1943
China at the Crossroads

Joseph W. Escherick
Matthew T. Combs
EDITORS

East Asia Program
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York 14853
After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States and China formalized their alliance by signing the Declaration of the United Nations on January 1, 1942, along with twenty-four other countries. This group of signatories now regarded China as one of the four Great Powers of the war. Franklin Roosevelt and his administration, by treating China as an equal ally in the war, were also in keeping with the internationalist "one world" philosophy championed by Wendell Willkie, who had lost the presidential election to Roosevelt in 1940 but was invited by Roosevelt to serve as his personal representative abroad to signal U.S. unity regarding the war effort. Yet this sudden elevation of China's status, according to Zhang Baijia, would nevertheless "create excessive expectations in both countries and obscure many difficulties." This gap between expectations and self-interest was all too evident in the

1 Willkie accepted the status of personal representative rather than ambassador-at-large because it gave him official status without the constraints on his freedom of expression. See Steve Neal, Dark Horse: A Biography of Wendell Willkie (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 232, 236.

1943 visit of Mme. Chiang Kai-shek (Song Meiling) to America a year later.

In the wake of Pearl Harbor, advisors in Roosevelt’s administration felt that a visit by Mme. Chiang would signal to the world and the American public that the U.S. alliance with China could form a viable alternative to Japan’s vision of pan-Asian unity. Not only was she the wife of China’s leader, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, but her extensive U.S. education would allow her to connect easily with the American public. In a letter to Mme. Chiang in 1942, Eleanor Roosevelt invited her to the White House, stating that she and Franklin felt that her visit would enable them to get to know her better, become more familiar with China’s problems, and “serve the ends of publicity” by demonstrating the close bond between China and the United States to the American public. During Willkie’s visit to China at the end of 1942, he enthusiastically pressed family members to encourage Mme. Chiang to visit, calling her the “perfect ambassador.” Coupled with Mme. Chiang’s desire to consult doctors in the United States about her health, she was persuaded in favor of a visit.

Measured by Eleanor’s goal of serving the ends of publicity, Mme. Chiang’s trip appeared to exceed all expectations. According to Life magazine, on February 19, 1943, Mme. Chiang “captivated,” “amazed,” and “dizzied” members of the U.S. Congress in back-to-back speeches to the Senate and then the House “without a single bobble or ill-timed pause, in a rich, concise voice that clipped off the words better than most Americans can pronounce them.” After her speech, a House member stood up to say that he would introduce a bill, which passed by the end of the year, to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. By her tour’s end two months later, she was a celebrity, received by enthusiastic crowds in New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Hollywood. Her stage presence on tour, her reception in the media, and the recent American and British renunciation of the unequal treaties all projected a picture of China joining the Allied community on equal footing and laid to rest its image as the “sick man of Asia.”

With the support of the American media and the Roosevelt administration, Mme. Chiang presented herself to the American public as a confident, cosmopolitan Chinese woman, suggesting that by extension, the Sino-American alliance was a friendship between equals and that Americans could embrace the Chiangs as the benevolent and popular rulers of China. Nonetheless, this chapter contends that while making a persuasive impression upon the American public as the first lady of a junior Great Power following in the footsteps of the United States, Mme. Chiang’s visit would have unintended consequences. Most importantly, the success of the trip further inflated what John Fairbank later described as the Free China bubble, when Americans and, even more troubling, Chiang Kai-shek and Mme. Chiang largely ignored the shortcomings and disturbing trends emerging within Chiang’s Nationalist regime. As we shall see, this bubble also led to excessive expectations on both sides of the alliance: China felt that it deserved more aid from the United States for the war effort, and the U.S. government felt no need to meet China’s request even as citizens across the United States opened their pocketbooks to help. Another unintended consequence, the chapter argues, was that the trip also inflated Mme. Chiang’s own sense of power. She not only acted more aggressively in issues related to America upon her return to China, which would have important consequences for Sino-American relations, but appeared to undergo a change of heart within herself, leading to a more pessimistic assessment of China’s fate. In essence, Mme. Chiang’s tour can be viewed as a high point in both China’s and the Chiangs’ international prestige, but one that neither would be able to sustain for long. To understand this great irony of the tour, this investigation focuses specifically on how her deployment of gender, race, and democratic values contributed both to her success in improving China’s status in the world and to masking tensions within the Sino-American alliance and contradictions in the Chiang leadership that would later lead to the decline of both.

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5 Hannah Pakula, The Last Empress: Madame Chiang Kai-shek and the Birth of Modern China (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 422.
Willkie, confident that Mme. Chiang's visit would take the United States by storm, attempted to persuade Mme. Chiang and her family to accept Eleanor Roosevelt's invitation: "Someone from this section with brains and persuasiveness and moral force must help educate us about China.... We would listen to her as to no one else." Indeed, the oratorical and interpersonal skills that she brought to this task and her determination to ensure that her health issues would not get in the way of her public message successfully portrayed China as a robust country with which Americans could happily ally.

Although the sheer force of her personality would serve Sino-U.S. relations well, the American media helped magnify her effectiveness by representing China as a country that was following in America's democratic footsteps. Henry R. Luce, editor of the widely read and influential Time and Life magazines, clearly viewed China as a vessel for American evangelicalism and economic cooperation. He also saw the Chiangs as ideal Christian leaders and put them on the cover of Time in 1937 as International Man and Wife of the Year. His paternalistic understanding of China resonated with a broader American mission to spread liberty and democracy to the world. Mme. Chiang's background squared easily with Luce's view. Not only had her father traveled to America at the age of fifteen and eventually received a theology degree from Vanderbilt University in 1885, but Mme. Chiang and her siblings also all received American educations. Mme. Chiang, the fourth of six children, began her education in America at the age of nine and graduated from Wellesley at nineteen. Her English was so fluent that upon her return to China, she had to relearn Chinese. Her excellent command of English, familiarity with American culture, and Christian faith appeared to narrow the differences between the two countries. Indeed, even before Mme. Chiang uttered a single public word on American soil, she had already drawn significant attention from the American public. Despite opening her tour in "icebox frosty" February conditions, nearly 6,000 requests for tickets were received.
to fill the 673 available seats in the House galleries in anticipation of her speeches to the U.S. Congress. 10

In her addresses to Congress, Madame Chiang personified the Sino-American bond and persuasively argued that America needed to aid China by drawing on its understanding of American political culture. In her opening salutations, Madame Chiang immediately underlined her knowledge of the American democratic process by making clear that her intended audience was not simply the legislators but the American people at large, announcing to the Senate that she was "literally speaking to the American people" and saying to the House, "I am overwhelmed by the warmth and spontaneity of the welcome of the American people, of whom you are the representatives." 11

Unafraid to present an agenda that differed from that of the American president, Madame Chiang urged America to adopt an Asia First strategy for fighting the war instead of the administration's Europe First policy. To persuade Congress, she reminded the members of the friendship between China and America with the story of one of General Doolittle's aviators who had been forced to bail out in the interior of China after a bombing run in Tokyo. The downed airman was greeted by Chinese villagers who "laughed and almost hugged him, and greeted him like a long lost brother," making him feel like "he had come home when he saw our people" despite never having been to China before. Like this American serviceman in China, Madame Chiang told members of Congress, she too felt that she was coming home on this trip to America. Through such anecdotes, she infused personal warmth and not just political calculation into the U.S.-China relationship. 12

Madame Chiang also advocated for a global, universalist, and humanist point of view before Congress, declaring that "peace should not be punitive in spirit and should not be provincial or nationalistic or even continental in concept, but universal in scope and humanitarian in action, for modern science has so annihilated distance that what affects one people must of necessity affect all other people." 13 With vivid language highlighting mutual friendship and universal values, Madame Chiang's ultimate goal was to urge Congress and the American people to provide China with military aid and support. Just as the previous Congress had declared war on the Japanese aggressors, she asserted, the job of the current Congress was to "help win the war and create and uphold a lasting peace." 14

Time's Washington correspondent, Frank McNaughton, observed that members of Congress, many of whom were skilled orators themselves, believed that Madame Chiang's delivery had been unequalled in twenty years. 15 Following his wife's tour closely from China, her husband, delighted by her performance, wrote in his diary, "The warm reception by the audience of Congress has been unprecedented. Ten years of hardship to perfect her scholarly and ethical endeavors are realized today, finally fulfilling her life's aspiration." 16 In important ways, this personal apogee in Madame Chiang's career coincided with the high point of American perceptions of China's significance on the international stage.

Just as forthright as she had been in her speech to Congress, Madame Chiang continued to hold her own during an exchange with Roosevelt at a joint press conference the following day. In response to a reporter's criticism that China could be using more of its manpower in the war effort, Madame Chiang replied that more men could fight if more munitions were sent over. Roosevelt then explained that America would supply its ally with such support "just as fast as the Lord will let us," to which Madame Chiang quickly rejoined, "The Lord helps those who help themselves." Her response elicited much laughter in the room and was widely reported in the papers. 17 Via humor and wit, Madame Chiang demonstrated her ease in going head to head with a great power and that by extension, China was rightly a partner of equal standing. (Her husband was less amused by

10 McNaughton, "Madame Chiang in the U.S. Capitol."
12 Madame Chiang, "Senate Speech."
the exchange, writing in his diary that the president's "words were close to ludicrous, making excuses" to avoid a direct commitment for American aid to China, although he was unsure "if his meaning was truly like this."

Mme. Chiang next traveled to New York, where she addressed a crowd of 17,000 at Madison Square Garden and an audience of 3,000 Chinese Americans at Carnegie Hall. In Boston, she addressed her alma mater, Wellesley. Her next stop was Chicago, followed by San Francisco and finally Los Angeles, where Henry Luce and David O. Selznick, producer of Gone with the Wind, gave Mme. Chiang a Hollywood-style welcome, including a parade and reception attended by 200 Hollywood stars in her honor. Her speech on April 4 at the Hollywood Bowl to 30,000 people, the largest audience of her tour, marked the end of her speaking tour.

Several of Mme. Chiang's qualities reinforced her portrayal of China as an emerging Great Power. As noted earlier, she had impeccable English diction and an eloquence that sent reporters scrambling for their dictionaries. The three-time Pulitzer prize-winning Carl Sandburg praised Mme. Chiang as a natural orator, "a marvel at timing her pauses and making each word count in relation to what goes before and comes after. Yet she doesn't know how she does it any more than Ty Cobb knew which one of his eleven ways of sliding to second he was using." Another reporter remarked that after having trouble understanding Willkie's Midwestern accent as he was introducing Mme. Chiang at Madison Square Garden, he was relieved when Mme. Chiang finally began speaking, as she had the "finest diction America has heard through the air."

Another strength was her knowledge of American history. As one letter to the editor noted, "Madame Chiang knows more about American history than most Americans; speaks better American than most Americans; understands the genius of American liberty better than most Americans;"
icans. I know not what course others may take, but for me I'm going to learn more about my country. This I owe to Madame Chiang—a great teacher.

Another much-praised personal quality was her excellent memory for people, which allowed her to personalize her interaction with others and imbue the alliance with a sense of warmth. In one reported incident, she was on her way to a waiting car after receiving a key to Chicago from the mayor when she spotted in the crowd a classmate from Wellesley whom she had not seen in twenty-six years. Calling out to her classmate by her nickname, Rommie, and grasping her hand for a minute before she was pressed forward toward the waiting car moved her former classmate to tears. Another newspaper account noted that at a Hollywood reception for two hundred film folks, Mme. Chiang was able to say something personal to almost every individual, such as asking after Joan Bennett's children and thanking Claudette Colbert for reading her letter to American children on a China relief broadcast.

Americans were also impressed by her ability to persevere through the tour despite suffering from severe health problems. Mme. Chiang had taken advantage of her American visit to consult American doctors regarding longstanding health problems, including debilitating outbreaks of hives, severe abdominal pain, and sinus problems. Immediately upon her arrival in the country on November 27, 1942, Mme. Chiang had checked into New York Presbyterian Hospital, where she convalesced until early February 1943. Her condition was serious enough that she was forced to decline several invitations, such as one to receive an honorary degree from Princeton University. Upon her release, her physician, Dr. Robert Loeb, urged her to maintain a light schedule to prevent a relapse.

But despite her doctor's vigorous objections, Mme. Chiang kept up a grueling schedule on her American tour. At times, her illness led to cancellations and delays. She arrived in Chicago a week later than planned, for instance, and had to present a battle flag to representatives of Chinese air cadets, who were in training at Thunderbird, Arizona, while convalescing in her hotel suite in Los Angeles. Yet according to the press coverage, her American audiences admired her efforts to soldier on. The well-known celebrity gossip columnist Hedda Hopper, noting that Mme. Chiang sometimes appeared in pain when delivering her speeches, reported that her demonstration of self-discipline was such that, Hopper said, "For the first time since I've lived in Hollywood I've seen our personalities willing and anxious to take a back seat—to Mme. Chiang Kai-shek." Although her husband's diaries revealed a twinge of guilt that he had "examined the matter carelessly and allowed her to struggle forward alone" despite her health, he nevertheless believed that her efforts would "result in a fine outcome for our country's future." Finally, virtually everyone responded to her beauty. During a reception at the Drake Hotel in Chicago, Mme. Chiang's entrance was reportedly met with applause and gasps of "Isn't she lovely!" and "Isn't she beautiful—much prettier than her pictures!" The society editor of the Chicago Daily News, June Parsons, felt that "no photograph could ever capture the charm of that friendly smile. She looks much sweeter, much more feminine than any camera has ever shown her." Her sense of style also inspired American fashion designers such as Maurice Rentner, whose collection that summer included sprays of Chinese embroidered flowers and black silk braids.

Despite the numerous tensions simmering below the surface of Sino-American relations, Mme. Chiang's public persona suggested equal stand-

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22 "Madame Chiang" [Letter to the editor], Chicago Times, March 1, 1943, Henry S. Evans, clippings file.
25 "Department of State: Division of Foreign Affairs, Memorandum of Conversation," February 16, 1943, Stanley K. Hornbeck, Box 49, Folder 1 of 4, Chiang Kai-shek and Mme. Chiang, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California.
26 Henry S. Evans, clippings file.
27 E.g., wire photo, Kansas City Star, April 7, 1943, Henry S. Evans, clippings file.
29 Chiang Kai-shek diary, March 2, 1943, Box 43, Folder 2.
Mme. Chiang's Inspired Navigation of Gender Expectations

Although Mme. Chiang's gender might have communicated a subordinate status to the American public and policymakers, she deftly circumvented many of the constraints typically imposed by gender. Despite the paternalistic attitudes of the period, Mme. Chiang's savvy deployment of gender further reinforced the credibility of her portrayal of China as an equal partner and led by a progressive Chinese couple.

According to T. Christopher Jespersen's study of American images of China, Mme. Chiang, as only the second woman in history to address Congress (the first being Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands), was perceived by American women from all walks of life as someone who represented the potential for where gendered relations could go. Eleanor Roosevelt, for instance, felt that Mme. Chiang's reception in Congress "marked the recognition of a woman who through her own personality and her own service, has achieved a place in the world, not merely as a wife... but as a representative of her people." At the other end of the social spectrum, old Mrs. Moy of Chicago's Chinatown told a reporter that Mme. Chiang's visit finally gave her the courage to wear the "newest fashion" from China, making her feel "emancipated" and as belonging to the "New China."

Mme. Chiang's personal relationship with her husband also appeared congruent with her public persona and her projection of the progressive nature of the Chiang's reign over China. From the beginning of her marriage, according to biographers, Mme. Chiang insisted upon maintaining a degree of autonomy. Approximately a month after their marriage, for instance, Mme. Chiang wrote to her college classmate, Emma Mills, "Marriage should [not] erase or absorb one's individuality. For this reason I want to be myself, and not as the General's wife." Although during the early years of their marriage Mme. Chiang avoided the spotlight and appeared in public only with Chiang, she eventually came into her own as a public figure in China, leading fund-raising campaigns for a military hospital and establishing schools for the "warphans" of Chiang's soldiers. Her persistent efforts to ensure some autonomy within her marriage was no doubt helped by her education in America and the prominence of her birth family.

Particularly in the area of Sino-American relations, Mme. Chiang was a true partner with her husband. Working on behalf of Chiang during her visit, she translated his intentions in ways that would resonate with American audiences. In her speech to Congress, Chiang had instructed her to emphasize the five points of traditional friendship between China and America, the peril of Japanese ambitions, and the importance of strong leaders like Washington, Lincoln, Jesus, Confucius, and Sun Yat-sen. Rather than slavishly list the Generalissimo's points, however, Mme. Chiang brought his message to life. Instead of simply reminding Congress

33 Jespersen, American Images, 97.
of the dangers of Japan's ambitions, she deftly wielded her words and understanding of Western culture to make the point memorable: it was not in Congress's interest, she declared, to "allow Japan to continue not only as a vital potential threat but as a waiting sword of Damocles, ready to descend at a moment's notice." 38

Although some China watchers, such as Owen Lattimore, a personal adviser to Chiang, had their doubts about how much clout Mme. Chiang had in domestic affairs, 39 she appears to have been one of Chiang's more important advisors. She was indisputably part of the inner circle of family advisers that included her siblings, T.V. Soong (Song Ziwen) and Mme. Kung (Song Ailing), and brother-in-law, H.H. Kung (Kong Xiangxi). 40 Although Mme. Chiang was no coequal in every aspect of Chiang's rule, at least in the area of Sino-American relations she played an active, assertive, and sometimes independent role from her husband. Indeed, she was probably more effective as an international spokesperson than as a domestic adviser-and an even more important one after her U.S. tour than before.

Despite the widespread perception of Mme. Chiang as a powerful and progressive woman, other portrayals in the American press threatened to distract from the strong female presence that she projected during her visit. First, male reporters and observers tended to emphasize Mme. Chiang's sensuality to the point of diminishing her abilities. Regarding Mme. Chiang's physical appeal and choice of dress, for instance, Newsweek honed in on her choice of the traditional qipao or cheongsam dress, noting that "she wore a long, tight-fitting black gown, the skirt slit almost to the knee," which John Gittings of the Guardian later observed "was, of course, as revealing of American orientalising fancies as of the garment that they praised." 41 Female reporters noted her physical appeal, too. As one claimed, "In a few short minutes, Mme. Chiang had Congress in the palm of her hand. ... Petite as an ivory figurine, Mme. Chiang stands barely five feet tall in her high-heeled American slippers." 42 But despite the sexism of such comments, the sensual and fashionable dimensions of her appearance ultimately appeared to work in her favor, attracting attention without obscuring her message. True to Luce's view of China as an aspirant to American-style democracy, the Time editorial response to her addresses before Congress asserted that Mme. Chiang was not just some "glamor-queen" whose goal was "to charm Congress away," but rather an eloquent and important voice from Asia "propounding the very principles that the Fathers had been at such pains to develop." 43

Ironically, Mme. Chiang also played into the trope of the damsel in distress. Her argument for aid to China fit into the larger picture of what Emily S. Rosenberg has characterized as the masculine assumptions about women where "wartime exaltation of family ... and of male bonding amid danger and violence widened the gulf between social constructions of femininity and masculinity." 44 These assumptions would spill into the international arena with portrayals of U.S. relations with weaker nations in gendered terms: Latin American countries, for instance, were often depicted as "fair maidens" in need of Uncle Sam's protection. 45 In a variation of this trope, an American businessman, Carl Crow, depicted the Sino-American alliance as Uncle Sam wooing a Chinese damsel in a cheongsam and carrying a parasol with American wares. In Mme. Chiang's case, the American media portrayed her as the petite Chinese fair maiden sur-

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38 Mme. Chiang, "House Speech.
39 Lattimore believed that Mme. Chiang had no influence over the planning or execution of Chiang's international or domestic policy, claiming that he and Chiang got down to business only after Mme. Chiang retired for the evening. Owen Lattimore, China Memoirs: Chiang Kai-shek and the War against Japan, trans. Fajiko Isono (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1959), 138-39. In any case, an important exception in terms of domestic policy was her efforts during Chiang's kidnapping in 1936. Mme. Chiang risked her life to come to Xi'an, took part in high-level talks to secure his release, and likely played a critical role in saving Chiang's life. Samuel C. Chu, ed., Madame Chiang Kai-shek and Her China (Norwalk, CT: Eastbridge, 2005), 161.
40 Lattimore, China Memoirs, 142.
rounded by tall American men who could rescue her and China from their enemies.\textsuperscript{46}

Another gendered characterization of Mme. Chiang was as China's first lady, a position that Eleanor Roosevelt was already elevating and redefining in what Maurine Beasley describes as a "struggle between the Victorian idea of womanly subordination and the modern concept of self-actualization."\textsuperscript{47} By representing herself as her husband's helpmate rather than as a public figure in her own right and by defining her involvement in public affairs in moral rather than political terms, Eleanor was able to deflect or defend herself against charges that she was stepping outside her place. Mme. Chiang similarly signaled that she was upholding the Victorian ideal of womanhood through her appearance and publicized activities such as her work with war orphans and in the New Life Movement, even as both women were at the same time redefining women's roles. In any case, Mme. Chiang seemed to have a knack for not being trapped by these roles or censured for stepping out of them. She could easily transition from being the "mother" of war orphans to discussing military logistics and aid.

Mme. Chiang's varied activities all contributed to what Jespersen describes as "her image as a woman who had moved beyond the traditional confines placed upon women by both Chinese and American societies."\textsuperscript{48} The impact of her 1943 U.S. visit on this image cannot be overstated. None of the subsequent first ladies of the People's Republic of China or the Republic of China has come close to Mme. Chiang's international stature. Beyond the personal acclaim it earned her, the perception that Chiang Kai-shek rightly valued his wife's opinions and respected her talents with regard to international issues suggested an enlightened leadership and country that could stand on an equal footing with the United States.

\textsuperscript{46} Carl Crow,\textit{ Four Hundred Million Customers: The Experiences—Some Happy, Some Sad of an American in China and What They Taught Him} (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), 283; Jespersen,\textit{ American Images}, 88.
\textsuperscript{48} Jespersen,\textit{ American Images}, 97.

\textbf{Complicating Tensions in Mme. Chiang's Deployment of Race}

Race, however, was a harder issue for Mme. Chiang to navigate than gender, in large part because much of Sino-American relations prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor was based on racism against the Chinese and Chinese Americans. Although she was sharply aware of this, her overriding concern with seeking American aid for China sometimes made her complicit in reinforcing the racial status quo. In her speech to Congress, for instance, she avoided mentioning imperialism or racial injustice within the context of Sino-American relations. Mme. Chiang knew that her allusion to 160 years of Sino-American friendship was inaccurate—for one thing, the Americans (jointly with the British) had operated a foreign concession in her home city of Shanghai—but she supported this public fiction so as not to alienate those whose help her country now needed.\textsuperscript{49}

Although Mme. Chiang felt comfortable calling for racial equality in off-the-cuff remarks to reporters,\textsuperscript{50} in more formal settings, she adhered to a tacit diplomatic agreement that the two countries would eschew challenging each other's national myths: Mme. Chiang would not talk about American race relations, and American officials would refrain from exposing the authoritarian nature of the Nationalist regime.

This diplomatic understanding curtailed Mme. Chiang's ability to advocate for racial equality. Thus, when the secretary of the NAACP, Walter White, invited her to participate in a panel discussion on "the question of skin color and 'white supremacy' both as a factor in winning the war and in winning the peace," she declined the opportunity.\textsuperscript{51} Pearl S. Buck, an

\textsuperscript{46} Mme. Chiang, "House Speech," \textit{Li, Madame Chiang Kai-shek}, 197.
\textsuperscript{47} One reporter asked whether she had a message for "Negro" Americans. He paraphrased her words: "I need give no message to Negroes because I consider them part and parcel of the nation. When I speak to America, I feel that the Negroes are a vital segment of the country, not to be differentiated from any other American." The reporter was clearly impressed by her response. Deton J. Brooks, Jr., "Mme. Chiang Sees Race Vital in U.S. Democracy," \textit{Chicago Defender}, March 27, 1943, 1.
American writer and novelist, was disappointed that Mme. Chiang chose not to make a public statement on the repeal of the Chinese exclusion laws at the congressional hearings during her visit. Her silence, Buck feared, would serve the purposes of a coalition that wanted the laws intact: the American Legion, some labor unions, and Southern politicians. Instead, Buck herself served as the chief spokesperson for Chinese interests at the hearings, voicing what was no doubt Mme. Chiang's own position that “democracy demanded equal treatment for Chinese with other foreign nationals; and success in the Pacific war depended on China's belief in American solidarity.”

Mme. Chiang's silence in instances such as these prevented her from broadening her base of support in America and acknowledged the subordinate position of China—she could ill afford to alienate those who had the power to aid China.

Further complicating Mme. Chiang's presentation of race was that after Pearl Harbor, Americans could justify racism toward the Japanese because they were at war but not toward their “friends,” the Chinese. Yet Americans could still exercise another kind of racism toward China in the form of “ethnocentric paternalism.” Ignoring history and the differences between the two countries, Americans now viewed the Chinese not as alien others but as would-be Americans. Observing someone like Mme. Chiang who knew their culture so well, many Americans might be misled into believing that all Chinese were similar to themselves in valuing freedom and democracy. The American media and the president did nothing to dissuade the public from this perception, as bolstering China's role as America's ally was an important goal. In Mme. Chiang's last official stop at the Hollywood Bowl, the spectacular pageantry of the occasion focused in large part on her gender, but rendered her race invisible—never once was she referred to as a “Chinese.”

Mme. Chiang's selective silence over race issues and the American tendency to render racial tensions and inequality invisible allowed the racial status quo to go unchallenged during her visit. By the end of her speaking tour, when it became clear that the sought-after aid from the U.S. government would fall far short of what was requested, the editorial page of the African American newspaper the Chicago Defender reinterpreted her initial speech to Congress along different lines: “Mme. Chiang knows that ... right now the Japanese 'sword of Damocles' is not killing white men in any great number; that for the moment, at least, it is destroying, for the most part, the Chinese, the Burmese, the Malays, the Japanese, and the Indians. Mme. Chiang knows that these are the darker races of this world. She knows that THEY are the REAL expendable of this war. ... Official Washington rose to its feet, doffed its hat, clapped its hands—and winked its eye.”

In playing into the public fiction that the Chinese were aspiring Americans, Mme. Chiang's presentations allowed her American listeners to ignore the racial dimensions of their government's Europe First policy. And without a more realistic picture of conditions in China, whether the needs and treatment of soldiers on the ground or the authoritarian tendencies of the Nationalist government, Americans were little inclined to demand accountability from China's leaders or able to make accurate and appropriate decisions about how much aid should be given. As a result, the inflation of the Free China bubble in American opinion allowed American policymakers to rationalize that whatever aid they gave China would be adequate.

Despite reinforcing the racial status quo in the formal aspects of her visit, Mme. Chiang's informal efforts to ensure the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the participation of the Chinese and Chinese Americans in the war effort made important contributions to the advancement of domestic and international racial equality in 1943. America's entry into the war in 1941 inspired a conspicuous shift in how Chinese Americans thought of themselves, and many went on to make notable contributions in the war effort. A total of 13,499, or 22 percent, of Chinese American adult males were eventually drafted or enlisted in the U.S.
Grace C. Huang

armed forces. The new work opportunities available because of the war allowed many Chinese Americans to break out of the ethnically prescribed occupations in the restaurant and laundry business, which had negatively stereotyped them, and enter into war-related employment. One member of the New York Chinatown community noted that for the first time, he felt part of an American dream and proud of Chinese heroes such as Chiang Kai-shek and Mme. Chiang Kai-shek: "It was just a whole different era and in the community we began to feel very good about ourselves."

This new political reality had brought into sharp relief the hypocrisy of the Chinese Exclusion Act that barred Chinese laborers from coming to America. Within these changing racial dynamics, Mme. Chiang appeared on the American stage to give voice to the injustices of discrimination against Chinese, which she and her family had experienced firsthand. Her family may have excelled during their time in America, but they still faced discrimination, and Mme. Chiang was sensitive to these slights. Although her father had been ordained as a missionary in America, his American sponsors nonetheless changed his status to "native preacher" upon his return to China, a demotion that gave him lower pay than his expatriate counterparts. Mme. Chiang confided to Owen Lattimore that when her father would report back to American missionaries in Shanghai after proselytizing in remote areas of China, they never invited him to sit. She felt that this oversight spoke volumes; the Americans had treated her father more like a servant than a colleague.

No matter how Americanized Mme. Chiang and her siblings appeared to be, they had also been on the receiving end of discrimination during their years in the United States. In a speech to a Chinese audience in New York's Chinatown, she noted that as a child, she and her two older sisters had been barred from attending public schools in Georgia because of their race and had to be tutored in the home of Dr. W.N. Ainsworth. She remarked to Lattimore that Americans had a racist and condescending attitude toward her, describing their judgment of her: "Oh yes, she is clever, of course, but after all she is only a Chinese."

Perhaps because of her sensitivity to such slights, Lattimore noted that Mme. Chiang always insisted upon top ceremonial protocol when visiting the United States. This insistence was especially true in Mme. Chiang's interactions with someone like Winston Churchill, who, unlike Roosevelt, had a frankly imperialist understanding of the world order. Churchill's personal physician, Lord Moran (Charles McMormor Wilson), noted that when Churchill spoke of India or China, one was readily reminded that Churchill was prone to Victorian orientalizing. After listening quietly to Roosevelt about the need to be China's friend, Churchill later spoke privately and derisively to Moran of the Chinese as "little yellow men." In public, Churchill also made clear that he did not consider China an equal partner in the alliance. The night before Mme. Chiang was to address an audience in Chicago, Churchill gave a radio address in which he stated that the aim of the war in Asia was to reclaim the lost imperial territories taken by the Japanese—a pointed insult to China and to critics of colonialism. Furthermore, he made no mention of China's participation in postwar plans, saying only that China would be "rescued" from Japan.

It is within such a context that Mme. Chiang's insistence on protocol should be understood. In May 1943, Churchill requested a meeting with Mme. Chiang at the White House. At the time, Mme. Chiang had finished her cross-country tour and was staying at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. Rather than accepting Churchill's request, Mme. Chiang asked that Churchill travel to see her in New York instead. Churchill likewise declined. Roosevelt tried to solve this impasse by inviting Mme. Chiang to dine with himself and Churchill at the capital. Although the Generalissimo encouraged his wife to meet Churchill as a political courtesy and to avoid bearing grudges or bargaining with the prime minister, she never-
theless refused, leading Chiang to criticize her for “stubbornly sticking to her position and paying no heed to [our] policy.” To the consternation of the British government, Mme. Chiang also never responded to its open invitation to visit that year. While Chiang had initially urged her not to visit on March 26, he reversed position on May 15, asking her to accept if Churchill asked, yet Mme. Chiang continued to cite health reasons for declining the visit. Although some, including T.V. Soong himself, may have interpreted her actions as spoiled behavior, another interpretation was that Mme. Chiang insisted on equal treatment or better, especially from those who took for granted a hierarchical view of race in the world order.

In a letter to Roosevelt’s White House economic advisor, Lauchlin Currie, in May 1942, Mme. Chiang had voiced her concerns that the “Democracies,” and specifically the British, had yet to accept China as an equal partner. If China was treated this way even though China was necessary for final victory, she worried about her country’s treatment after the war, when it was no longer needed. She warned, “Unless China after the war is accepted as an equal in international affairs, the Chinese people will rise in such indignation that there may be another war far more terrible than the war which we are now passing through.” In this regard, Mme. Chiang gave voice to her compatriots’ own desire to be treated as an equal by other nations. Konshin Shah, a pilot for Chiang and a protege of Mme. Chiang, was representative of the Chinese admirers of the Chiangs when he stated, “For me, Generalissimo and Madame Chiang rescued us from being a downtrodden country .... My generation regards the Chiangs as a godsent couple for uplifting our country to an equal status in the world.”

Fittingly, in response to Mme. Chiang’s speech to the House of Rep-resentatives, the Democratic representative Martin J. Kennedy of New York noted that he would “take this auspicious occasion, in [Mme. Chiang’s] gracious presence” to introduce his bill to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act. Mme. Chiang made sure to build on this momentum during her visit, if only on an informal basis. At a dinner party several months later when Congress was holding hearings about the act, she stressed the importance of its repeal to several key congressmen, impressing upon them that the repeal would boost Chinese morale and support the war effort. In the end, Roosevelt would sign the law into effect on December 17, 1943, after the Cairo Conference had concluded. In some ways, the repeal was merely symbolic, as it allowed only 105 Chinese to enter annually, and an average of only 59 per year came during the first ten years. Nonetheless, it was an important step toward racial equality. One Chinatown resident remarked, “Now that I have become a naturalized citizen, I am going to change my birthday. Henceforth, it will be on the Fourth of July.”

Shifting American attitudes about the Chinese and Mme. Chiang’s sensitivity to racial discrimination worked in tandem to open a path for an understanding on American aid to China on the basis of mutual respect. One letter to the editor, for instance, remarked that the “talented and accomplished Mme. Chiang Kai-shek” only brought into sharp relief “our bad treatment of the Chinese people in the past,” and made clear that “no amount of lend-lease goods to the Chinese can now atone for such past treatment,” thereby agreeing with Chiang Kai-shek’s assessment that his wife had conveyed the appropriate meaning on her American trip: “That China’s request for American aid and materials is not a gift [to China] but a basic responsibility.”

Despite taking care not to embarrass Americans by publicly criticizing their racism toward people of color at home and internationally, Mme. Chiang credibly pushed for racial equality during her visit. Her speeches
to members of the Chinatown community reflected this desire publicly; her interactions with Churchill reflected it privately. Much of the outpouring of private aid to China that resulted from her visit was given in the spirit of admiration and respect for Mme. Chiang and China. The Toledo and Milwaukee Chinese communities, for instance, contributed $2,500 (which, adjusted for inflation, would be almost $35,000 today). Mrs. Emmons Blaine, daughter of Cyrus McCormick, the founder of the International Harvester Company, contributed $100,000 and told Mme. Chiang that the money was to be used at the Chiangs' discretion.75 A likely estimate of the large and small monetary gifts from across the country is more than $1.3 million.76 Despite the complicated terrain of race, the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act and Mme. Chiang's efforts on behalf of the Chinese and Chinese Americans increased the possibility of full equality among the Allied Powers.

**THE DEMOCRATIC VALUES OF MME. CHIANG AND AMERICA**

From the opening line of her speeches to Congress and throughout her tour, Mme. Chiang appeared to enthusiastically embrace democratic values, confirming Luce's vision of China as an eager acolyte of America. Nevertheless, the trip revealed a distinct gap between the positive image the American public had of Mme. Chiang's democratic values and the negative image about those same values that was emerging privately. Although the Roosevelt administration and American media kept these negative representations largely out of the public eye in the interest of maintaining the relationship with a dependable ally in the Pacific, turning a blind eye to Mme. Chiang's undemocratic behavior when out of the spotlight would have unintended consequences for Mme. Chiang, her husband's regime, and China.

In keeping with Roosevelt's vision of a democratic international order in which "cooperation was not a one-way street" and no nation could assume that it had "a monopoly of wisdom or of virtue," Mme. Chiang vigorously conveyed an image to the American public of herself as a woman of her people, which implied, by extension, that the Nationalist leadership could be viewed in a democratic light.77 She had, for instance, set up a boys' and girls' school on a thousand-acre lot at the foot of the Purple Mountains in Nanjing, and her "orphans" came from the poorest fami-

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76 After Mme. Chiang's New York speech, Henry Luce noted that gifts had totaled $300,000 and $1 million was on its way. See T. Christopher Jespersen, "Madame Chiang Kai-shek and the Face of Sino-American Relations: Personality and Gender Dynamics in Bilateral Diplomacy," in Chu, Madame Chiang Kai-shek and Her China, 137. Since Mme. Chiang was still in the early stages of her tour, this suggests that the total amount of aid was likely much higher.

lies and called her “Mama.” During the war years she administered first aid to soldiers, tested medical supplies sent from the United States, and sewed Red Cross bandages. A photo of her published in the Herald American Pictorial Review in 1943 captured her diligently bandaging a soldier’s wounded foot. These examples projected a credible image of Mme. Chiang as a woman with a common touch.

In her speeches across America, Mme. Chiang spoke admiringly of the Chinese people’s wartime sacrifices in the face of what appeared to be impossible odds. The Japanese Prince Konoye, she reported in her Madison Square Garden address, had believed that Japan would beat China within three months. She then explained why so many “three months” had gone by without his prediction coming true. Although the Nationalist government had set up food centers in Chongqing for people whose homes were destroyed by the Japanese bombings, many declined the help. They felt that they had suffered no more than others. Only after being told that they were entitled to the food because of their contribution to the war effort did they accept. In contrast to the “arrogant pride” of Prince Konoye, this “rightful pride” of her people, according to Mme. Chiang, was what allowed China to persevere in the face of the Japanese threat.

Mme. Chiang even extended her connection with ordinary people to American workers. When the mayor of San Francisco, Angelo Rossi, neglected to invite representatives from the Longshore and Warehouse Union to meet with her during her stay, Mme. Chiang took matters into her own hands and visited them. These union members had supported China’s boycott of Japanese goods in 1932 and had allowed Chinese Americans to picket on the docks at great cost to members and their families. Mme. Chiang showed her appreciation by repeatedly addressing them as “fellow workers” in her speech. One reporter described her impassioned back-and-forth exchange with workers:

“Do you want to lose this war?” cried Mme. Chiang.

As a voice the answer came: “No!”

“Do you want to increase production?” she asked.

“Yes! Yes! Yes!”

“Then,” she shouted, “let all labor cooperate and increase production.”

A rather different picture of Mme. Chiang and the Nationalist regime, however, emerged outside of the public eye. That Mme. Chiang was an aristocrat did not automatically undermine her democratic image, but she was less than vigilant about how others would perceive her words and actions, especially given wartime exigencies. During her eleven-day stay at the White House (February 17-28), for instance, instead of using the bells or telephones with which their rooms were equipped, Mme. Chiang and her niece and nephew would repeatedly clap their hands to summon the staff. According to one observer, she treated “virtually everybody below Cabinet rank as coolies.” According to another, her visit posed more problems for the Roosevelts than that of any other guest during their twelve-year tenure in the White House. When U.S. Customs delayed a shipment of cigarettes, calls from Mme. Chiang’s staff continued all day to the Treasury until an agent was instructed to “get them off the boat and fly them” to the White House. Sufficiently concerned that his guest’s “private manners might gain unfavorable publicity to spoil her public image,” Roosevelt hoped that Mme. Chiang would return to China at the end of February. But Mme. Chiang did not leave until July 4, and such behavior continued unabated throughout her tour.

Given Mme. Chiang’s fastidious cultivation of her image, her familiarity with American customs, and her position as a guest in another country hoping to garner aid for China, her behavior seems puzzling. One plausible explanation was that her illness had exacerbated her imperious side and hampered her ability to manage potential misunderstandings. Stanley Hornbeck, the special adviser to the secretary of state, Cordell Hull, noted...
that Mme. Chiang's uncertain schedule was partly due to illness, and although "Americans are habituated to demanding precision," he suggested that incorporating flexibility into the schedule was highly desirable in Mme. Chiang's case. Adjusting the expectations of Mme. Chiang's American security guards, for instance, may have lessened their complaints about long waiting times and her unpredictable schedule.

Such behavior might have been overlooked except that it appeared to have a darker side, revealing a profound insincerity about Mme. Chiang's embrace of democratic values. Unaware of this in the beginning, Eleanor Roosevelt soon discovered "a certain casualness about cruelty" in Mme. Chiang. During one of their dinners together during her stay at the White House, Franklin Roosevelt mentioned that a labor leader, John Lewis, was giving him trouble and asked Mme. Chiang how she would handle such a leader in China. Eleanor observed that she responded with "a most expressive gesture": a "beautiful, small hand came up very quietly and slid across her throat." Franklin then gave Eleanor a look before continuing the conversation and later teased her, "Well, how about your gentle and sweet character?"

This "casualness about cruelty" was on full display in her reaction to an article published in *Time* on March 22 about a terrible famine occurring in Henan Province (see chapter 10). Author Theodore H. White blamed the Nationalist army for insisting on collecting grain taxes when there was no food to be collected, and faulted the Nationalist government for not sending grain to the affected area when there was still time. Compounding the tragedy, according to White, was the veritable feast officials gave him before his departure from the area. Mme. Chiang's reaction to the article was telling. Outraged that White criticized the Nationalist government, she demanded that he be fired. To his credit, Henry Luce refused. Expressing not an iota of sympathy for her suffering compatriots, Mme. Chiang appeared more concerned about maintaining the legitimacy of her husband's regime. Even a symbolic gesture of empathy toward those suffering in the famine would have gone a long way. Instead, this apparent absence of a felt connection with her people revealed a fundamental difference between the Chiangs and the Roosevelts (who also came from an aristocratic background) and reflected an elitist view of nationalism that lacked the critical element of a shared or imagined community.

Mme. Chiang's seeming disconnection from ordinary people may be explained in part by the chauvinistic political environment to which she had grown accustomed. Chiang Kai-shek often encouraged feuds and withering criticisms among his subordinates while prohibiting criticism of himself and his wife and family members. Over time, Parks M. Coble suggests, this protection from criticism may have given Mme. Chiang a view of democracy in which the rule of law did not apply to her. Her sense of difference from ordinary people may also have been exacerbated by her belief that she and her husband were among a Christian elect and "had been divinely chosen to rule China." The American public's wholehearted adulation of her likely further reinforced this feeling. Graham Peck, who worked for the Office of War Information in China, felt that with her celebrity reception in America, it "would have taken a woman of the most austere character not to become addled." In any case, Eleanor Roosevelt perceptively observed that although Mme. Chiang spoke highly of democracy, she found the ideas too abstract and was thus uncertain as to how they would work in practice in China. By the end of the war, Roosevelt concluded that Mme. Chiang "can talk beautifully about democracy, but she does not know how to live democracy."

Even as Mme. Chiang's tour continued to wide acclaim, her lack of democratic values began to draw concern from other quarters. In a March
22, 1943, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt urging her to visit China.\textsuperscript{44} Pearl S. Buck noted, "Not a few Chinese have said to me, 'She has behaved like an empress or a queen. ... We would have been better pleased had she behaved more democratically.' Buck regretted that Mme. Chiang's eldest sister and the widow of Sun Yat-sen, Mme. Sun (Song Qingling), had not been sent to represent China in America, as she truly "made the cause of common Chinese people hers and they know it." Tellingly, Mme. Sun was at the time virtually under house arrest in China because of her outspoken criticisms of the Chiang regime and her identification with the Chinese Communist cause.\textsuperscript{45}

Buck made her criticisms public in \textit{Life} two months later, albeit in a milder tone that focused on the dangers of the Free China public relations bubble. In "A Warning to China," Buck observed, "American friendship for China has at this moment reached a popular height which brings it to the verge of sentimentality" and warned that "those who have rushed to give gifts ... are going to wake up one morning condemning China and all Chinese. ... One of the major paradoxes of this war is that although Madame Chiang is our most eloquent wartime evangelist, the Chinese people themselves are voiceless."\textsuperscript{96} Buck had come to the ironic conclusion that Mme. Chiang appeared to have more in common with Churchill's hierarchical worldview than with Roosevelt's democratic worldview.

Paralleling the tensions in Mme. Chiang's portrayal of democratic values were similar tensions within the U.S.-China partnership. Despite Roosevelt's democratic vision of a world order and Mme. Chiang's successful celebrity tour, the United States was not forthcoming with significant aid to China. In fact, when China needed the greatest assistance during this most difficult stage of the war (1941-1944), American aid totaled only $280 million. As a mere "side show" compared to Europe in the war and not an "important American priority," the goal was only to ensure that China had just enough aid to keep fighting, but not necessarily to win. By contrast, in 1945, China received $1.1 billion in American aid because the goal and function of aid had shifted to defeating the Communists.\textsuperscript{97}

Just as the American public's esteem for China was at an all-time high, U.S. decision makers and observers of China's situation were beginning to have doubts about Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist regime. Nevertheless, the strategic, if secondary, importance of having China as an ally made ignoring Mme. Chiang's treatment of staff workers, intolerance of criticism, and other undemocratic behavior politically expedient, and this collective averting of the eyes occurred all the way to the top. Heeding the praise and not picking up on the criticism or uneasiness that Mme. Chiang's tour engendered may have contributed to Chinese overconfidence about its standing within the alliance. This overconfidence would ill serve the Nationalist regime and China in the aftermath of the tour.

\textbf{After the Tour: Tipping Points for the Alliance and Mme. Chiang}

The success of the American tour translated into a more confident Mme. Chiang upon her return to China in July. Perhaps most crucially, her new international influence helped her to persuade her husband to retain Joseph Stilwell, the controversial American general in charge of the China-Burma-India theater, who had often clashed with Chiang over the use of Chinese troops. Furthermore, by accompanying her husband to the Cairo summit, where she was captured on camera with Chiang, Roosevelt, and Churchill, she helped reinforce the image of China as a Great Power and of a progressive Chinese leadership. Yet her newfound influence would also have unintended consequences for the Nationalist regime and for Mme. Chiang herself.

\textsuperscript{44} Franklin turned down Eleanor's request for a reciprocal visit to China in the middle of 1943 due to worries that he would receive extra pressure to give the China front a higher priority. According to her close friend and biographer, Joseph P. Lash, Eleanor "accepted his decision uncomplainingly." Sensing her disappointment, Franklin encouraged her to visit Australia and New Zealand instead. See Joseph P. Lash, \textit{Eleanor and Franklin: The Story of Their Relationship}, Based on Eleanor Roosevelt's Private Papers (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 679-80.


\textsuperscript{56} Pearl S. Buck, "A Warning about China," \textit{Life}, May 10, 1943.

\textsuperscript{96} Zhang Baijia, "China's Quest for Foreign Military Aid," in Pottier, Drex, and van de Ven, \textit{The Battle for China}, 303-4.
In September 1943, just a few months after her triumphant return, Mme. Chiang’s brother, T.V. Soong, persuaded Chiang to remove Stilwell and began taking the necessary steps on Chiang’s behalf. At this point, however, Mme. Chiang and her sister, Mme. Kung, allied to keep Stilwell, a move apparently influenced at least in part by a family power struggle between the sisters and their brother. Yet Mme. Chiang recognized that the removal of Stilwell, as Rana Mitter points out, would make public “a fundamental divide between the Americans and the Chinese at a time when Japanese forces still threatened to conquer Free China,” as removing him would be unpopular among the American military leaders and public, who considered Stilwell a hero. In October, following further interventions by General Somervell and Lord Mountbatten, Chiang ultimately accepted his wife’s counsel and changed his mind. Soong, whom Chiang then blamed for having put him in the awkward position of having to back down from an official request to remove Stilwell, disappeared from the Generalissimo’s inner circle for most of the following year.

The consequences of Mme. Chiang’s influence on retaining Stilwell and her part in her brother’s removal would have far-reaching effects. Her influence not only helped to prolong a difficult relationship for another year but temporarily forced Soong out of Chiang’s inner circle at a crucial time in preparations for the Cairo Conference the following month (see chapter 13). As a result, the most capable person slated to attend the conference with Chiang was now also prevented from going, replaced by Mme. Chiang. Mme. Chiang’s increased confidence and influence was still on full display during the Cairo Conference in November, leading the English general Alan Brooke to ultimately (if probably wrongly) conclude in his diaries a dozen years later that Mme. Chiang was the “leading spirit” of the Chiangs. Unfortunately, Mme. Chiang was far less capable than her brother would have been in stage-managing the Chinese side of the negotiations. To make matters worse, her persistent illness and the fact that the very capable public relations master Hollington Tong was relegated to a minor role at the summit, because of his association with Soong, meant that the China contingent was hardly working at its fullest capacity. As a result, the Chiang’s performance in Cairo was a public relations disaster that within the span of a week managed, according to Ronald Heiferman, to undo “much of Soong’s previous efforts to cultivate a favorable image of the Kuomintang regime and its leaders.” Chiang Kai-shek sensed that Roosevelt now perceived China as a liability rather than an asset, a change in perception that may have actually begun during Mme. Chiang’s American tour and would have serious implications for the Sino-American alliance moving forward.

Despite seeing a more assertive and confident Mme. Chiang upon her return to China, observers also began to notice a change in her faith in herself and her country’s possibilities. Peck observed that she had “become a pathologically pretentious woman who, under the surface, was so distraught, uneasy, and at odds with herself that she could no longer make much sense on either a political or personal level.” Along similar lines, John Fairbank, who interviewed Mme. Chiang in September, reported that she appeared tired and unhappy and despite her philosophical remarks about keeping to one’s ideals and meeting circumstances as they came up, Mme. Chiang ultimately could not make peace with the reality that “China [was] backward, the material backwardness being associated with spiritual backwardness, each causing the other.” In the absence of the American adulation that had supported her optimistic portrayal of China, the contradictions in the China she returned to must have been painfully evident to Mme. Chiang, taking a heavy toll on her. Her biographer, Laura Tyson Li, thought that a turning point occurred around this time in which Mme. Chiang changed from someone relatively well intentioned to a brittle, rigid, self-righteous, and dogmatic woman. By her 1948 visit to the United States, according to Li, her noticeable lack of
self-reflection struck a serious blow to her subsequent role in elite politics.\textsuperscript{103}

During her American tour, Mme. Chiang's rhetoric was not substantively overblown, but reflected the actual possibilities for a viable and mutually respectful Sino-American alliance. While it is easy to judge her undemocratic in retrospect, as Eleanor Roosevelt did in 1945, putting her squarely in this category in early 1943 would have been unfair. Indeed, 1943 had begun well for Mme. Chiang, the Nationalist regime, and China. Her speeches to Congress and across the United States were genuine high points in the prospects of all three. Had more regard been given for her health than to political expediency, and had the Free China mania been leavened with more critical reporting and counsel, perhaps Mme. Chiang might have returned to China with a renewed sense of her initial ideals and maintained her star quality for decades more.\textsuperscript{106} Instead, Mme. Chiang returned to China in illness and with a somewhat broken spirit even as she worked tirelessly for the betterment of China's position within the Sino-American alliance. In the end, the politics of the alliance, the inflation of the Free China bubble, and the Chiangs putting their own power considerations over the general good of China would set the stage for the downturn of the Nationalist regime, making Mme. Chiang's 1943 American tour but a shooting star in the night sky—beautiful, memorable, and fleeting.

\textsuperscript{103} Li, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, 471.

\textsuperscript{106} Had Mme. Chiang been less ill, for instance, she may have had the fortitude to reduce her imperious behavior and to resist the cynical turn of her personality. The combination of strong sleeping medications, gastrointestinal distress, and chronic and acute urticaria, on top of a lengthy, grueling tour schedule, would have affected the steeliest of minds (Li, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, 477-78).