2-13-1918

Letter from May-ling Soong Chiang, 1918-02-13, Shanghai, China, to Emma Mills

May-ling Soong Chiang

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13 February, 1918

Dearest Dada:

Your 25th letter came this morning. In spite of my efforts to keep up with you, you are always several letters ahead of me due to the fact that while I was on the ocean, you had some three weeks' advantage over me! After all, though, I have not done so badly: have I?

By the way, before I forget it, I want to tell you that I had written to Ruth Tuthill, & also sent her a little remembrance. I addressed them merely to Newport R.I. as I had forgotten her street address. A few days ago I received a value from the P.O. in Shanghai requesting me to call for a letter & package addressed to her and were unclaimed at the Newport P. Office. Please tell her this for me. She forgot to put on her address when she wrote me,- as a result I had no knowledge of her street etc.

A few ways ago I received an announcement of [Dot] Days' engagement. "Everybody is doing it" - you see.

I hope that you are thoroly recovered from the [page break] Grippe. To say the least, it is an aggravating illness. And I hope that you got the trip on your friend's boat too. I can well sympathize how celestially grateful one would feel in letting one's wings fly without the least bit of hindrance. Ah. well, you need not think, though, that you are the only one who has "to be responsible," for the world is alike all over! In that respect at least!

By the by, I am looking forward to that visit of [Marguine's] friend - a Mr. Hyde,

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is it not? I am just longing for a chance to
talk to a man as a human being, and not
as a girl! We certainly were mere infants at
college! I haven't gotten to be a woman yet;
but I am in that irritating stage of develop-
ment called "teething." You may well
imagine all the minor ailments usually
accompanying it.

Yesterday was the first day of the Chinese
New Year - officially the "New Year" lasts
five days. When we got up, we all dressed
in our best clothes and all of us children [page break]
knelt and touched our foreheads to the floor
before Father & Mother. Then all the servants
followed and did the same thing to Dad
& Mother & then to us. When you bow
down you say something like this
"Congratulations and Prosperity."
Of course Dad & Mother said for us not to
kow-tow etc, that it was not necessary
as we are a Republic now. You may feel
certain though that had we omitted the
ceremony, they would feel that the new year
had an inauspicious beginning. You ought
to see them smiling benignly sitting in
the drawing room as each of us paid
our respects.

I forgot to add that my little brother awoke
at five yesterday morning, and kept firing off
firecrackers. I did not get up until
ten or there-abouts.

After the kow-towing, money was distributed
to all the servants wrapped in red paper. My
little brother also received some: but as
we are "grown ups", we did not get anything [page break]
for our pains - In my case it was a pain,
as unused to such kneeling, I almost tore the skin
on my knee. My married sister also gave
presents of money to the servants, & so did my
oldest brother: however as I am not married,
I only gave money to my own maid.

After the distribution of money, fruits, nuts,
and candies were also given to the servants.
Then we all set down to eat a sort of pastry made of white flour with the inside stuffed either with meat or nuts or a certain sort of bean sugar. They look like potato balls being round; but instead of fried, they are put in boiling water & boiled. They are round - roundness being symbolic of happiness. One must not eat an odd number of them, as the even numbers are propitious whereas the odd numbers cause all sorts of embarrassments.

After the breakfast, - which was at 10:30, we had family prayers. Then we fired fire-crackers until dinner which included some 20 courses. As you may im-agine, none of us were hungry, although we all pretended to be. After dinner, the three boys went off to pay respects to their elders. Father stayed at home to receive his younger relatives - all men of course. Mother, sister & I stayed at home. I read the "New Republic."

I forgot to tell you that my sister's children also kow-towed to us, and of course as their elders, we gave presents of money. I am so glad that I have only one niece & nephew: otherwise I might be worse off financially than I am at present!

About five-thirty or six, my brothers returned from their calls. Only my youngest brother received money, as the other two are no longer children. He came in very much excited, with 20 or 21 packages of money wrapped in red paper. Practically each package contained a dollar and a penny:- again you see, "even money" are wrapped in an even number. Of course this custom is not so strict as it was when China was a monarchy. After supper we had fireworks which lasted about an hour and a half. Then each one went to his or her own room except brother and I. We sat in front of the fire and talked.
The following are a few queer customs which I noticed.

First, it is considered bad luck to clean on the first day of the year. Therefore our servants wiped and scrubbed and dusted until about midnight on New Year’s Eve.

Second, on New Year’s Eve, one must not put soup in one’s rice, for that means that bad weather will attend every outing one makes during the next year.

Third, one can collect all debts until the dawn of the New Year. Then if the creditor appears, the debtor has the right to throw him out. For this reason in the country, when the debtor risks going to the creditor’s house when the first glimmer of dawn steals forth, he takes a lantern with him, then still claiming it is night.

Fourth — In cooking meat for the New Year season, — if the meat swells, then that household is sure to prosper; if it diminishes, then poverty will attend that family. Our meat swelled beautifully this year: so Mother is sure that we are going to be rich!! Especially as the night before New Year, I dreamt of a whole pile of coffins with dead people in them. If the coffins were empty, it would mean that I am going to lose money: however I dreamt of them as full. Whatever you may say, the superstitions of the people here have affected me most strongly too. I believe them also; in spite of the fact that when I first came home, I tried to laugh at them.

Fifth — The first day of the New Year is when the younger generation calls on the older. Then no calling cards are used. After the first day, the older people call among themselves, and the
younger people call on their own friends. In such cases, cards are used.

Sixth - Women do not call except perhaps among their relatives of their own sex - And then what rottenly stupid and dull. Mother has gone off to see her widowed sister, & wanted me to go along. However, before I go, I know already what my aunt will say, and what I shall answer - hence why be told. Both the car & the carriage are being used - And I have no way to go out unless I use the [rickoka] which is cold, and full of germs, I bet. Or else the tramways which always mixes me up as to directions. And I hate to ask the conductor questions. All the shops are closed, and without my Mother, I am afraid to go calling on the friends of the family, for they belong to the oldest families here, and are horribly conservative.

[], what I would not give for a "wow wow" with the crowd at college. But I guess, I might as well say, "Aw chuck it" and shut up!

China, you see, is not like America. Conventions, manners, and ideas all tend to restrict one. Either one conforms to them, and be proper, - or there is another possibility: one can flout them entirely and be what is called "The New Woman." That title however is somewhat unsavory - used in a derogatory sense. And as I am anxious that the "Returned Student" class should not be confused with the "New Woman" class, which really is quite shocking in their inability to distinguish & differentiate license from liberty, - more or less I am bound to observe and to respect the old conventions which irritating as they are, at least.
bar women from actions questionable
not only in themselves but in their
influence.

Ergo - drat them all!
Bad way to begin a New Year. I should
say - However as Sir Roger de Couerley
says, "Much might be said on both
sides" - Especially when China has
absolutely no place of amusement or [page break]
recreation when a decent person can enjoy
himself or herself.

Take the movies, for instance. After a
week of them, one is satiated with them.
And the Chinese theatres! - I beg to
excuse myself. I may be devoid of all
musical sense: yet the Good Lord
save me a nerve center with
little threads called nerve cells or
"neuritis" - is that the name for them.

With love
Daughter
20

13 February, 1918

Dear Dada:

Your 25th love card this morning found my efforts to keep up with you, you are always several letters ahead of me due to the fact that while I was on the ocean, you had the week's advantage over me! After all, though, I have not done so badly. Have I?

By the way, before I forget it, I want to let you know that I had written to Ruth, but also sent her a little reply because I addressed them weekly to Newport R. D. as I had forgotten her street address. A few days ago I received a notice from the P.O. in Shanghai requesting me to care for a letter & package addressed to her and were unclaimed at the Newport P. Office. Please tell her this for me, she forgot to put on her address when she wrote me, as a result that I do not know her street etc.

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hundred and touched our foreheads to the floor before Father and Mother. Then all the servants followed and did the same thing to Dad and then to us. When you bow down, you say something like this.

"Congratulations and Prosperity."

Of course Dad and Mother said for us not to know how it was, that it was not necessary as we are a Republic now. You may keep certain though that had we omitted the ceremony, they would feel that the new year had not in auspicious beginning. You ought to see them standing benignly sitting in the drawing room as each of us paid our respects.

I forgot to add that my little brother woke at five yesterday morning, and kept firing off five crackers. I did not set up until ten or thereabouts.

After the bow-topping, money was distributed to all the servants wrapped in red paper. My little brother also received some, but as we are "grown ups", we did not get anything.
for our pains — in my case it was a pain, nothing as usual to sneeze, Fakemask too its skin on my knee. My married sister also gave present of money to the servants, so did my oldest brother; however as I am not married, I only gave money to my own maid.

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Second, on New Year's Eve, one must not put soup in one's rice, for that means that bad weather will attend every outing one makes during the next year.

Third, one can collect all debts until the dawn of the New Year. Then if the creditor appears, the debtor has the right to throw him out.
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the redskin's house when the first shimmer 2
dawn steals forth, he takes a lantern
with him, — still, still claiming it is night.

Fortune — In cooking meat for the new
year season, — if the meat swells, then
that household is sure to prosper — if it
diminishes, then poverty will attend
that family. Our meat swelled beauti-
fully this year; so must it be sure that
we are going to be rich!! Especially as
the night before new year, I dreamed 9
of a whole pile of coffins with dead people
in them. If the coffins were empty, it
would mean that I am going to lose
money; however, whatever you may say, the superstitions
of the people here have affected me
and strongly too. Believe me, they are almo-
in spite of the fact that when I first came
home. Tired to laugh at them.

Fifth—The first day of the new year is when the younger generation calls on the older. Then no calling cards are used. After the first day, the older people call among themselves, and the younger people call on their own friends. In such cases, cards are used.

Sixth—I women do not call except perhaps among their relatives or their own set. And then what rowdy, stupid and dull weather has gone! I wanted to see her widowed sister as I wanted to go along. However, before I go, however, I shall answer—and I already what my aunt will say—and I shall answer—hence why what I shall answer, hence why the carriage is held. But the ear—the carriage is held. But the ear—And there no are being used—and there no way to go out unless just the kickola way.
which is cold, and full of serum, etc. Or else the train way which always
wipes me up as to directions. And I hate to ask the conductor questions. Are
the shops are closed, and without any
worst, I am afraid to go calling on
my friends of the family, for they belong
to the oldest inhabitants families here,
and are horribly conservative —
and we shan't have "wow wow" with the
girl for a "wow wow" with the
crowd at college. But it's very,

and shut up!

China, you see, is not like America.

Conventions, manners, and ideas are
entirely, and be what is called "the new"
woman." That title however is somewhat unsavory—used in a derogatory sense, and as Jam anxious the "Returned Student" class should not be confused with the "New Woman" class which really is quite shocking in their inability to distinguish & differentiate license from liberty, were or less Jam bound to observe and to respect the old conventions which imitate as they are, at least bar women from actions questionable not only in themselves but in their influence.

Ego—dear them all!

—

Bad way to begin a new year, Holmes.

But as Sir Roger de Coverley says, "Much might be said in both sides"—especially when China has absolutely no place 8 amusement or
recreation when a decent person can enjoy himself or herself —

Take the workers, for instance. After a week of men, one is saturated with them and the Chinese theatres! — They to excuse myself. I may be devoid of a musical sense; yet the good Lord gave me a nerve center into little threads called nerve cells or “neuritis” — is that the name for them.

With love

[Signature]