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History's Turning Points: (13) –
America's Disastrous Chinese
Obsession - I

Lead: Historical study often helps reveal twists in the human journey. Consider one of history's turning points – America's Chiang Kai-shek obsession.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: One of the most fascinating diplomatic and personal alliances of the twentieth century was that between the people and government of the United States and

Chinese strongman Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his fourth wife Soong May-ling.

Chiang was born in the late 1880s into an upper-middle-class family in Zhejiang province, received military training in both China and Japan, and became attracted to and fought with the revolutionary movement led by Sun Yat-sen which overthrew the Qing dynasty in the 1911 Revolution and established a republic. With Sun he was one of the founders of the Kuomintang, the nationalist political party, but also had a long-term association with the Green Gang, a criminal syndicate based in Shanghai. He was suspected of many felonious activities by Shanghai authorities but

was never convicted. An aura of corruption surrounded Chiang throughout his life and he was not averse to using his alliance with various warlords and the underworld in his climb to and maintenance of power.

After Sun Yat-sen's death in 1925, Chiang aspired to become the leader's successor and in 1927 made a fortuitous political match. He married Soong May-ling, the youngest sister of Sun's widow, after a multi-year courtship. Originally rejected as a suitor because of his lower social status, the family was convinced of his suitability because of his growing political power and his supposed "conversion" to

Christianity. Next time: America and China's power couple.

At the University of Richmond's School of Continuing Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.

Resources

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Pakula, Hannah. *The Last Empress: Madame Chiang Kai-Shek and the Birth of Modern China*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2009.

Taylor, Jay. *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-Shek and the Struggle for Modern China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

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