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THE EROS OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: MADAME CHIANG KAI-SHEK AND THE QUESTION OF THE STATE IN CHINA

CHIH-YU SHIH

Abstract

Madame Chiang Kai-shek presented an Asia-first strategy to the US Congress on February 18, 1943. Although her speech was critical of US strategy in ending WWII, she received enormous praise. This article examines how the American media reported her speech and concludes that the emotion her speech aroused in American society could be explained by her feminine appearance, her Americanized perspectives and her self-perceived role as a rescuer in America. Madame Chiang portrayed China as an about-to-be-Westernized society experiencing the threat of annihilation under Japan's invasion. To save China was to save the hope of American civilization in Asia and she herself was the testimony that there was no difficulty in mixing American and Chinese values.

Introduction

The topic of this paper is an example of an intercivilizational confrontation or adaptation that had policy ramifications that lasted for decades. On February 18, 1943, Madame Chiang Kai-shek (Meiling Soong) visited the US Congress and gave a speech in each house respectively, urging the US government to re-evaluate its strategic priority in Europe. Considered one of the greatest speeches in Congressional history, her remarks aroused enormous concern among the audience including political leaders as well as news commentators. As a matter of fact, the content of Madame Chiang's speech reflects the struggling mentality of Chinese leaders as a new and late comer to world politics, and the response it drew reveals the position and presumptions that US leaders held with regard to China. A review of this exchange of views between Madame Chiang and US opinion leaders sheds light on the state question still lingering in China and on the relationship between Beijing and Washington recently.
Generally speaking, the American audience listened to Madame Chiang's speech from a standpoint fundamentally different from her presumed position about China, which was now to be interpreted according to the need of the American audience. People might agree or disagree with the reasoning in the speech, but on the whole, most expressed sympathy towards Madame Chiang, the person. The sympathy had a great deal to do with her American-educated background; this allowed the audience to fantasize that China might become American and thus, it created compassion for the Chinese people under Fascist Japan's tyrannical invasion.

The sympathy may have also had more to do with Madame Chiang's feminine appearance which easily won compassion from a masculine rescuer, a timely image for America's self-styled leadership during WWII. Madame Chiang actually manipulated this need for masculinity among her audience. Indicating the strength of the helper, caricatures printed in the next day's newspapers conveyed her success in that she was portrayed becoming stronger by shaking hands with an American figure. It is therefore understandable why some observers worried that an Asia-centered perspective could undermine the US global strategy of ending the war in the sequence of first, Germany, and then, Japan. No one questioned, though, that Madame Chiang had soothed the American psyche by presenting China as a pupil of American civilization, as well as its strategic ally.

This article examines the media reports of Madame Chiang's speech on February 19th, 1943, to show that what constituted this great strategic appeal was, in a deep sense, an indirect yet adequately positive response to a fantasy, a projection, a construction of one civilization in search of an inferior "Other" to confirm its self-perceived superiority.

Who is Madame Chiang?

Madame Chiang was the First Lady of China, wife of the Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the highest commander of the Far Eastern war zone. However, "First Lady" status alone was culturally uninteresting to Americans, since there had been a good number of first ladies in the world by that time. In fact, Madame Chiang arrived in the States without any official title; her stated purpose was to cure an injury caused by an accident years earlier. What attracted the host society seemed to be her Oriental background.
and/or appearance, her gender, and the American psychological and ideological values she voiced.

No reporters were blind to her feminine characteristics. To begin with, her clothing seemed exotic. The style was clearly Chinese; some were able to discern its Shanghai style, but most could only report its ebony color. Almost all noted the split on the sides up to her knees which "set off her figure admirably...with a graceful walk." Usually, the more detailed the description, the clearer the subject-object relationship implications as columnists enjoyed her look:

Her small body, richly covered in a long side-slit Oriental dress of black, moved slowly down the green-carpeted center aisle.

Most Westerners thought her garb the essence of simplicity. But to those who know Mme. Chiang, she was "dressed up." Across her chest she wore the three Chinese "buttons," bediamonded pieces of jade. Her earrings were jade and one of her rings was jade. By her heart was the pin she nearly always wears, the bejeweled wings of the Chinese air force, which she founded and once directed. The yoke and cuffs of her dress were sequinned in jet.²

The strength of her speech was easily felt against the feminine frailty thus embedded, hence "a slight woman..., as fragile as an ivory figurine" could speak in "compelling manner and poise."³ Thus, a gesture which could have been amusing if without conscious sympathy became a dramatic and irresistible demand when Madame Chiang, "short, pert and vivacious, who, with her small fist clenched in emphasis,"⁴ raised her voice and moved the heart of the audience, and "electrified" the Senate during her first speech.⁵ Madame Chiang was critical of the American grand strategy and clearly hopeful that Congress would amend the thinking of the Roosevelt Administration. Surprisingly, her criticism bothered few. Indeed, she personally did not meet anyone who seemed to oppose her. All of those who had been criticized commented on or reported her performance with enthusiasm!

There was one—and perhaps only one—sarcastic comment on her decoration because it just did not fit into China's scarcity, the
premise of her speech:

Mme. Chiang was dramatic in a slim black Chinese brocade gown with its side-slit skirt lined in scarlet, mink coat and sequin-spangled black head scarf. The wife of the Chinese generalissimo walked on high-heeled platform black sandals studded in gold.

Whatever anguish the Chinese are suffering the Chiang family seems to be doing right well.6

Attitudes of this sort reappeared later on. Stories about Meiling Soong in the 1980s and 1990s, in English as well as Chinese, have reported the anxiety of those who once witnessed her style of life. Nonetheless, this kind of criticism misses the true meaning of her speech at the time and was unlikely to be important to contemporaries of the 1940s.

Madame Chiang's educational background is worth noting here to fully demonstrate her American appeal. In earlier years, she spent over ten years in American schools and received her degree from Wellesley College with a major in Western philosophy. Coming from a Christian family long before she moved to the States, she was culturally an American by the time she returned to China. The fact that she now lives in the United States suggests that she feels comfortable with American life. The same feeling of “returning home” could have well accompanied her during the 1942–3 trip. She did not become China's First Lady without effort. For example, she studied Chinese right after returning to China. Twenty years later, she returned to America with a plea for support for her new (and old) home in China. This coming-home-American atmosphere was detected by the more discerning pen, but while her quest was for help, the reporters seemed to be celebrating her personal triumph:

No one could be better qualified to present the case for China to the American people than Mme. Chiang Kai-shek, wife of China's generalissimo, who set it forth in addresses before the Senate and the House. Reared and educated in America, she has for the last 20 years been a leading spirit in the social and political awakening of China and an advocate of all-out resistance to Japan, which for more than five years has been ravaging China.7
Implied also was the appreciation that the values she had absorbed from this society had been spreading in China due to her efforts. China's progress and awakening were therefore also a honor for Americans. If she represented American values, a connection with her would make everyone in the audience feel good about themselves. Indeed some paid detailed attention to her Western background, which brought the readers nearer to her. For example, after her second speech in the House, Madame Chiang attended a late luncheon reception with leaders of both houses. In preparing the luncheon, there had been the question of what to serve her. One reporter wrote the following story which could have consoled those who still worried about Madame Chiang's Chinese strangeness:

When the question of what to serve arose during the advance arrangements, one prominent member apparently forgot Mme. Chiang's American schooling and warned his colleagues:

"Before we go too far with this thing we'd better find out whether she uses a knife and fork."

P. S.—Mme. Chiang used a knife and fork to eat her chicken a la king.8

On the Stage

Not everyone had the opportunity to watch Madame Chiang's presentation at luncheon. The House had only fifty extra invitations to give out, far short of the requested number. The speech could be heard live on the radio, though, and many social occasions were cancelled for people to listen. According to a report which translated Meiling into "beautiful moon" (quite a stretch), the whole country stopped:

The whole country paused yesterday to honor and to hear a great woman, Madame Chiang Kai-shek (Beautiful Moon), as she spoke in both houses of Congress, an honor unprecedented for a woman holding no official position.9

Before Madame Chiang arrived at Capitol Hill, the atmosphere was already warm, although the weather was brisk. In spite of the weather, admirers crowded the outdoor path for more than an hour. The Hill was heavily guarded, although most spectators were
women. The luckier ones had invitations and entered the hall as early as 10:45 a.m. Next only to Queen Wilhelmina, Madame Chiang was the second female invited to give a speech at the House. She was accompanied by Mrs. Roosevelt and entered the Senate at 12:13, improvising a short speech upon request. She was not prepared for this one yet was able to use a number of metaphors to enlighten the audience.

Led by Representative Bloom, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, she left the Senate at 12:26 and, after a walk through the corridors of the Capitol, entered the office of Speaker Rayburn. When she spoke, her hostess, Mrs. Roosevelt, followed the script closely. To avoid distracting Madam Chiang, Rayburn ordered flashbulbs turned off. She seemed to have handled the flashes all right as she gave strategic advice to her American friends. After the speech, she shook hands with Speaker Rayburn, drank water and left for a luncheon reception with the escort of Representatives McCormack, Bloom, Martin and Eaton. The only women, seated on the two sides of Senator Connally at the head of the table, were Madame Chiang and Mrs. Roosevelt.

There was no doubt that she appeared to be protected by male senators and representatives, and this image matched precisely with her strategy. The six most popular pictures printed in the next day's newspapers were first, Madame Chiang entering the House filled with primarily dark-suited males; second, Madame Chiang and a very thoughtful-looking Rayburn exchanging views privately; third, Madame Chiang escorted by four representatives much taller and with her in the front middle; fourth, a side profile of Madame Chiang giving a speech; fifth, Madame Chiang responding smilingly to the applause from the floor; and finally, her militant expression during the climax of her talk.

**Personal Characteristics**

The contents of Madame Chiang's speech were most beautifully laid out in terms of the English language. Her spoken tone was so fluent that it was virtually impossible to tell her Chinese origin. Equally important was that the values which she stood for were familiar to, and enjoyed by, her audience. Reading the script afterwards could be as rewarding as listening to her speech live, hence reporters' compliments that "this Chinese woman not only spoke American, but thought American. She is not only Chinese, but quite
as much American.” If a heroine from China could speak for American values, then she was it:

She spoke as the representative of heroic fighting China, the largest and the most civilized of the Asiatic and non-white nations...

She spoke as the fitting representative of all decent, enlightened men and women throughout the world—the people who know that international cooperation and peace must in some way supplant international anarchy and war, who know that aggression must be stopped, who know that what people have in common in their hearts is more important than differences in the color of their skins.

She spoke as the womanly leader of a nation that has made the greatest sacrifices in the war against Axis aggression...

She especially captivated the audience because of her gender. It raised the horizon on which “the womanhood of the world is beginning to write a great saga of vigor, talent and achievement,” and another horizon on whose “limitless canvas the men and women of all the world can paint a better order of human living, granted only a keen perspective and a broad vision.” Hers was therefore a “cool, determined, thoughtful, eloquent, statesmanlike” character. Entitled “Woman Wins Them,” a report sneered at any male who would want to be the enemy of Madame Chiang:

Arrayed against a woman who wields the sword of Joan d'Arc and who has the shrewdness of Queen Elizabeth, the diplomacy of Catherine the Great and the charm of Cleopatra, what chance has Japan now? We ask you, Mr. Tojo!

A few reports particularly mentioned Madame Chiang's voice. The timbre of her voice apparently captured her audience. It was believed that there was a good reason why she could achieve such great enunciation. Having received her schooling in both the American south and north, her intonation combined the merits of both accents, resulting in perfect American English. It would appear that Madame Chiang was more American than most Americans and
any American would certainly want to see her as an American. This image of perfect English was so recorded:

Her accent bears traces of both Georgia softness and Massachusetts cultivation. The "r's" are nonexistent, and the "a's" for the most part are broad as the Pacific Ocean. She has quite a flair for the dramatic; knows exactly how to begin a speech with low tones, and then gradually works up to a crescendo of emotion; how to drop her voice at exactly the proper split second, and then pick it up once more in time to drive on forcefully to the next point.¹⁵

This most beautiful pronunciation was believed to be flawlessly, typically American:

Madame Chiang's speaking voice is beautiful, "American-English," not the broad unfamiliar and slightly nasal tones of Oxford English, nor the harsh nasal twang of the Yankee, disagreeable to the ear, however correct grammatically, but a strong, resonant and at the same time gentle voice—the voice to be expected of a Southern woman, educated, as Madame Chiang was, in [the] Methodist Seminary in Georgia. Thus[,] she acquired for her voice an ineradicable deep-toned music, from which later education at Wellesley in the North must have removed the drawl, leaving the ideal American voice, compounded by the North and South, with the virtues of both sections and the faults of neither.¹⁶

Other than that her English articulation was "faultless;"¹⁷ she occasionally employed a vocabulary which sent editors of newspapers to their dictionary. At least three of these words were discussed in the media. The most widely mentioned by the media the next morning was "obtunded" when she urged the United States and the United Nations to take action; the second was "intransigent" as she described the characteristics of Japan; and the third was "thews" when she commended American soldiers.

All this praise could not help but involve some imagination.
Since Madame Chiang came from China, clothed in modified traditional Chinese dress, this look just did not correspond with her entirely American accent. The incongruence between look and voice enhanced the extent of the drama she enacted—A Chinese woman was unambiguously American—and Congress was "thrilled." No wonder that she was considered a "knockout."

What Did She Say

Madame Chiang gave several public speeches while in North America, but the most famous two were given on February 18, 1943 to Congress. The improvised speech at the Senate lasted for about 10 minutes; the one to the House was well prepared and took over a little more than 20 minutes. The content of both speeches is equally important to an understanding of the "knockout" because the logic of the speech implicated positions of the United States vis-à-vis China as a civilization.

Madame Chiang portrayed China not simply as a worthy strategic and political ally of Washington's, for she knew well enough that the US priority on Europe went much beyond strategic thinking, touching upon both racial and cultural intimacy with Europe. Therefore, she, in person and in logic, presented China as a spiritual ally for the American people.

She worded her speech with extreme caution as she came from a strategically critical point of view. This critical approach was camouflaged by an affective fabric which she patched together not without some stretch and struggle. In short, she wanted to plant a sense of obligation towards China in her audience so that they would be liking China from the heart instead of merely calculating China's usefulness to them. No one else in China could match Madame Chiang, whose values, language, and life style mixed the two, in accomplishing this mission impossible.

Madame Chiang was particularly good at bringing Americans psychologically closer to China. She mentioned that "the traditional friendship" between the two countries had lasted over 160 years and was based upon "a great many similarities" between the two peoples. She told a story of an American soldier bailing out of his ship and landing in China. The boy shouted "mei-kuo" to villagers running to him. Madame told the audience that mei-kuo was a translation of America literally meaning "beautiful country." Villagers
then welcomed him “like a long lost brother.” He later told Madame Chiang that he had thought of coming home at that moment but it actually had been his first time to China. Madame Chiang then turned to her own experience in the United States and confessed that “coming here today I feel that I am also coming home.” And it was her home, thus also home for her nation, and thus for all mankind:

I believe, however, that it is not only I who am coming home; I feel that if the Chinese people could speak to you in your own tongue, or if you could understand our tongue, they would tell you that basically and fundamentally we are fighting for the same cause, that we have identity of ideals, that the Four Freedoms which your President proclaimed to the world resound throughout our vast land as the gong of freedom, the gong of freedom of the United Nations, and the death-knell of the aggressors.

I assure you that our people are willing and eager to cooperate with you in the realization of these ideals, because we want to see to it that they do not echo as empty phrases but become realities, for ourselves, for our children, for our children's children, and for all mankind.

An ancient story of words exchanged between a Father Prior of a temple and a little acolyte was given here to suggest that in Chinese wisdom, the most relevant thing was to implement ideals. If indeed Americans and the Chinese were to cooperate and it was unlikely for the Chinese to spare effort over the European front, the only sensible alternative was for Americans to go to the Chinese battleground. To support this logic, Japan would have to be treated as an equal or worse enemy compared with Germany. Why was it so? Because Japan was ruining China, another home of American values.

The reasoning was more delicate in her speech to the House. Madame Chiang first spoke highly of those American soldiers fighting in China. All American soldiers would have to fight both enemies and homesickness. She reminded Congress that it was its duty to buoy up their morale which was easily undermined in “the
monotony of waiting” as soldiers “lived indefinitely on canned food” and, possibly through this “deadly sameness,” continued till their “nervous systems [were] torn to shreds.” She stopped right here to let Congress consider how much hardship Chinese soldiers must have suffered and how much help they would probably need.

But Americans were not just pure Americans. Madame Chiang recalled her impressions in this current trip that American soldiers could be first generation “Italians, Frenchmen, Poles, Czechoslovakians, and other nationals.” She found their accents so thick that “one could cut them with a butter knife.” Yet they were still all Americans because they were devoted to the same ideals which “eliminate[d] differences in race” and was “the strongest possible solvent of racial dissimilarities.” She urged the audience to carry the American spirit “beyond the frontiers of physical and geographical limitations” and she believed that the opportunity to spread the American spirit and the common ideals of the mankind was “immeasurable.” She then went on to evaluate Japan's war capacity.

She thought that the Allies had underestimated Japan's capacity just as they had done before Pearl Harbor. She argued that Japan's resources were greater than Germany's and would take a greater toll in the lives of both Americans and Chinese if left unchallenged. Madame Chiang told the audience that China and the United States were like “hands and feet” since their friendship had never been marred by misunderstanding for 160 years, a record “unsurpassed in the annals of the world.”

Japan's military action in China would be affecting America also, since the world was now one corporate body and science had “annihilated distance” among all peoples. Americans could gain confidence from Madame Chiang's speech when she reminded them of victories at Midway and the Coral Sea. She worried that the pendulum could swing back and forth and Americans would, once again, consider Japan a minor foe. China was nonetheless faithful to these common ideals:

She [China] has been soberly conscious of her responsibilities and has not concerned herself with privileges and gains which she might have obtained through compromise of principles. Nor will she demean herself and all she holds dear to
the practice of the marketplace.

This speech drew a full ovation. She explained clearly that China needed help yet she was able to avoid being bluntly specific. Her employment of common ideals for all mankind could mitigate the charge of China-centrism. Most importantly, China's war against Japan was no longer China's own war, it was a war of American values against aggression. To help China was therefore like helping Americans themselves. Thanks to her Oriental face, quintessential American English, and keen knowledge of American values, this subtle yet strong criticism of America's Europe First strategy could thus sound amazingly comforting to an American ear.

The Symbol of Common Cause

The key message in the speech was that there was no difference between American and Chinese values. Madame Chiang in person was testimony to this unity and this was probably the most convincing element in her presentation. She herself would also need this commonality in order to avoid appearing outdated to Americans or barbaric to the Chinese. The fact, however, was that China was no America and American and Chinese values were (and are still today) drastically dissimilar. The construction of a common cause naturally positioned extant Chinese civilization in an awkward, outdated image, but the devastating impact of this image on Sino-US relations in subsequent generations was overshadowed by the desperate need for help in war-torn China.

At the same time, the American public was apparently in search of an inferior “Other” to confirm itself as a vanguard of human civilization, especially during a war against unfamiliar cultures. Now, China, previously just another Oriental society, could serve as a perfect proof that it was Japan’s mistake to resist the White race from advancing into the Far East. If China could become American, why could not Japan?

Did China really become American? Obviously not. But Madame Chiang needed China to be Americanized for personal as well as national defensive reasons, and interestingly, this need of an Americanized China also surfaced in the United States. No wonder the media reacted to the claim of common cause enthusiastically.

China was conceived to be a member of the democratic camp while, as a matter of fact, Chiang Kai-shek was under the heavy
influence of both Confucianism and Fascism. Madame Chiang was able to weave into American democracy "the deep wisdom of her native land," and preserve "the destiny" of the two that they be "partners." The American media were particularly proud of her observation that common ideals had overcome racial differences and thus responded to her devotion to democracy affectionately:

She is fired with a deep admiration for and understanding of democracy and inspired by a devotion to her people, to whom she has given a lifetime of service. Her beautiful English, enriched by an Oriental picturesqueness, deepened the profound impression on her hearers as she courageously laid before the Congress her conception of the mission it must fill in war and the peace to come.

The American media were broadminded enough to include the Japanese people in this common bond. Madame Chiang's speech was given on February 18th, inspiring the national observance of "Brotherhood Week" which would run from the next morning through the 28th. In an article entitled "Genuine Brotherhood," the author condemned both Japan for launching aggression and any other country which would appease such an aggression, but then reminded the readers that the Japanese, just like the Chinese and the American, should not be excluded from universal humanitarian concerns:

Yes, anyone who has read of the Japanese soldiers' conduct toward prisoners and civilians must agree they have much to atone for. Yet there are unquestionably millions of Japanese who are not bloodthirsty by nature, and who if led along constructive paths will walk the path of peace. It is so with every race and every people who are given the opportunity for self-development and improvement, and educated to respect the achievements and rights of others.

Others articulated sympathy towards China's case, feeling that the United Nations could do more, for example, to "be showing a concern for China that convinces the Chinese unmistakably that they have been accepted in good faith as partners in the world wide cause." More specific suggestions included a call for "a renewed
effort to assure the Chinese case a hearing in a genuine supreme war council of all the United Nations." Among these ideas, there was the complaint that the United States was just too slow and too insincere and if not because of Madame Chiang's visit, people might never realize that they almost left behind the common causes which brought Madame here:

Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, whose country fought Japan four and one-half years before any help came, talked of duties and responsibilities to a nation whose leaders often seem to be running around in circles; to the capital of a great republic where jealousies, bickering, grumbling and cheap politics are rife; to a nation whose people struggle to recover the faith of their forefathers...

Many of us in the days when we departed from the fundamental moralities and principles of our civilization forgot this. And many of us still give lip service to this basic foundation of our democracy. How else can you explain those who continually rail at certain minorities? How else can you explain the lack of interest on the part of some in providing access to the riches of our civilization for all? How else can you explain those who flout the fundamental basis of our civilization—the Brotherhood of Man.

The solution was just as what Madame Chiang had said, that is, to return to the founding fathers and cherish the time when America still represented the hope of all the people in the world. This glory was "blunted in years of material prosperity—years of moral deterioration"—and eventually produced Hitler. To revive the American spirit required the whole world to see clearly where Americans would now choose to go and this would mean dedication "itself to the preparation for the brighter future that a stricken world so eagerly await[ed]." Here came Madame Chiang, who woke up Americans from their moral decay and provided China for Americans to prove themselves to the world once again.

**Europe vs. Asia**

Madame Chiang asked the Allies to review their priority of
Europe over Asia. In 1942, the Allies had reached a consensus to handle Hitler first and Japan afterwards. Madame Chiang pointed out that the Allies' knowledge of Japan was shallow: they once downplayed Japan and were surprised by Pearl Harbor; the subsequent adjustment overestimated Japan's capacity until China held it effectively. As a result, an underestimate of Japan seemed to prevail again. She stressed that Japan was physically stronger than Germany although it was still not impossible to defeat it. But the Allies would have to engage Japan right away before it grew too powerful to beat. Her contention caused heated discussion on the following day.

Those who felt attracted by her logic did not come strictly from a strategically rational point of view. Many Americans disliked the Japanese in the first place. Japanese Americans were ill treated during the war in spite of the very cherished criterion of human rights. This certainly had to do with the experience with Pearl Harbor. Many Americans found Japan more an unfamiliar and thus uncomfortable opponent than Germany. In addition, probably due to the US missionary connection with China, the American sympathy for China was much more straightforward than for Russia.

Nonetheless, commentators understood that one did not win war through sympathy and thus worried that Congressmen would intervene inappropriately to switch the war focus away from Europe, a move which Hitler had unsuccessfully attempted through some peace overtures. If Madame Chiang was convincing to them, Hitler could benefit as a result. Public reactions can be broken down into two camps—one arguing that the US should gather resources to curb Japan from further growing and the other suggesting that China should hang in there on its own for a little longer until the war in Europe was over.

Madame Chiang's view that Japan held more resources than Germany caused concern, because the current thinking held that Japan could be finished within weeks after defeating Germany. Which of the two were richer in resources was hard to tell, yet the fact Japan had much of Chinese land under its control was true indeed. This might become troublesome if Japan utilized its advantage in China to mount further military actions. On the other hand, this advantage was precisely what Japan's "continental policy" was driving at. Even though it was unlikely to change its priority on Europe, the United Nations should at least do its best to support war
in China. Psychological support must be based on concrete material support. One writer noted:

...the United Nations cannot afford not to assist China up to the limit of their resources—and as speedily as possible. For ourselves, we should regard a Chungking collapse as unlikely, but we can imagine, quite easily, Japanese successes in China which would make it harder than it is today for Chungking to help the United Nations; and, simultaneously, might make some elements in Free China wonder whether the United Nations are worth helping—at the price demanded of China by existing military conditions.²⁹

If the Chinese felt hurt emotionally, the final victory of the Allies would not necessarily settle the role that China could play stably in the post-war system. The American media realized that this was an element any sensible strategic thinking must take into account:

But China feels let down. China wants more aid, wants action now. And unless this aid is extended in quantity and in time, we may expect that American prestige will suffer. This will be an important factor in the postwar situation.³⁰

Typical military analyses would not consider the intangible, long-term effects of a specific resource allocation such as giving China few more fighters. Indeed Madame Chiang did not meet with the military. She did spend some time with the Commander in Chief, President Roosevelt, who, as a popularly elected head of state, would have to heed public opinion, although Madame Chiang might not have great personal influence over him. In addition, other parts of Asia including Australia, the Philippines, and the Pacific islands could share the same feelings expressed by her. American generals in these areas had already requested more support, setting a favorable context to Madame Chiang's speech. China did not unite with these areas to increase the pressure on the Allies, though:

She spoke in the wake of decisions made at Casablanca which, we must infer, were distinctly
not altogether to the liking of China. These decisions were to carry the war to Hitler and Mussolini now, and settle with Japan later. What China fears, and there is echo in Australia and the Philippines, is that by the time a decision is reached in Europe, Japan will have fattened into a foe most difficult to defeat.\textsuperscript{31}

To America, the “unusual restraint” in Madame Chiang's speech was marked by her reluctance to fully uncover the sufferings of her people or to involve other Asian allies in her pursuit of an Asia-first war strategy. The implication was nonetheless profound. That is, China's value as the most important ally to the United States in the Far East would quickly expire whenever the United States alone would have to face Japan in the near future. If this should happen before Germany succumbs, the priority on Europe would inevitably be diverted. The question posed to the United States was also why Great Britain and Russia could not effectively hold Germany and leave the United States to finish Japan? What was so urgent in Europe that could overshadow Japan's rapid rise in Asia?\textsuperscript{32} Finally, although the American people might not really understand Madame Chiang's appeal, many were still willing to accept her point of view. This was particularly the case in North Carolina, where her father had gone to college (Trinity College, the predecessor of Duke University). According to a local report, the Christian general, Madame Chiang's husband, won “affection and admiration” of the local people. Moreover, a number of soldiers from North Carolina were fighting “valiantly in China.”\textsuperscript{33}

The cold fact of the moment, though, was that supplies to China often stopped at the Indian border; this explained why the United States was lukewarm in its efforts to support China. Russia was another hope for China, but this would not happen before Germany was defeated. Unlike China, Russia and Japan had signed a mutual non-aggression pact, which allowed the former to concentrate on Germany. Some in America believed that once Germany was defeated, Russia would be ready to help on the Asian front. This was not forthcoming yet:

With the air transport service expanded to its maximum, however, the “bottleneck” will remain for bulky cargo until the Japanese are driven out of
Burma by a combined land, sea, and air offensive and Chinese Pacific ports, following the crushing of the Japanese fleet, are again opened to surface cargo carriers, unless Russian policy toward Japan undergoes a change.34

On the other hand, some argued that the United States had not let Asia down. This was indicated by the American involvement in Burma. The original “limited offensive” in Solomons-New Guinea had been expanded to include Burma in 1943. The whole purpose of this operation was to break open the route of supply to China:

In other words, the trend of our strategy would seem to indicate that our military leaders do not consider Japan a minor foe, and that they have no intention of permitting the Japanese to become undisputed masters of the Far East while Hitler is being liquidated. However, it is true that our operations in the Pacific have not been of the nature which would bring quick and direct assistance to the Chinese, and this is a fault which we would do well to correct as rapidly as possible. The barriers to more help to China are formidable, but the Chinese people, who have fought so gallantly and so well for five and a half years, are richly deserving of the effort necessary to smash such obstacles.35

Still, it was unrealistic to expect American leaders to adjust a Europe First strategy. This was not only because military preparation could not be reversed overnight, but also because the Asia-First idea was hardly convincing to generals in Europe who were about to claim the final victory. Madame Chiang's appeal was still welcome, since she challenged Americans to think globally, as a true leader would have to, and to tackle the task of keeping Europe first while meeting China's demand at the same time. In response to her, some sort of action must be taken to show concern for the Chinese. Indeed there was the question of why one should assume that Europe and Asia could not be treated equally:

To say now that we “cannot” wage war on two fronts at once is like saying, a couple of years ago, that we “could not” oppose Hitlerism, much as it
menaced us. If it has to be done, we can find means to do it. Madame Chiang's judgment that we must not dally about Asia cannot be shrugged off as merely a pro-Chinese plea. She understands Asia's real relation to the world perhaps better than any other public figure of our time.\(^{36}\)

The supporter of this argument added that:

May we not leave the Jap in "undisputed possession" of all his fabulous, ill-gotten gains, until we find, facing us across the Pacific, a colossus where we once thought to find a pygmy—a pygmy who could safely be left until "later," when we hoped to have "all the time in the world" to turn to and give him the thrashing he so richly deserves!\(^{37}\)

Opponents to this argument had good reasons, too. They did not deal with the potential support Madame Chiang seemed to be rallying in her attempt to reverse the Europe First thinking. Their major contention was that the United States had already helped China. True, the American people represented by their Congressmen would want to show their respect for Madame Chiang, but, according to this argument, civilians should avoid intervening in the expert opinion of military leaders. It was imperative to separate emotion from reality:

And as for America's primary concentration on Germany, and the sending of vast stores of military equipment and supplies into eastern Russia and to equip the Montgomery army for its defeat of Rommel, some decision about what to do first had to be taken by our military leaders because no nation is big enough to do everything simultaneously everywhere in the world. To the American layman there appear to be teeming reasons why the decision was not only wise, but indeed couldn't sensibly have been different. Even were those reasons not at hand, the layman, aware of his lack of much influential information, would surely place reliance in the trained soldiers to select the most sensible course of action.\(^{38}\)
That the Allies could not care equally for all who then felt anxious was an inevitability for any alliance. There was little public worry that if the Allies failed to enhance their supply to China, it would opt for a premature compromise with Japan and simply quit. Nevertheless the commentator urged the Allies to stick together to avoid being divided and broken. The most “realistic” cooperation was, accordingly, for every country to strive for “self-preservation.” Since it was more than natural for Madame Chiang to promote the idea of Asia First and feel frustrated if not satisfied, differences arising among allies were thus all right:

It is no more possible to have a peace without friction and disagreements than it is to fight a coalition war without them. But we don't give up the war and lose it just because Russian and China, for instance, might have different ideas about how the war ought to be fought. We don't give up the war just because each nation is looking out for itself.

The more conservative view questioned Madame Chiang's wisdom nonetheless. The suspicion was especially acute when the holders of this view sensed the change in mood, the Congressional which was now more favorable to China. The comment was also a bit cynical, as when some observed that even “a far less emotional people than the Americans” could not resist the “emotional appeal” by “the romantic figure.” Consequently, no one spoke for the United States, whose resources were already spread thin and whose prestige was questioned by China, Russia, Australia and Britain at the same time:

America must dispose its widely scattered power in the manner determined by the joint command for a general victory and, in the meantime, allies like Russia and China, who are attacked on their home fronts, must do the best they can there until the general situation develops to a point where substantial aid can be sent them. Roosevelt and Churchill have promised early help to China, the nature of which must be kept secret from the enemy.
Madame Chiang's speech was given at a time when Japan had just launched its spring offensive from seven different fronts. There was a complaint that Madame Chiang's choice of timing was coincidental, or perhaps even deliberate, for the purpose of arousing sympathy for China. She could not convince the hard liners anyway:

Did Madame Chiang present a complete, analytical picture of the problems of strategy and supply that must be faced in defeating fascist aggression all over the world?

Did she then argue with cold logic that the whole global task of the United Nations could be achieved more efficiently and more quickly by forgetting about Hitler, leaving the Russians to wrestle with him as best they can, and turn all our strength instead into the Asiatic theater? (original emphasis)

"Of course, she did not" was the reply the author provided. Why should military experts put priority on a place which was "farthest and most inaccessible?" The expert opinion ought to be rational, not emotional:

We are not implying that Madame Chiang was cynically appealing to American hearts rather than to American heads. She inevitably speaks from the heart. And we are morally obligated to take into account the deep emotion with which, because of her terrible suffering for so many years, China looks upon the world struggle and her place in it.

But as a leading power of the United Nations, in some respects the leading power, the United States is also obligated to determine how the whole totalitarian world can be brought to its knees—and then to go about it in such a way as to make certain of the most complete and earliest possible victory everywhere (original emphasis). The most bitter feeling was stirred when the hardliner suspected that Madame Chiang had taken the position that even "Hitler's conquest of Europe" could not concern her while indeed the United States took both Germany and Japan as enemies. That the fact that
China received relatively little support was not the evidence that China was unimportant. The real test for the military leaders was the choice of "timing" so that limited resources could achieve most across vast and various fronts, not to respond to Madame Chiang, who spoke only out of China's own perspective. Although these resentful comments might represent the opinion of many in the military, it was not in line with the generally sympathetic mood of the public.

Reactions of the Congressmen

Congressmen interrupted Madame Chiang's speech to "stand and wildly cheer" and in the House the supporters "literally rattled." The speech stirred individual congressmen who were "usually reserved" to "unashamed tears." Comments by these Congressmen appearing in newspapers the next day were better descriptions of the mood than other indicators concerning the effects of direct contact between the two civilizations, for these leaders were on the spot, were moved immediately by the scene and Madame Chiang's voice. Their reactions clearly involved a sense of mission, sometimes religion.

Senator La Follette believed the speech "ought to spur the efforts of the people of this country to give to the Chinese tangible evidences of our sincere sympathy in the form of planes, tanks, guns and ammunition, rather than in pious expressions of promises for future aid during the war and the realization of China's aspiration for independence and sovereignty in the peace."

Senator Vandenberg described the address to be "the best speech I have heard in 17 years in Congress."

Senator Lucas said, "I am in favor of giving everything we can to get aid to China."

Representative Eaton said, "Madame Chiang was sent by Almighty God to summon America to her duty."

Undersecretary of State Welles said, "It's almost impossible to use words that are sufficiently eloquent."

One representative said, "I think Roosevelt's got things backwards," suggesting "the persuasive quality" of the speech.

Representative Luce said, "Madame [Chiang] spoke in a brilliant parable. She is too proud to beg us for what is China's right, and too gracious to reproach us for what we have failed to do;"
was at once the proudest and most humble speech I have ever heard from the lips of a statesman." ...She spoke of China as an equal partner of the great nations, and every one who heard her determined that henceforth China should be treated as the great world power, militarily and spiritually, she has become in the concert of United Nations.  

Representative Smith had one word, "superb," while Representative Stanley's was "wonderful."  

Representative Rogers commented, "Everyone who heard her logical and moving appeal will demand more help for China. I thought her appreciation of our men who fought with China was very touching. Her reminder that our country and her's have an unbroken history of friendship prompts us to be worthy of that friendship and to do our utmost to furnish China with the means of driving out the cruel aggressor which has ravished her land."  

Finally, there was Representative Judd, "She went over the President's head, over the head of Congress, and straight to the American people... I do not know how those felt who were hearing her speak for the first time, but I could not help but suffer with her, as she suffered for her people." "It is one thing to know with your mind how another people has suffered, as China has suffered for five and one-half years. It's another to hear it from the lips of someone who has felt it and seen it... Madame Chiang seemed the personification of a people who have suffered and endured. There was a throb in her voice at times, which told how deeply she feels her country's need." Further, "a close reading of her speech, with an eye to the Chinese feeling for implying rather than directly expressing, will reveal a lot that could be missed by a literal reading... What she had to say about how hard it is for American soldiers in China to wait for supplies implies with more force than if she had said it has been hard for China to wait."  

Interestingly, what appeared to military analysts to be an irrational, emotional, and unscientific speech attracted political leaders in Congress. Unlike military analysts, Congressmen felt no need to restrain their feelings and thus acted truthfully in front of an obviously petite, vulnerable lady. However, being truthful to one's own feeling is not the same thing as being truthful to reality. That reality is apparently changing constantly, with China having first been a humble outsider of civilization, then a worthy pupil of American civilization. Even those who felt subverted by Madame Chiang's
call for an Asia First strategy could not resist the temptation that America, through China's plea, could comfortably accept the burden, albeit in a different time frame, of taking care of an inferior partner as implied in the image of a feminine, beseeching Madame Chiang. Congress's positive response to her speech was, therefore, also and unambiguously a positive response to the role of leading civilization granted to America by Madame Chiang.

**Conclusion**

The sole purpose of Madame Chiang's speech was to solicit prompt assistance from the United States. Thus, she would have to confront the prevailing Europe First strategy. She did this by highlighting the threat Japan had posed to the United Nations. She raised her voice or clenched her fist during her presentation, precisely and always upon those parts related to the need to counter Japan, and was able to draw applause from the floor. She stressed the development of Japan's capacity which if continuously allowed by the Allies' strategic neglect would eventually do serious damage to the Allies. Indirectly yet forcefully, this was a warning against the erroneous Europe First thinking.

The dispute concerning China's role in the war had long existed between China and the United States. European war was yet to break out when China's war of resistance against Japan, which began in 1937, was already hot and fierce. During the two-year period from 1937 through 1939, not only had countries (including the United States) which later became China's allies avoided supplying China, but most had actually remained in a close working, if not wholeheartedly friendly, relationship with Japan. This lukewarm attitude towards Japan's action in the Far East indicated first, that the violations of international norms in Asia involved no real threat to those Western statesmen who likely cared only about norms involving European countries; and secondly, that China's reluctance to engage Japan militarily between the Mukdan incident of 1931 and 1937 was based upon the calculation that no other states in the world would help China if China should have opted for war.

A sense of solicitude and inferiority explained why when Chiang Kai-shek heard that war was breaking out on the European front, he immediately announced the wish to link two fronts. This must have been the long desired chance for China to become a real
country, one that was acknowledged by the Western powers in deed as well as in word. His wish was not officially granted until Pearl Harbor, and he wasted no time declaring war on Germany and Italy. From then on, China's enemy was also the enemy of the Western Allies, whose enemy the Chinese were now more than happy to also treat as theirs. Chiang successfully called and held a military meeting of America, Russia, Britain and China in China in 1942; this was the first formal international conference in which China had ever participated as an equal partner.

Unfortunately, the subsequent exchanges between China and America brought disillusion. On the one hand, the constant quarrel between Chiang, the commander of the Far Eastern zone, and General Stilwell, the commander of the Indian zone and the chief of staff of the Far Eastern zone for the Allies, revealed to Chiang that he was not really the commander of his chief of staff. And this was obviously because he was a Chinese and his chief of staff was an American. The frustration was exacerbated when it became clear that China was not regarded as an equally important battlefield for the Allies. Before Madame Chiang visited the United States in late 1942, the Europe First strategy had already been a cause of strain between China and America. For Madame Chiang, who witnessed and in fact mediated the bellicosity between Stilwell and her husband and understood America's natural, utmost concerns for European allies, it was necessary to resort to a more subtle way of expression rather than embarrassing herself by inviting the sheer denial of China's place in the fighting on aggression against civilization.

Madame Chiang henceforth prepared her argument of Japan as a threat to human civilization which China and America together embraced, yet China alone protected at the risk of total extinction. She mentioned no word of criticism, but the whole speech was a profound criticism of American hypocrisy. She praised courageous US soldiers while the question really was if Americans felt ashamed of her praise? The praised audience could not but feel good about themselves, about Madame Chiang and about China, causing anxiety to those who thought only in military terms.

However, this anxiety could not be just a reflection of the worry that rationality might be subverted. Since the Europe First strategy presumed Europe and America to be unparalleledly the leading civilization, never had there been a need to discuss whether this strat-
egy was appropriate until Madame Chiang brought the issue with her to the United States. Her argument constructed the possibility that China would share a leading position in the civilization of mankind. And this was an argument difficult to resist because she said that it was America's achievement to lead China into the leading category. If the American public thus aroused had decided to treat China as an equal partner and enacted this nascent partnership through strategic reallocation of resources, inevitably the presumption concerning the status of leading civilization exclusively in Europe and America would be challenged.

The speech itself contributed very little to strategic thinking or political thought, especially as few would expect from an Oriental female any great ideas. The detailed attention paid to her appearance implied that China, through her, was an object to be examined. Ironically, her success was conditioned upon a patriarchal image which reinforced the American self-identity as a protector. She instilled a sense of duty in her host society and inspired a spirit of heroism. What sort of leading civilization could America be if it jettisoned its obligation towards the Chinese, who had believed, followed and almost reached the American standard? Would America lose its subjectivity and progressiveness if China were lost to aggressive/regressive Japan?

This challenge was particularly acute as it was raised by Madame Chiang, half of whose identity was American. Could Americans deny her understanding of her own, and therefore the American, political as well as religious values? If not, could Americans resist the temptation that China, at least its elite stratum, had turned American? To help China, as the logic went, was not different from helping Britain. If she could convince the audience that Japan was now more menacing than Germany, the Europe First strategy would be debatable. In short, she did not come from outside the Western civilization, she cleverly spoke from within it. She did not question Euro-centrism, she expanded it.

For Madame herself, this was a comfortable position to take. Yet for the Chinese in general, this line of presentation presumed an historically inferior and retarded image. They would lack confidence every time they faced the West; they would be alienated from their own culture, which had been declared outdated. Madame Chiang would not find this annoying, because she personally had the need to be accepted by her Chinese home folks. If China turned
utterly nationalistic, her Western background would become a liability. On the contrary, only when the Western values were worshiped and followed could she safely shift between cultures and still enjoy self-respect.

From the American perspective, Madame Chiang's achievement was a celebration of American values. Her Oriental, feminine appearance maintained room for imagination by her audience concerning China's status while her Occidental, rational argumentation evidenced the triumph of Western training. She herself was a combination of Oriental-Occidental, male-female characteristics. While most people feel more comfortable with a clear identification and threatened when this sense of clarity is obscured, Madame Chiang provided an alternative. She was not a static mix of double identities which could have caused anxiety for any of those with only one fantasized track of identity. Rather, she presented a dynamic process and a validation that her original, yet secondary, identity was turning American. And the completion of this process required the assistance of Americans, a sort of White-Man's-Burden metaphor. What Madame Chiang could not determine was, though, whether the Western media, which soared to cheer her, would leave behind an image of China for later generations as an about-wester- ernized culture or a permanently feminized people.

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