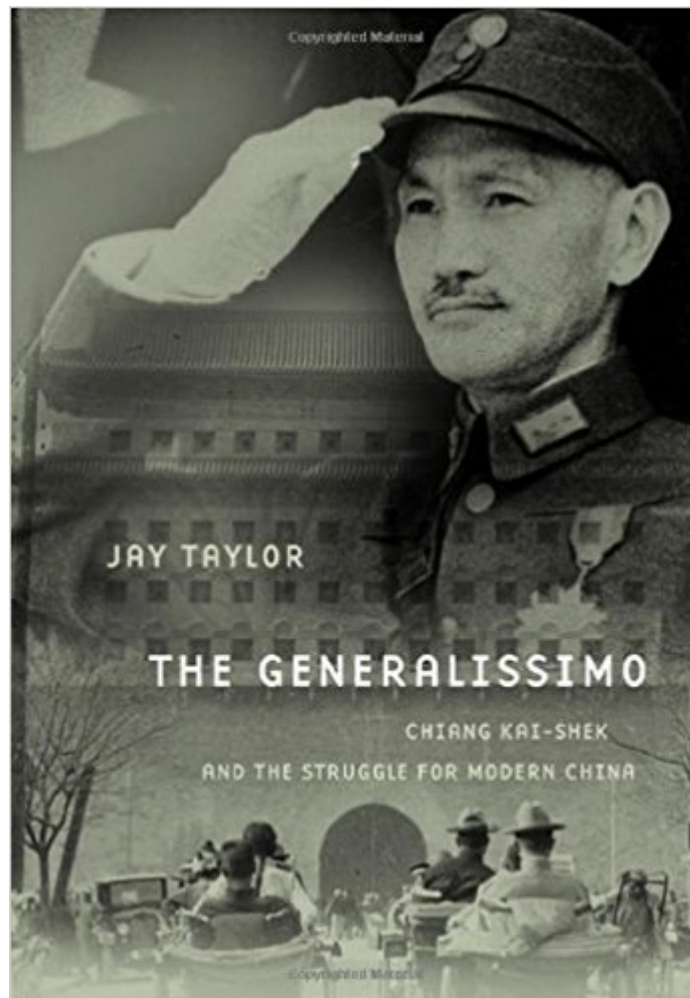


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The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek And The Struggle For Modern China (Belknap Press)



Synopsis

One of the most momentous stories of the last century is China's rise from a self-satisfied, anti-modern, decaying society into a global power that promises to one day rival the United States. Chiang Kai-shek, an autocratic, larger-than-life figure, dominates this story. A modernist as well as a neo-Confucianist, Chiang was a man of war who led the most ancient and populous country in the world through a quarter century of bloody revolutions, civil conflict, and wars of resistance against Japanese aggression. In 1949, when he was defeated by Mao Zedong, his archrival for leadership of China, he fled to Taiwan, where he ruled for another twenty-five years. Playing a key role in the cold war with China, Chiang suppressed opposition with his "white terror," controlled inflation and corruption, carried out land reform, and raised personal income, health, and educational levels on the island. Consciously or not, he set the stage for Taiwan's evolution of a Chinese model of democratic modernization. Drawing heavily on Chinese sources including Chiang's diaries, *The Generalissimo* provides the most lively, sweeping, and objective biography yet of a man whose length of uninterrupted, active engagement at the highest levels in the march of history is excelled by few, if any, in modern history. Jay Taylor shows a man who was exceedingly ruthless and temperamental but who was also courageous and conscientious in matters of state. Revealing fascinating aspects of Chiang's life, Taylor provides penetrating insight into the dynamics of the past that lie behind the struggle for modernity of mainland China and its relationship with Taiwan.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. American historians tend to portray Chiang Kai-Shek (1887–1975) as an inept dictator who mismanaged China until Mao Zedong expelled him in 1949 and he finished his life ruling Taiwan under the protection of the U.S. military. But this thick, heavily researched but lucid biography by Taylor, a research associate at Harvard's Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, describes an impressive figure who left China a greater legacy than he has been given credit for. An ambitious officer, Chiang took power when Sun Yat-sen died in 1925. Attempting to unify a chaotic nation, he fought warlords and rival Communists and then spent nine even bloodier years fighting the Japanese. Those expecting the traditional account of how Chiang hoarded American military aid in preparation for a postwar showdown with the Communists will read instead of the massive losses his troops suffered fighting the Japanese while Mao husbanded his forces. Taylor does not conceal Chiang's brutality and diplomatic failures, but he is an admirer who makes a good case that Chiang governed an almost ungovernable country with reasonable skill and understood his enemies better than American advisers did. 41 b&w illus., 4 maps. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Chiang Kai-shek has long been viewed as a failure for having lost mainland China to Mao's People's Liberation Army in a stunningly short span of time. This richly detailed biography argues that Chiang's neo-Confucian vision for a modern China may yet win. Chiang saw himself as central to China's destiny, yet his years in exile were some of his happiest; as he once wrote, "Trouble is an excellent tonic." While Mao was inflicting the Great Leap Forward on mainland China, Chiang was instituting a widely admired program of land reform on Taiwan, and today the raucously democratic island is often looked to in the People's Republic as a model of prosperity. Drawing on a revelatory cache of newly available diaries and records, Taylor reveals the complexities of the soldier and statesman, showing him to be shockingly brutal at times, oddly passive at others, naively earnest, quick to tears, and always surrounded by intrigue. Copyright ©2008 Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker

A good prism into the events and changes happened in China during the last century. The selection of historical pictures alone would have made this a worth possession.

An absolutely wonderful book, well written and very insightful. After reading this, I look forward to Mr Taylor's book Ching-Kuo. If you are intersted in China or Taiwan I highly recommend it, you will not

be disappointed.

The Generalissimo sheds shocking new light on Sino-American relations, and the view isn't pretty. Under a string of administrations (in fact all of them) from the 1930s on, the United States showed itself to be an untrustworthy ally, shamelessly betraying the Nationalist Chinese again and again. Supposed "wise men" like Acheson and Kissinger come across as buffoons and sellouts to the communists. The most amazing insight of the book is that the prosperous, democratic Taiwan of today is exactly what the "wise men" of the 1940s insisted that Chiang Kai Shek could never deliver and his communists opponents would. Tens of millions of dead and decades of suppression later, it now seems that China is coming around, not to Mao's vision, but to Chiang's.

The History of China in the 20th Century has been usually colored by the ideology of the times and of the writer. China had a turbulent History, living the first half of the century in war, and war accounts are usually told by the winner. Chiang Kai-Shek lost the war, and so I think his role has always been underrated. This is a more balanced account of those times, and Chiang's voice comes through his journals, and we can feel the tremendous burden that he carried on his shoulders, trying to unify a fragmented country, while fighting an almost hopeless war against a powerful and ruthless invader. In my opinion his stature should be equal to Churchill's: they faced the same crucial choice, fight and risk annihilation or surrender. Both chose to fight, and we owe them both the same respect.

I dont expect this book to be this good. Looks like a new one. Thanku for the great quality

Excellent book! It gave a good information in and out. Seller delivered this book as promised. Book arrived in excellent condition!

Excellent book.

Well-written

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