she was regarded as a cunning criminal of the war”.¹¹⁸ People’s Daily, a press controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, commented that Soong’s request to the U.S. for aid was impudent.¹¹⁹

China and the Chinese people had been dominated by dignity (面子) – this was how the Chinese Communist Party criticized Soong.¹²⁰ A commentator said, “Previously, when Soong arrived in America, journalists and photographers from different presses usually recorded a large number of pictures of her in order to pick her best posture to publish in magazines. However this time, they highlighted her awkwardness instead. This is unquestionably pathetic. We shall not forget how Soong was embarrassed (丢人) by sending herself to the United States (送上门). From Soong’s misfortune, we can also discern the stupidity of Americans. They sanctify someone (捧人) sometimes, just like what they did to Hu Shih. When they change their mind,

¹¹⁷ Hu, Shi, 1891-1962, Boyan Cao, 1891-1962 胡適, and 曹伯言. *胡適日記全集* / Hu Shi Ri Ji Quan Ji. Taipei; 臺北: Taipei : Lian jing chu ban gong si, 2004; 臺北 : 聯經出版公司, 2004, 2004.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ *Renmin Ribao*, [People’s Daily], December, 1948, (1).

¹²⁰ Lin Yutang , *My Country and My People* , New York: John Day , 1935. p. 349 - 350 、 p. 356 、 p. 362 、 p. 362.

they desert the person immediately.” The commentator ended by saying that “if the United States suspends their sponsorship with Nanjing Kuomintang government for a while, it may make them (反动派) give up soon. Chinese people will not suffer and undergo that much.”¹²¹ This report was published when Soong’s pleas for increased aid were refused by America. The judgment was biased with political prejudice. Therefore, an unstable political environment should also be considered regarding Soong’s gradual negative reputation. In brief, Soong did not take advantage of her representation of homogeneity and feminization, because the inherent social, cultural, and political discrepancies between China and Western countries have cut her off from national sentiment. Soong’s condescending approach found no echo in the hearts of Chinese.

¹²¹ Zhiyan, 1949, *Zaizao*,(1).P7.

Conclusion

Chiang wrote down in his diary that “there is not truth in history, facts cannot be recorded”.¹²² His statement made me reflect upon the question, what is the true image of Soong? As an individual who spent her lifetime dealing with an intertwined transnational relationship forged between China and the United States, I seek to understand how Soong’s identity and social location in relation to both nations has been compounded and represented tightly through her diverse images.

Soong was called “Soong mama” in many schools she sponsored or established. She played the role of national mother who worked tirelessly on philanthropy work for victims of war, such as a vast number of orphaned children, millions of refugees, and countless wounded soldiers. Her image as “China’s mother figure caring for orphans and others displaced by the war” had a transcendent power that spanned across “a spectrum of liberal, conservative, urban, rural, religious and secular affiliations”.¹²³ Her magnanimous kindness was remembered by the world.

Meanwhile, she endeavored to manipulate a well-behaved wife’s image for China, whereas obviously she was not a typical traditional Chinese female. Her elaborately designed figure persuaded audiences to recognize her contribution in taking care of her husband, communicated through extensive media coverage.¹²⁴ Through her diplomatic representation of

¹²² Hoover Institution Stanford University 斯坦福大学胡佛研究所档案馆藏档，BOX5.

¹²³ Leong, Karen J., 1968-. . *The China Mystique : Pearl S. Buck, Anna may Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism*. Berkeley: Berkeley : University of California Press, c2005, 2005. P118.

¹²⁴ Liangyou,1934,(99),P18.

China as both a feminine and a homogeneous country, we are amazed by the wisdom she had. She was also an active leader who was exceptionally chic.

We witnessed how an Orientalized subject tackled Orientalism. In this context, we observed how Soong tried to modernize and reenergize China through internalizing Orientalism as a deconstructive attempt. I demonstrated how Soong mediated her Americanized modernity standard with the implementation of that of China from the 1920s through the 1940s, principally through the New Life Movement. This revealed how her national identity led her to transform China into her imagined modernity. But her attempts with her husband Chiang were incongruent with China's sociological and socioeconomic circumstances, and they failed. They conveyed strongly the dynamics of Orientalized subjects, suggesting that they were no longer passive.

Despite the fact that China had been regarded as having lacking religious and economic development, there was a demonstrated need for conversion to Christianity and capitalism in the early twentieth century. After the 1930s, 'China mystique' was used by scholars to describe new "romanticized, progressive, highly gendered images of China" that were popularized by the U.S. government and other Western nations.¹²⁵

On April 19, 1942, The *New York Times* ran headline news about Soong's speech – "First Lady of the East Speaks to the West: Madam Chiang Kai-shek declares that 'East and West have tried to be self-sufficient. Neither has succeeded. Each must acknowledge now that the other has something to teach'."¹²⁶ Interestingly, the 'China mystique' used by the United States to resolve the moral breakdown – a word I borrowed from Gareth Fisher – caused a sequence of radical

¹²⁵ Leong, Karen J., 1968-. . *The China Mystique : Pearl S. Buck, Anna may Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism*. Berkeley: Berkeley : University of California Press, c2005, 2005.

¹²⁶ By MAYLING SOONG CHIANG (Madame Chiang Kai-shek)CHUNGKING [By Wireless].*New York Times* (1923-Current file); New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y.]19 Apr 1942: SM5.

cultural, political, and economic change. Fisher defines moral breakdown as an unstable psychological state caused by people's confusions of identities and social roles. People who were accustomed to consistent cultural norms had new ethnic demands imposed upon them.

American Orientalism's shift, from imagining Asians to be decadent to seeing them as modern and progressive, affirms Said's concept of the shaping of Orientalism. According to Said, despite the fact that Orientalism is an imagined creation, it is associated with reality.¹²⁷ My understanding is that as an evolution of American Orientalism, the 'China mystique' is the product of China's self-Orientalism.

In Vico's observation, "men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities – to say nothing of historical entities – such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made. Therefore, as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. Thus, the two geographical entities support and, to an extent, reflect each other."

Soong and Chiang undoubtedly made this period of history. The difference between "Orient" and "Occident" was established by Soong and her husband as the fundamental way to construct the Republic of China. Edward Said extends his argument by evoking the views of two early scholars – the philosopher Vico and anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss – to illustrate that the mind creates knowledge and order through categorization. In this case, Soong and Chiang's experiment to construct their imagined modernity affirms the self-awareness of Edward Said's

¹²⁷ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: London : Penguin, 2003, 1979.

perspective. What is more, Soong and Chiang, both as Orientalized subjects, adopted a linear ideology to construct their imagined modernity. That is to say, they unexpectedly enhanced Orientalism that values white culture and normalizes its dominance over non-white cultures was thus enhanced by them unexpectedly. They took the external forms of the West and created their own conceits.

A 1940 newspaper article succinctly characterized Soong's reforms: "She is against the sweating of labor by plutocrats; she wants to see village industry developed without too much machinery and large-scale enterprise; she favors a planned economy 'which will give our people a dignified and unequivocal opportunity to achieve something worthwhile for their personal respect and their prosperity'." ¹²⁸ In sum, Soong had talked glibly of modernism, modern spirit, and the essence of civilization but was ignorant of China's own culture. It is true her national identity urged her to achieve things rapidly and she brought China to the world; however, her imagined, fancied modernity could never be achieved.

¹²⁸ NATHANIEL PEFFER. "Madame Chiang Kai-Shek Speaks for China." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Apr 21, 1940.

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