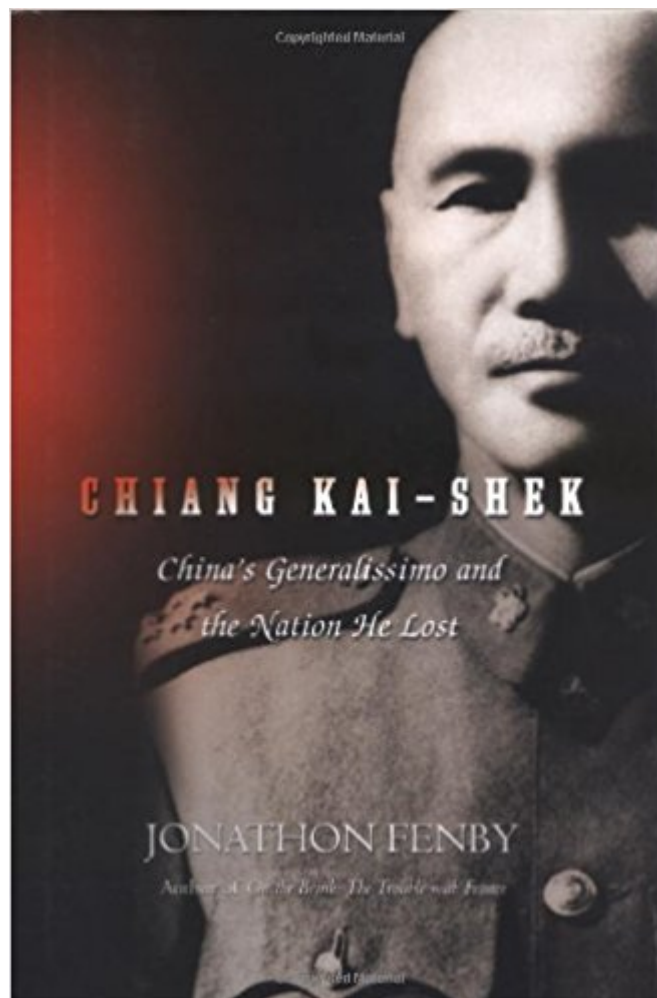




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Chiang Kai-Shek: China's Generalissimo And The Nation He Lost



Synopsis

With a narrative as briskly paced and vividly detailed as an international thriller, this definitive new biography of Chiang Kai-shek masterfully maps the tumultuous political career of nationalist China's Generalissimo as it reevaluates his brave but unfulfilled life. Chiang Kai-shek was one of the most influential world figures of the twentieth century. The leader of the Kuomintang, the nationalist movement in China, by 1928 he had established himself as head of the government in Nanking. While he managed to survive the political storms of the 1930s, and although he was the only Chinese statesman of sufficient stature to attend the Cairo conference with Churchill and Roosevelt during World War II, Chiang's power was continually being undermined by the Japanese on one side and the Chinese Communists on the other. Once Japan met its unequivocal defeat in 1945, civil war again erupted in China, and four years later Mao Zedong claimed victory for the Communists. Featuring pages of photographs, and drawing extensively upon original Chinese sources and accounts by contemporaneous journalists, Jonathan Fenby unfolds a story as fascinating in its conspiratorial intrigues as it is remarkable for its psychological insights.

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Customer Reviews

Chiang Kai-shek's life (1887-1975) coincided with some of the most violent and chaotic decades of Chinese history, and as this son of a salt merchant from the lower Yangtze came into his own, his destiny became increasingly entwined with the agonizing destiny of China. Many of Chiang's actions, including his 1949 flight to Taiwan, directly shaped that destiny. In this chronicle of his life, Fenby, former editor of the Observer and the South China Morning Post, recounts the

generalissimo's rise amid the gruesome power struggles of warlords; the political machinations that enabled his gradual assumption of political power during the Kuomintang regime; his tortuous attempts to fend off Japanese imperial expansion while also trying to exterminate the fledgling Communist movement; and his eventual defeat at the hands of Mao's Red Army. Fenby's account of Chiang's early life is the most detailed part of the book and relies heavily on excerpts from a memoir by Chiang's second wife (whom he cast aside to forge a political marriage and strategic alliance with the youngest daughter of the powerful Soong family) and on journalistic tidbits from Western observers and participants; these accounts are always colorful and engaging if sometimes less than analytical. Whatever one might think of the man-depicted here as explosive-tempered, superhumanly ambitious, profoundly conservative and authoritarian, and not above forging alliances with underworld gang leaders-one cannot read this biography without marveling at the sheer magnitude of his arc of power and the scope and unifying impact of his life on a once-decentralized nation. B&w photos, maps. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

During the American political wars of the mid-1950s, "Who lost China?" was a question used by the Left and the Right to bludgeon each other. Of course, China was never ours to lose. If any single person can be accused of "losing" the most populous nation on earth, it has to be Chiang Kai Shek. Journalist Fenby has written the first comprehensive biography of Chiang in the past 30 years and makes skillful use of newly available sources from mainland China, Taiwan, and the West. The result is a fascinating, often surprising portrait of the man and his nation as it endured the trials of revolution, foreign occupation, and civil war. This is no simplistic exercise in Chiang bashing. Fenby consistently pays tribute to Chiang's dedication to lifting his nation out of its morass. But, as Fenby shows time and again, Chiang's egotism, stubbornness, and his often shocking ignorance of his own people doomed him to failure. This is an important work that will deepen our understanding of the past, present, and future of China. Jay Freeman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

When journalists write history books the result is often something of a muddle: there tend to snippets of detail (added to provide "colour") and there tends not to be much in the way of an overarching interpretative discussion of the facts or anything in the way of a theoretical framework. Many such books regurgitate high-school history between new, glossy covers featuring irrelevant sub-titles ("China's Generalissimo and the Nation He Lost") - their contents add little or nothing to

scholarship on their subject matter and in place of this make unsupported assertions and random observations ... the reader is soon left with the uncomfortable feeling of having had too much but in no way having been satiated, just as one might feel after sitting down to a three course banquet consisting of potato crisps served with lashings of Coca-Cola. Mr Fenby's book is a representative example of this genre. It is a boring, unimaginatively-written jumble filled with dull and irrelevant detail ("...a Nationalist mission to Hong Kong, headed by a one-legged admiral...", "the Prime Minister sent [...] a valiant, one-eyed, one-handed First World War veteran ...", there are pages and pages of waffle bolstered by this kind of claptrap), replete with bold and entirely unsupported statements ("Stillwell wanted to build a modern, professional army; Chiang saw military units as chess pieces to be manipulated for his benefit") and burdened with passages which provide clear insights into Mr Fenby's evident ignorance about China, including the bizarre assertion that Chiang Kai-Shek insisted on speaking the Wu language of his native region instead of Mandarin (which is impossible, as no-one from the rest of China would have understood him). It goes on and on in a random, tedious way, telling us little we didn't already know if we did Modern History at high school. Mr Fenby allows himself the luxury of a bob each way in his summation of Chiang's career, and retains his addled style to the bitter end. In the last few pages the disorganisation of the writing is painfully evident. Instead of a balanced conclusion, the reader is left to wade through paragraphs which contradict one another in a welter of innuendo and cliché. The penultimate paragraph of the epilogue features the journalist's ace-in-the-hole: a quote from a person-in-the-street, in this case a tour guide - and this, alas, is an appropriate epitaph for the level of scholarship Mr Fenby brought to bear in writing his book. Read Jay Taylor's "The Generalissimo" instead.

Author Fenby ignores the big picture in favor of squalid scenarios that can reflect negatively on Chiang Kai-shek. He devotes more pages to a lurid tale from Chiang's ex-wife than to the U.S. enforced "mediation" that preceded Chiang's downfall and China's descent into terror and death. In regard to Chiang Kai-shek and America's role in the process that resulted in more death than Hitler and Stalin combined, Fenby exhibits an aversion to the government records that define what went wrong. Key records such as; Foreign Relations of the U.S. (FRUS) China, 1946, 1947, 1948 (the years of China's demise) are completely evaded. Thus, Fenby can't (or won't) furnish U.S. Ambassador Stuart's defining reports from China. After two years of Red sabotage and insurrection Stuart reported "America still delays the long

promised aid on which survival of democratic institutions depends. And
“The Chinese people do not want to become communists, yet they see the tide of communism running irresistibly forward. Stuart
“long promised aid” refers to aid pledged by both Presidents FDR and HST (twice). That aid specifically included rearming and retraining the Chinese Army, the army that lost millions while holding down the bulk of the Japanese Army for seven years, the army cited in Japanese Army records as their most lethal enemy. China’s Army saved countless thousands of American lives, (No U.S. troops fought and died on Chinese soil). The author repeatedly assures readers that Chiang’s government was
“Corrupt”, (creating the impression that dollars generously provided by U.S. taxpayers were being syphoned off by the very people we tried to aid). But that picture is a fraud. China was blockaded throughout WW2 and received less than 2% of U.S. aid to allies. Until the last year of the war, China received a trickle of supplies airlifted over the
“Hump” of the Himalayan Mountains; all of that trickle was controlled by General “Vinegar Joe” Stilwell. China was America’s bargain ally and the subject of China corruption was irrelevant! But having raised the issue, the author fails to mention the FBI investigation ordered by HST that exonerated the purported recipients of China corruption money. When Fenby evades FRUS, he can also avoid Ambassador Stuart’s assessment of morality in China, as war torn, exhausted China slipped away. In this chaos and inaction the Generalissimo (CKS) stands out as the only moral force capable of action. And
“The men at the very top are of high integrity” There are many more like them within and outside the government. Author Fenby ridicules FDR trouble shooter Patrick Hurley, attacking his personal appearance, behavior and effectiveness. However, Hurley had a long record of military and diplomatic success. He was highly regarded by Churchill and Stalin and valued by FDR and Truman (who later refused Hurley’s repeated requests for retirement). Hurley was the key to removing Stilwell and he later embarrassed the administration. Both of those situations cost him. Patrick Hurley didn’t damage China. That came later. Joseph Stilwell is presented as a formidable figure in WW2 China. But Vinegar Joe ignored his primary assignment as Chief of Staff of China’s Army and conducted a side show in Burma. In his first Burma campaign, he abandoned his troops and fled to India. In his second campaign, he, supported by his patron General Marshall, constructed a 1000 mile mountain supply road (touted as the “Lifeline to China”). After

one of the "PR" convoy, the trucks were left rusting in China and the road was declared useless, (as predicted by locals and engineering experts.) Fenby's final miscasting promotes Chiang Kai-shek's son, (who assisted his father but led nothing) to be the founder of Taiwan democracy. Logic, integrity, accuracy may suffer, but Chiang Kai-shek's image must be trashed, or those who abandoned him, (and abandoned nearly 20% of the world) will be seen in a true light. Abandoning an Ally: The Real Story Behind 70 Million Killed in China and America's "Forgotten War"

This was a surprisingly interesting book. Chiang Kai-shek was not an impressive man, but the times he lived in were definitely not boring. Chiang's career is marginally interesting; what is really significant is the whirlwind of events that he lived through that shaped China's history. Recommended for all aspiring sinologists, as well as rank amateur history buffs like me.

This book provides a wealth of information regarding the Chiang Kai Shek era and China's struggle against feudalism and war-lordism all within the context of a savage Japanese occupation. What is sad is that the person that promised to save China turned out to rely on War Lord tactics himself. It is a great study how a person can have great ideals but those cannot be implemented because of pervasive greed that crept into his own household. The vision turned into a nightmare catalyzed by Japanese cruelty. Captivating reading, much better than a novel. It's one of those books you know the end but you want to keep reading anyway! Some weird typos in my electronic version which is distracting, but the amount and quality of the information is outright fantastic. Highly recommended particularly if you have read other books covering the same period by other observers. This one helps pull everything together. It's the story of an opportunity lost that changed the course of history for the Chinese people. Read it you will like it.

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