8-10-1921

Letter from May-ling Soong Chiang, 1921-08-10, Shanghai, China, to Emma Mills

May-ling Soong Chiang

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30 Seymour Road,  
Shanghai,  
10 August, 1921. 

P.S. Pardon scrawl. 

My dearest Dada: 

Wells’ Outline of History reached me last week. Since then I’ve delved into its depth, and have found great enjoyment. I want to tell you that for the first time since I came home, I have felt as I never have as I have been feeling since the Wells’ came. You remember, do you not, that at college, I used to have fits and starts when I would practically isolate myself for a week or ten days from all my friends, and shut myself up in my room, and never went to bed until one or two in the morning? During these “spells”, I used to be completely wrapped up in some subject or another which gripped hold of me, and which I could not throw off until I had read myself to mental and physical exhaustion. I remember that Rev. Higgins and Betty said that when I had those moods, I was cross as a bear and was actually churlish! I suppose they wanted me to be sociable, and I was not inclined to be even civil then. At any rate, I myself was the only one who actually knew the keen enjoyment of those moods. I lived in a world of my own where only certain books and I existed. I confess that when those spells were past, I was dead tired; and [page break] you remember, they always brought their re-actions; — in each case extreme sociability, and merriment.

Well, since I came home, up to the twice Wells came to pay me a visit, I did not have enough interest in any one subject or book to care much what I
read. But oh! Since Wells came, I
have been indulging in a most ecstatic
mood; a mood oblivious of all my surround-
ings, and existing circumstances. I lived
over again the beginning of the world, the
various stages of civilization in each part of
the globe. I was particularly struck by his
treatment of facts relating to Chinese History
as his facts are quite authentic.

I am not surprised that much criti-
cism has been levied upon this work as a
historical document. Probably in his treat-
ment of certain "pre-historical" hypotheses, he
causd, some of the so-called experts, infinite
pain in their tender theories. And altho
the History rushes forward in leaps & bounds,
there are certain spots where he dwells too
much in detail in comparison to certain
other spots where more emphasis might be [page break]
laid. But all in all, the "History" is
a marvelous & stupendous piece of under-
taking! The logical sequence of events, the breadth
and scope of ideas displayed, the general
proportion of "perspective-interpretation" are
certainly note-worthy. As I read the book, I
felt that I had caught a glimpse of a "new
domain", -- to be sure, a brief one; but
none the less tantalizing, I do not think that
I am wrong when I say that I think the
"Outline of History" will not be a negligible
factor in bringing out the Utopian "International-
ism"; for anyone after having read it cannot
help but feel a kinship for the rest of man-
kind regardless of race or place.

But enough of Wells! I hope you are
very bored, for what I have written is merely a
sort of "after-math." So far, none of my friends
in Shanghai have read the book; and I feel
as though I must give vent to my enjoyment,
and since you are responsible for my feelings
you must tolerate my enthusiasm.

Before the Wells came, I had been reading [page break]
de Maupassant systematically. If you remember,
in the introduction, the author Maupassant made this point:
that the [] of his work should be judged from the artistic point of view, i.e. without reference to the subject of his theme, & consequently without taking into consideration whether the reader approves or disapproves of the "tone" or conditions depicted. In other words, the author is not responsible for the morals of existing society; his art should be judged from this stand point: whether artistically his descriptions are true to life.

I confess that I was thoroughly[sic] and sickeningly disturbed with Maupassant's attitude towards life. Decency; purity of thought or action, modesty, true gallantry, and innate refinement had absolutely no place in his "society". Men and women of his creation were creatures of passion, governed by sensual desires, dominated by momentary impulses, and possessed only bestial attributes truly [] by so-called civilization.

You are wondering, I know, why I read all his works if I were so disgusted. Certainly not out of curiosity, my dear! I am reading Chinese novels, in Chinese with the idea that some day when I am sufficiently [page break] well versed I shall do some translations into English. Now some of the Chinese novels are on Maupassant's style; but extremely well-written, beautifully phrased and delicately executed. The central theme, though is a picture of conditions among society of that time. If possible, certain portions of these Chinese novels are even more obscene than Maupassant's work; yet other portions are delightful and could be made available for translation. I wanted to see how Maupassant handled his subject; and so I made an intensive study of his books.

Of course in English there are certain books too that are questionable; for instance "Clarissa Home" etc, but to my mind, the English novel of that type is not really so vulgar as the French novels, not to mention certain Chinese novels. I am reading the Chinese novels somewhat at a handicap just at
present; as certain expressions, words etc
are such that I have never met up with in Classics. And consequently
I have to go to my teacher for explanations. And as he is a man of about
forty, it is rather embarrassing. And so now I am reading without asking
my questions; and trust to luck that by incessant work & application, I
shall finally understand the context.

You wrote me that you are coming
to San Francisco. Dada, my dear! To think that only a body of water is to
separate us! I have talked over the
following matter with my oldest sister Mrs. Kung. I want you to come to China very
much, because I want to see you! But from this purely personal consideration,
there is no reason why you should not
catch a glimpse of the East when
you are so near the Orient. I am sure
you will find life here full of interest,
color & movement. In another ten years
perhaps, the Orient will change much of its aspect, as Western ideas are fast pene-
trating into our national life & activities.
So you ought to come to China now. You can stay
here as long or as short a time as you desire.
Know if you can manage to get your
passage out here, I can guarantee
to get you back to America. There are
plenty of jobs here for you if you like
to stay in Shanghai for a few months;
& they will not be from 9-5 p.m. kind
either. Probably you can tutor 3 or 4
hours a day some Chinese ladies of wealth
& get $100-$150 per month. The rest
of the time you will be absolutely free. Of course you live with me,
and so your salary will be quite enough for your pocket money. Then after
a few months, we can go down to Canton to stay with my sister Mrs. Sun
for some time; then in the summer we can
go up north to visit Shansi, the cradle of Chinese civilization. Whether Mrs. Kung is in
her Shanghai home or not is of no importance[
page break]
as her house is always open & the
servants are there.

As our present house is rather small,
about 1/3 the size of our Ave. Joffre house,
Mrs. Kung has offered to let us have a
room in her Shanghai house where she
is now living. At any rate, you don’t
have to worry about anything, have a good
rest, see the Orient, and perhaps do
some work together in English based on
Chinese fiction.

I hope you will come! I know
that you are wondering whether you would
like me as I am now; as I have changed
since I left college. One cannot help
changing in four years, especially as the
mode of living, the standard of ideals, and
external conditions here are different
from those in Wellesley. I think, though
that we have kept sufficiently near to
each other through constant correspond-
ence not to be either strangers, and shall [
page break]
be able to find a common meeting ground.

I was thinking the other day that the
one reason why I delay writing to Rend,
Betty etc. is because as long a time
elapsed that somehow or another I
seem unable to bridge the gap caused
by long separation and dissimilarity of
interest. In other words, if I write them
I have to write too much in detail in
explaining myself etc. But between you
& me, this is not this difficult.

My plan as I have written above
is not the impulse of the moment; &
so I hope you will give it your
serious consideration.

I have something for you &
Teddy; but am awaiting some one to
take it to America; as otherwise you
would have to pay custom fee.
With love Daughter--

P.S. Need I murmur conventional & empty words of thanks for Wells?? M.
P.S. Pardon me.

My dear Bade:

Well, another of history reached me last week. Since then I've delved into its depths, and have found great enjoyment. I want to tell you that in the first time I came home, I have felt as though I have been feeling its terrors come. For remember, do you not, that at college, I used to have fits and starts when I would practically isolate myself for a week or ten days from all my friends, and that by myself in my room, and never want to be alone one or two in the morning? During these "spells", I used to completely wrap myself in some subject and completely shut off or another which sufficed both of me, and which I used not to know until I had read myself too. Mental and physical health, that is, that P. and B. and B. and B. used to call me. I was always as a team and had these woods, I was cross as a team and had these woods, I was cross as a team and had these woods. The only one was actually cruel to me to be cruel to me to be cruel to me. At any rate, I say to be even crosser than. At any rate, I say, I lived in keen enjoyment of these woods. I lived in keen enjoyment of these woods. I lived in keen enjoyment of these woods. I lived in keen enjoyment of these woods. I lived in keen enjoyment of these woods.
in each case to
consider, and monument.

The bees, since I came home, up to the
three hives came to pay me a visit, and
did not have much interest in any of
my books because I did not do what I
read. But still, since these bees came,
I have been indulging in a love of
ecstatic wood; a wood oblivious of all my personal
visions, and writing in endless pages. I knew
over again the beginning of the world, the
diverse stages of civilization in each part of
the globe. I was particularly struck by his
treatment of facts relating to Chinese History
as all his facts are quite authentic.

I am not surprised that much criticism has been aimed upon this work as a
historical document. Notably in his treatment of certain "pre-historical" hypotheses, he
causes, some of the so-called facts, infinite
pain in their tender theses. And so,
the history reaches final aid in leaps or bounds,
there are certain spots where he dwells too
much in detail in comparison to certain
other spots where more simplification might be
he laid. But let us ask, is the "History" a
mammoth, stupendous piece of undertak-
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and scope of ideas displayed, the general
proportion of perspective—interpretation—are
certainly noteworthy. As I read the book, I
felt that I had caught a glimpse of a vast
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domain;"—to be sure, a line/one, but
tantalizing. I do not think that
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I am wrong when I say that I think the
"Outlines of History" will not be a neglectful
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I confess that I was thoughtless in accepting de Maupassant's attitude towards life. Decency, purity of thought or action, modesty, two qualities, and innate refinement had absolutely no place in his "society." Men and women of his creation were creatures of passion, governed by natural desires, dominated by momentary impulses, and possessed only bestial attributes thinly veiled by so-called civilization. For me wondering, I knew, when I read all his works if I were so unjustified. Certainly not out of curiosity, my dear! I am reading Chinese novels, in Chinese, with the idea that some day when I am sufficiently
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is not nearly so vulgar as the French
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are such that I have never met up

with us Classics. And consequently
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nations. And as he is a man of about
forty, it is rather embarrassing.
Now I am reading without asking
my questions, and trust to luck that
by incessant work and application, I
shall finally understand the context.

You wrote us that you are coming
to San Francisco. Daddy, my dear! To
think that only a body of water is to
separate us! I have talked over this
following matter with my oldest brother.
He wants me to come to China very
quickly. I want you to come with him. But and
much, because I want to see you! But above
all this purely personal consideration,
from this purely personal consideration,
from this purely personal consideration,
from this purely personal consideration, as
there is no reason why you should not
catch a steamer of the East when
come to the Orient. I am sure
you will find this here free of interest,
color and movement. In another ten years
perhaps, the Orient will change much
y, its aspect, as Western ideas are first seen tracing into our national life or activities.

As you ought to come to China, you can stay here as long or as short as you desire. Now if you can manage to get your passage out here, I can guarantee to get you back to America. There are plenty of jobs here for you if you like to stay in Shang Hai for a few months; they will not be from 9-5 p.m. but either. Probably you can take 3 or 4 hours, some Chinese ladies, 9 wealth + set $100- $150 per month. The rest of the time you will be absolutely free. Of course, you will live with them, and so your salary will be quite enough for your pocket money. Then after a few months, we can go down to Canton to stay with my sister Min. See for some time there in the Cantonese. We can go up north to visit Shensi, the cradle of Chinese civilization. Whether Hu. Kung is in her Shensi home is not so important.
as her house is always open to the
newcomers and there.

Our present house is rather small,
about 3/4 the size of our old house,
while King has offered to let us have a
room in her Shanghai house when she
is now living. At any rate, you don't
have to worry about anything, have a good
rest, and perhaps do
some work together in English based on
Chinese fiction.

I hope you enjoy your stay! I know
that you are wondering whether you would
like me as woman now; as I have changed
since I left college. One cannot help
thinking of the
changing in four years, especially as the
modern living, the standard of ideals, and
eternal conditions here are different
from those in Europe. I think, though
that we have kept sufficiently near
each other through constant correspond-
ence not to be utter strangers, and they
be able to find a common meeting ground.
I was thinking the other day that the
one reason why I delayed writing to you,
reason why I delayed writing to you,
Betsy etc., is because as long as there has
shaped that somehow or another, I
even monarch and bridge the gap caused
by long separation and dissimilarity. In
other words, if I recall them,
interest.
I have to enter too much in detail on
explaining myself etc. But between us,
I think it may well be difficult for
my plan as I have written above
is not that impulses of the moment;
so I began to make sense of your
serious consideration.
I have some things for you &
Teddy, but am away some one &
hole to Canada, as otherwise I
would have to pay customs fees.


P.S. Need & meantime convenient, empty words
of thanks for letters. ?? ??}