



Madame Chiang Kai-shek and Her China

Samuel C. Chu

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When Soong Meiling, better known to the world as Madame Chiang Kai-shek, died in October 2003, her life of over a century almost exactly paralleled America's own century of direct involvement with Asia, which began with the acquisition of the Philippines. Alone among Western Powers, the United States championed an Open Door policy toward China. The Madame's Christian family and her American education perfectly suited the American aspirations for a free and democratic China. And when Japan threatened both countries, the Madame, in perfect English, spoke directly to Americans as the heroic symbol of Chinese resistance. Never mind that she and her husband turned increasingly authoritarian and that the Guomindang was defeated by Chairman Mao Zedong's communists. And never mind that she never really connected with the vast majority of Chinese living in the countryside. Today, as China is again catching up to the West in leaps and bounds, it is almost as if Soong Meiling, ending her life after a Rip Van Winkle-like retirement in the United States, is ushering in another century, when new Open Door Americans look toward China again. Here for a new generation of general readers and scholars are thoughtful reflections on the significant impact of a major twentieth-century figure who fascinated Americans for decades and had a significant impact on American perceptions of China.

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