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Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China*

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This book is noteworthy for the way in which Taylor portrays Chiang Kai-shek as a faithful disciple of Sun Yat-sen, who dedicated his life to the transformation of China into a modernised nation. For Taylor, Chiang spent his whole life attempting to achieve the same goal, i.e. the modernisation of China. This involved three different aspects, namely the unification of China, the

establishment of a strong central government, and the elevation of the general populace to one that is disciplined and willing to sacrifice everything for the defence of the nation.

- 2 Taylor divides Chiang's life into four different phases: the early revolution in China, the war of resistance against Japan, the civil war in China, and his rule over the island of Taiwan. Taylor believes that throughout these different stages, Chiang never wavered from his lifelong aspirations, but took different approaches in different situations to fulfil his goals. Taylor clearly illustrates this fact by listing all of Chiang's decisions during his political career, missing no detail, however erroneous, unjust, or above the law.
- 3 Taylor proves able to achieve numerous breakthroughs due to his wide selection of historical records, including both positive and negative accounts of Chiang's career. Taylor is even more convinced that Chiang Kai-shek "was motivated less by the desire for personal power than by a vision of a unified, modern, independent China" after examining Chiang Kai-shek's diaries, which have only recently been made available to the public by Stanford University's Hoover Institute (and which Taylor quotes 420 times). He draws attention to the fact that Chiang was a revolutionary leader during a turbulent era, with China splintered into warring fiefdoms and facing rebellion from the Chinese Communist Party. Lacking adequate mechanisms to address the conflicts within the nation, using unofficial means to accomplish goals proved to be a fairly normal path to take. Viewing all of Chiang Kai-shek's decisions from a "nation comes first" perspective allows this biography to stand out because of its richness in the variety of historical records it contains. Viewing all of Chiang Kai-shek's decisions from a "nation comes first perspective" allows this biography to rationalise Chiang's actions throughout his career, not distinguishing between those that were approved or frowned upon by the public. This makes room for a richness in the variety of historical records that distinguishes the biography.
- 4 In addition, Taylor recognises Chiang Kai-shek's contributions to China in terms of how he successfully countered the Japanese invasion, his commitment to a unified nation, and how he laid the foundation for democratic government in Taiwan, thereby setting the stage for Taiwan's evolution into a Chinese model of democratic modernisation. Seeing Chiang in a more positive light, Taylor points out many reasons why he should not shoulder sole blame for the failure to keep China unified, as well as for a less-than-reputable record of upholding human rights. For example, in considering the civil war between the KMT and the CCP, Taylor believes that it was not only a conflict between two political parties, but also one that was determined by the relative strengths of each party's international backers. The commitments that the United States made to Chiang were not steady and were sometimes no more than lip service. In contrast, the Soviet Union's assistance towards Mao Zedong, despite being sometimes hidden, proved much steadier. Furthermore, the White Terror instigated by Chiang that led to the imprisonment of many innocent intellectuals, when considered in the light of the enormous threat that Communist China posed — Chiang had to mobilise the populace and consolidate their loyalty to him — could well be regarded as a necessary evil. When in retrospect we take into account the relative political stability and economic prosperity experienced by Taiwan since the 1960s, Taylor believes that the extraordinary measures taken by Chiang during the 1950s could be forgiven.

- 5 Of course we cannot determine Chiang Kai-shek's success or failure based on just one biography. Yet, compared to other biographies, Taylor's analysis of the relationships between Chiang, the United States government, and General Stilwell allows readers to see the situation in a new light. The United States government used the Anglo-American integrated command headed by Eisenhower in Europe as its model for the war in Asia. However, the United States government forgot to consider that in the European war Americans made up the great majority of Allied ground as well as air forces, while the Chinese Army consisted of only Chinese soldiers. Another factor to consider was that the United States viewed England as a more important ally than China. In order to provide sufficient support for England during its war against Germany in Egypt, the United States would often send resources earmarked for China over to England on very short notice. Although the United States government was providing limited support towards China, it was also eager to integrate the Chinese Army into the American system led by General Stilwell. To gain the miniscule support that the United States was providing, Chiang Kai-shek had no option but to capitulate to US decisions, even when it meant that China had to sacrifice. General Stilwell knew very well that the situation between the United States government and China was a weak point for Chiang, and used it as an advantage. These conflicts caused Chiang Kai-shek to demand the removal of General Stilwell from his position, and also led the US government to form a negative impression of Chiang. Based on Chiang's diaries and newly found historical records, Taylor points out that some of the blame should be laid on the discrimination by Americans towards the Chinese. In contrast to other Western scholarly views that avoid the sensitive topic of discrimination, Taylor adds a new factor to the reasoning of why Chiang Kai-shek and the United States government maintained a rocky relationship after World War II.
- 6 There are some minor errors in this biography, including the claim that Chiang Kai-shek did not murder Tao Chengzhang, stating that Chiang was in Shanghai when he was actually in Tokyo establishing a magazine called Jun Sheng (View of the Military) during Sun Yat-sen's cooperation with Yuan Shikai in 1912, and recording the first meeting between Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yat-sen as December 1913 when it should be June 1914. All in all, however, this book represents a major contribution to our understanding of one of the most important figures of modern Chinese history.
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NOTES

1 Chiang's diaries cover the period from 1917 to 1972. Except for those written in 1924 that were lost due to the civil war, the remainder are intact. Chiang was very honest in expressing his innermost feelings and readily admitted his mistakes and failures in these diaries. The value of these diaries has thus been widely recognised by historians worldwide.