6-15-1919

Letter from May-ling Soong Chiang, 1919-06-15, Shanghai, China, to Emma Mills

May-ling Soong Chiang

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Letter from May-ling Soong Chiang, 1919-06-15, Shanghai, China, to Emma Mills

Transcription
207 Bubbling Well Road
Shanghai,
15 June, 1919

Dear Dada,

As you see from the above address, I am visiting my oldest sister as our house is being painted. Mother and Joe, my youngest brother are also here. Mr. Kung has gone up North again after a stay of a month down here to help sister to settle. We are expecting him back in another month, just before sister’s confinement. The weather here has been very sultry and hot with the exception of the last three days which have been actually cold.

I suppose you have seen a great deal in the New York papers regarding the Boycott Movement of Japanese Goods and the General strike when all the Chinese merchants shut down their shops as a protest against the militarist element in our Government. For a week, one could not buy anything hardl [sic] the shops were all closed. The workmen on the railroads, the telephone, waterworks etc all were on strike. The national feeling was certainly roused and I believe that this is a hopeful sign in the two following ways, 1, to show the world and especially the Japanese that while our Government is weak, shortsighted and willing to sell China for a song, the Chinese people will not stand any encroachments against their rights, and 2, this awakening of national unity is uniting all classes of society. Never has the feeling of one-ness been so clearly demonstrated. We on one hand are feeling that the abridgement between the rich and the poor is coming at hand, while on the other hand in Japan the gulf between classes is ever widening, because the rich are getting terribly rich and the poor are getting terribly poor. As you can well imagine, sudden wealth to the newly rich means arrogance and intolerance, the result of their behavior towards the poor in Japan is likely to cause a Revolution. The internal affairs in Japan are anything but stable and some even think that a revolution in Japan will be the inevitable result.

The strike was first introduced by the students in the various school[sic] They decided that with the country in such a peril by the granting of Kiachow to Japan it was their duty to protest to the Government against agreeing to the decision of the Peace Conference. At the same time, they knew that certain of our officials had made an agreement with the Japanese Government to concede certain rights to Japan. The students therefore demanded that the government should dismiss three of the officials and set free certain students in Peking who were imprisoned because they were the agitators of anti-
militarism in China. The students knowing that the majority of the population were illiterate and knew nothing of the danger then threatening China formed themselves into a body and went out to the country and on to the streets to explain the true political situation to the people, and asked them to boycott Japanese goods. Finally the students realized that their power was limited so they went to all the various ships and begged the people to close shops until Peking consents to the demands made upon them. The merchants realizing too well what a Militarist Government would mean [with] Japan as its sponsor, consented. Therefore all the ships were closed. Later on all workmen also struck to show that they were in favor of the movement. Even the prostitutes, 3000 of them in Shanghai, declared that as long as the country were in the hands of traitors, they would not continue their business. All restaurants and theatres were also closed. During last week, our family almost starved for want of fresh fruits and meats. We could get rice, but as the hawkers in the markets also were on strike, we could not obtain any fresh vegetables either. The students behaved in a most praiseworthy manner. They were on the streets asking that there should be no violence, and helping to keep back the crowds. There were a few instances of violence against the Japanese, but they were very few indeed, and were started by the illiterate. The people on the whole were very very orderly indeed. They said, 'Any violence that we may cause will be laid at the door of the poor students, and as they have suffered enough for our country, the least we can do is not to harm the cause for which we are all working'. A pretty good piece of logic by the masses, is it not?

But things could not continue thus, for as you may know, Shanghai is under the authority of the Municipal Council. The men who compose this Council are all foreigners, and of course as there is a Japanese on it, he used his influence to persuade the Council that what the students were doing would be against the good of the community etc. As a result the Council forbade the students to have parade[s] or put up posters. While they could do nothing against the will of the Council, the students behaved in a remarkably sane manner. They moved their headquarters to the Chinese City, as the Council refused to let them stay in the Settlements. The students did all this without any fuss or protests. Only they wrote pamphlets for the benefit of the foreign population telling them that the movement was not anti-foreign in its aim, in fact no one is more anxious than the students to bring about closed co-operation between the Chinese merchants and the foreigners than they. They regretted that the foreigners were inconvenienced in the general closing of the shops etc. but as that was the only and most effective method to bring pressure upon the Peking Government, we Chinese had to resort to it. Some of the foreign dailies really took a very sensible view of the matter. They recognized that we were fighting for the maintenance of democracy and self-determination, the very same principles that the Allies fought for. Some of the newspapers for various reasons which you might imagine branded the whole movement as the plot of certain elements in political life to stir up trouble. You know very well that such a things as this movement was could not[sic] be base since it was the students, the majority of them under twenty, and not even
their teachers who were working for this.

The Returned Students, the very people whom you would naturally think of as leaders, did nothing to further the movement. At least that was true of the men students because the chairman of the committee whom they appointed to look into the matter did not call his committee for any meeting. As we women returned students had formed a club by ourselves last year, we got to work and really did help some.

After various telegrams etc. the Peking Government finally did accept the resignation of the three traitors and so matters are resuming their natural course. And also apologized to & set free the students they imprisoned.

I wish you could have been in Shanghai to witness the events of the past week. To tell the truth even I who have so much faith in the ultimate outcome of China's salvation, was surprised at the wholeheartedness of the people. You know every Japanese thinks that we are a cold blooded people, incapable of United thought or action. We certainly have shown them something. Before this movement, the Japanese behaved with the most remarkable hauteur and superiority. You ought to see the way they slink around the corners now. They would make you think of a cur with his tail between his legs. Before it was quite a glorious thing to be a Japanese, now it is getting to be a disgrace. The various Japanese firms have spent over a million dollars on cablenews to their Government during the strike, and many of the firms here have quitted business, as the Chinese have refused to trade with them. The Japanese Government is so terrified that they have sent four gun-boats to Shanghai. Much we are afraid of them. The Chinese now realize their strength in Union, and so in spite of a rotten Government, there is not going to be any obstacle too difficult to overcome. All over China the boycott movement is gathering strength, and you may be sure that once the Japanese have tasted what we can do, they will be a bit more wary in treading on our toes.

Well, goodby[e] Dad, I am sending you a five dollar check to get the St Nicholas Magazine for one or two years for my brother. If it's enough for a two year subscription, please get two years subscription. By the way, altho my check book has come, I have not sent in my identification card, so I'll send it next time.

Daughter
Dear Dada,

As you see from the above address, I am visiting my oldest sister as our house is being painted. Mother and Joe, my youngest brother are also here. Mr. Kung has gone up North again after a stay of a month down here to help sister to settle. We are expecting him back in another month, just before sister's confinement. The weather here has been very sultry and hot with the exception of the last three days which have been actually cold.

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[Signature] Daughter