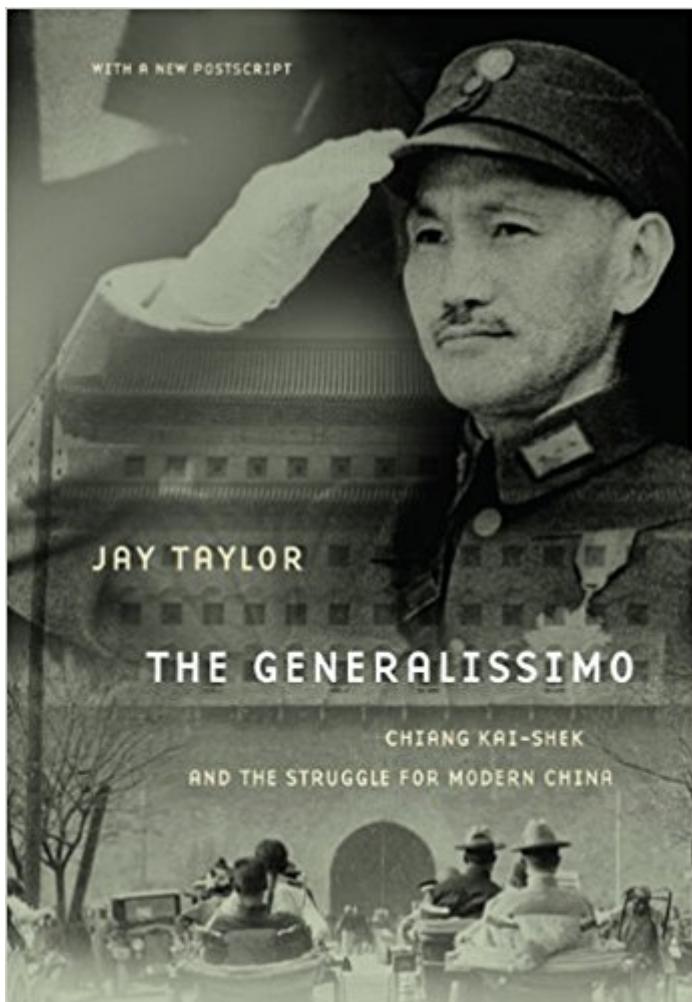


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The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek And The Struggle For Modern China



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have come upon Jay Taylor's engaging writing only recently when I read his fascinating overview

of the world's two most populous nations, China and India in his book "The Dragon and The Wild Goose". The refreshingly unbiased viewpoint of this veteran Foreign Service Officer presents instead of thinly disguised extrapolations of his own canny wisdom and insights, rather a keenly observed journalist's overview of the realities of these complex societies with an objectivity that is both pragmatic and prophetic. When I heard of Taylor's recently released historical overview of Ghiang Kai-shek in the "The Generalissimo", I put it on a must read list, and found it another gem of his factually based analysis (he was given complete access to Chiang's personal journals, as well as many others involved in his epic story). Whoever believes they know, or would like to know, how China arrived at its present, dynamic role on the world stage, you have to read "The Generalissimo" to fully grasp the internecine struggles that engulfed China before, during, and after World War Two. Chiang lost the battle on the mainland to Mao Zedong, retreating to the small island of Taiwan where he continued his struggles to somehow bring a modern, coherent and unified China about. This has not happened in the sense of Taiwan and the mainland politically joined, but Chiang and his sons created a miraculous transformation of a small island into one of modern history's most successful democratic nations, and it seems evident now that the mainland regime rightly would like to emulate this marvel. Chiang's long, tumultuous career involved nearly all the major political personalities of the twentieth century - including his own beautiful and beguiling, western educated wife, Madame Chiang.

Since I was born in the 1980s, growing up in a village in Northeast China, the adult people around me liked talking about old time stories in spare time, Mao and Chiang are among most interesting figures in the topics. I became curious about the two men early from that time. Although I don't believe any works are 100% objective, I am especially skeptical about the biographies published in their own country, they always giving me an impression: too biased, yet is getting better now. I chose to read the two men in original English version books, also as a way to challenge and enhance my still not good English language ability. After reading Jung Chang's worldwide popular book, Mao: The Unknown Story, a biography focuses on Mao's dark side, in a not well recognized serious way. I turned to read books about Chiang, at first I read Jonathan Fenby's book, Chiang Kai Shek: China's Generalissimo and the Nation He Lost, it is a nice biography, yet I didn't finish, I like its book cover, Chiang's portrait is better represent his strong will and looks handsome. Recommended by The Economist, I switched to read Jay Taylor's book, The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China. I think Chiang's historical position in 20th century China is his vision and struggle for defending and building a modern China,

not because he lost the civil war or a nation to Mao. Being a hero does not depend on success or failure. I really like Jay Taylorâ™s writing style for this book, objective and tried to find insights about the most important events in 20th century China, he used facts to illustrated Chiangâ™s personality.

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