7-25-1921

Letter from May-ling Soong Chiang, 1921-07-25, Shanghai, China, to Emma Mills

May-ling Soong Chiang

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30 Seymour Road,
25 July, 1921.

My dear Dada,

I am writing you because I feel somehow this afternoon that you would be in the mood to talk if you were here. Do you know, I have been studying Chinese by myself today, and just as I was reading over some Chinese History, it suddenly came to me with renewed strength that perhaps some day you and I will be able to work together and turn out some rather decent stuff. I feel this way especially, because lately I am beginning to feel the spirit of the old Chinese masters creeping over me, as though I am getting the essence of their thought and personality. I do not know how to express this feeling, except that I feel their nearness and and [sic] that they are tangible, and that to express their thoughts would be natural for me. I must work hard, not become discouraged, and accomplish something worthwhile. Of course, I know very well that many people could do this far better than I, at the same time, very people[sic] have done this sort of thing, and those who have attempted have mostly been foreigners. Of course it is harder for the foreigners to catch the spirit of our national atmosphere, so to speak, especially as the writers who have made translations are mostly men. I am very much conceited in that I believe that women as a rule are more sensitive critically than men. I do not know why I should think this way as the most noted critics of the world are mostly men. I came across a very pretty comparison this morning to this effect, in describing the beauty of a certain lady in history, the author wrote that so dazzling her beauty that the white clouds on the celestial dome stood still, while the long streams of flying birds fell at her feet, and the peony hung its blushing head with shape. The peony in literature is considered the queen of flowers, its delicate coloring shaming the wanton red of the rose, its satin texture outrivaling[sic] the snow white petals of the lily.

Sometimes, I feel as tho I could write and write and never stop, but when I begin to write, I can only hold my pen and chew the blunted end, because, I feel the inadequacy of my vocabulary, and the inaccuracy of expressions at my command. And so Dada, you see, you will have to come and do the actual writing while I give you the essence and spirit of our literature. But at present I do not know enough to do that. Another year of good hard boning, however ought to be enough

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for the beginning. Then you had better come over. I can easily get you a job here either in Shanghai or in the Interior, a job with a good enough salary to live comfortably on. I would advise you never to teach for there is no job on earth that sucks the vitality and enthusiasm of anyone so much as teaching. It is a worthy profession no doubt, but then there are a great many people who are doubtless worthy and comme il faut, but with whom you and I might not get along so well.

Dada, why don't you come across the Pacific? It is not such a tremendous undertaking after all. Do you know, if Mother had not lost such a tremendous loss in the gold exchange, I think I could have persuaded her to let me return to America? You see during the exchange of the last few months, she lost something like fifty thousand dollars in buying and selling. And so she is rather tight in ready money now. Don't tell this to anyone, for no one outside the family knows this, and even my brother in America does not know this. I suppose we ought to be thankful that we still have enough left to be comfortable on, but I do hate to think of fifty thousand dollars going to the devil. Suppose she had given it to me to take a trip around the world with, wouldn't that have been grand? [sic] I am only hoping that we will get some of it back in other investments this year.

Write to me soon. With love,
Daughter.
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[Signature]