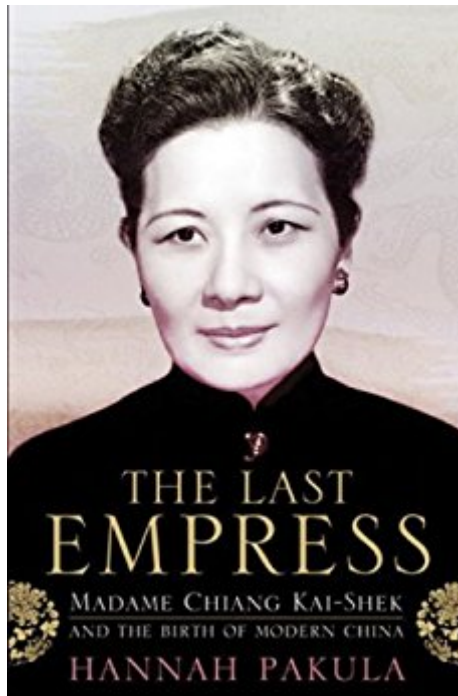


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The Last Empress: Madame Chiang Kai-Shek And The Birth Of Modern China



Synopsis

Entertaining and masterly biography of Madame Chiang Kai-shek - the woman who built modern China. THE LAST EMPRESS revolves around a fascinating, manipulative woman and her family who were largely responsible for dragging China into the modern world. Soong May-ling, or Madame Chiang as she was known, is uniquely positioned at the heart of this story. As her husband came to represent the hopes of the West in the East, she acted as his adviser, English translator, secretary, and most loyal champion, finding herself on the world stage with Franklin D Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. A savvy politician, she remained a popular if controversial figure both at home and abroad. Hannah Pakula brilliantly narrates the life of this extraordinary woman - how she charmed the United States out of billions of dollars while remaining dedicated to her China, and how she managed to influence if not change the history of the twentieth century.

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Customer Reviews

Madame Chiang Kai-shek was, as journalists like to say, a good story. It is a story of wartime travails, of high-stakes political gambling, of an epic fight-to-the-finish between authoritarian

Nationalists and radical Communists. It's also a story of a tempestuous partnership between an ascetic military man and his glamorous, winsome, shrewd and luxury-loving wife. He needed her connections to American money. She needed his access to power. Time magazine named them "Man and Woman of the Year" for 1937, essentially colluding in their myth-making. Together, they led China, and then lost it. Madame Chiang dazzled Franklin Roosevelt, bedded Wendell Wilkie, backstabbed Gen. Joseph Stilwell and, for a time, enthralled the greater American public. Dynamic, vain, literary and ambitious -- she's a great subject for a long biography. This is a beautifully designed book, with an inviting cover and an excellent array of photographs inside. Unfortunately, what lies between the covers is not as magical. The writing is OK, but Pakula often seems tone-deaf to the subtleties of Chinese culture and history. Then again, Madame Chiang's story is so engrossing that, for those who like an old-fashioned approach, this long-form rendering is still pretty absorbing. Madame Chiang's life spanned the entire 20th century, and she lived through a period of considerable upheaval, intersecting with quite a cast of characters. Born in the last years of the 19th century, May-ling Soong was the youngest of three sisters whose father, Charlie, a Christian who made millions printing Bibles, bucked Chinese tradition by raising his daughters to be independent, savvy and ambitious. The eldest became one of China's richest women.

Her name was May-Ling Soong. She lived from 1897 to 2003. She came from a wealthy household. Her father Charlie Soong raised himself from peasantry to become a rich businessman. One of her sisters married Mr. Kung a millionaire businessman, another married the legendary Sun Yat-Sen the founder of modern China. One of her brothers T.V. Soong had a PH.D from Columbia in finance and was among the richest men in the world. What a family and what a lady! May-Ling studied in Georgia and graduated from Wellesley where her best friend was American Emily Mills. May-Ling spoke perfect English, was materialistic and a beautiful and sexy woman. In the 1920s she wed Kai-Shek. He became the dictator of China who lost in the Chinese Civil War against Mao's Communists. CKS and Mayling retreated to Taiwan in 1949 where they set up the nationalistic Chinese government. CKS died in 1975. May-Ling often spent a good deal of time in America during the power couple's long marriage. She often had skin problems and other ailments. She could be nervous and demanding of those around her. She could also charm the pants off famous men. Her spouse CKS was often cruel having no problem with eliminating those who opposed his policies. May-Ling was a devoted Methodist Christian and talked CKS into becoming a Christian. May-Ling spent much of her life in America. She lived in New York from 1975 until her death. She probably did not love CKS and had no children. During World War II she was adroit at bringing in millions of

dollars to Chinese coffers as they fought the Japanese. She often visited the White House becoming friendly with Eleanor Roosevelt and FDR. President Truman did not like her since he felt she supported a corrupt regime. (which she did!).

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