



Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine Who Launched Modern China

By Jung Chang

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A New York Times Notable Book
An NPR Best Book of the Year

In 1852, at age sixteen, Cixi was chosen as one of Emperor Xianfeng's numerous concubines. When he died in 1861, their five-year-old son succeeded to the throne. Cixi at once launched a coup against her son's regents and placed herself as the true source of power—governing through a silk screen that separated her from her male officials.

Drawing on newly available sources, Jung Chang comprehensively overturns Cixi's reputation as a conservative despot. Cixi's extraordinary reign saw the birth of modern China. Under her, the ancient country attained industries, railways, electricity, and a military with up-to-date weaponry. She abolished foot-binding, inaugurated women's liberation, and embarked on a path to introduce voting rights. Packed with drama, this groundbreaking biography powerfully reforms our view of a crucial period in China's—and the world's—history.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Her original first name was considered too inconsequential to enter in the court registry, yet she became the most powerful woman in 19th-century China. Born in 1835 to a prominent Manchu family, Cixi was chosen in 1852 by the young Chinese Emperor Xianfeng as one of his concubines. Literate, politically aware, and graceful rather than beautiful, Cixi was not Xianfeng's favorite, but she delivered his firstborn son in 1856. When the emperor died in 1861, he bequeathed his title to this son, with regents to oversee his reign. Cixi did not trust these men to competently rule China, so she conspired with Empress Zhen, her close friend and the deceased emperor's first wife, to orchestrate a coup. Memoirist Chang (Wild Swans) melds her deep knowledge of Chinese history with deft storytelling to unravel the empress dowager's behind-the-throne efforts to "Make China Strong" by developing international trade, building railroads and utilities, expanding education, and constructing a modern military. Cixi's actions and methods were at times controversial, and in 1898 she thwarted an assassination attempt sanctioned by Emperor Guangxu, her adopted son. Cixi's power only increased after this, and she finally exacted revenge on Guangxu just before her death in 1908. Illus.

From [Booklist](#)

Chang, author of the impeccable *Wild Swans* (2003), provides a revisionist biography of a controversial concubine who rose through the ranks to become a long-reigning, power-wielding dowager empress during the delicate era when China emerged from its isolationist cocoon to become a legitimate player on the international stage. As Cixi's power and influence grew—she actually helped orchestrate the coup of 1861 that led directly to her own dominion as regent—she radically shifted official attitudes toward Western thoughts, ideas, trade, and technology. Ushering in a new era of openness, she not only brought medieval China into the modern age, but she also served double duty as a feminist champion and icon. When an author as thorough, gifted, and immersed in Chinese culture as Chang writes, both scholars and general readers take notice. --Margaret Flanagan

Review

"Cixi's extraordinary story has all the elements of a good fairy tale: bizarre, sinister, triumphant and terrible." —*The Economist*

"A truly authoritative account of Cixi's rule. Her story is both important and evocative." —Orville Schell, *The New York Times Book Review*

"A fantastic Machiavellian tale. . . . Dives into a genuinely fascinating figure: a fierce imperial consort who ruled behind the thrones of two successive Chinese emperors and helped ease China into the twentieth century." —*New York magazine*

"Certain to become the standard by which all future biographies of the Dowager Empress are measured." —*The Daily Beast*

"Jung Chang has written a pathbreaking and generally persuasive book." —*The New York Review of Books*

"If there is one woman who mattered in the history of modern China, it is the empress dowager Cixi. . . . [Her] conventional image is queried in this detailed and beautifully narrated biography, which at long last

restores the empress dowager to her rightful place.” —*The Sunday Times* (London)

“Sets out to rehabilitate the reputation of a woman who, [Chang] argues, helped modernize China. . . . While Chang acknowledges Cixi’s missteps—such as allowing the Boxers to fight against a Western invasion, which led to widespread slaughter—she sees her as a woman whose energy, farsightedness, and ruthless pragmatism transformed a country.” —*The New Yorker*

“[An] authoritative and epic biography.” —*The Toronto Star*

“Well-researched and provocative. . . . Cixi deserves to be remembered and this book is to be welcomed for giving an important figure in Chinese history the prominence she deserves. . . . This spirited biography reminds us that a greater female presence might be a trigger for much-needed political change.” —*New Statesman*

“Fascinating. . . . Wonderfully illuminating. . . . Jung Chang’s new book gives the infamous concubine Cixi her due.” —*The Spectator*

“This is a rich, dramatic story of rebellions, battles, plotting, rivalry, foreign invasion, punishment and forbidden love. . . . [Chang] uses new evidence and meticulous research to cast a spotlight on the amazing woman she regards as the mother of modern China.” —*Daily Mail*

“Corrects a longstanding misconception about a woman whose impact on China can’t be overstated. It’s a fascinating look at power, politics and the gender divide.” —*BookPage*

“A rich and fascinating book that never relaxes its hold on the reader despite the marshalling of a mass of complex historical details seen through the prism of Cixi.” —*The New York Journal of Books*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Evan Hinson:

Here thing why this Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine Who Launched Modern China are different and reputable to be yours. First of all looking at a book is good however it depends in the content of it which is the content is as delicious as food or not. Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine Who Launched Modern China giving you information deeper and different ways, you can find any guide out there but there is no reserve that similar with Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine Who Launched Modern China. It gives you thrill reading journey, its open up your current eyes about the thing that will happened in the world which is might be can be happened around you. It is possible to bring everywhere like in playground, café, or even in your approach home by train. If you are having difficulties in bringing the paper book maybe the form of Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine Who Launched Modern China in e-book can be your alternative.

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Eric Kinlaw:

Spent a free time for you to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their down time with their family, or their very own friends. Usually they doing activity like watching television, planning to beach, or picnic within the park. They actually doing ditto every week. Do you feel it? Would you like to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Can be reading a book could be option to fill your free of charge time/ holiday. The first thing you ask may be what kinds of publication that you should read. If you want to try out look for book, may be the reserve untitled Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine Who Launched Modern China can be fine book to read. May be it may be best activity to you.

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