



Mao: A Life

Philip Short

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Mao Zedong was a defining figure of the twentieth century. Military strategist, statesman, fiendishly clever politician, philosopher and poet, no man has so profoundly influenced the fate of China's people since the First Emperor of Qin unified the country and built the Great Wall 2,000 years ago. The revolution engineered by Mao dragged almost a quarter of the world's people out of medieval splendour and squalor into the modern age. In this meticulously researched account, Philip Short draws on extensive interviews and on a wealth of previously secret documentary material to present for the first time a complete portrait of this bewilderingly complex and versatile leader. He traces Mao's development from idealistic student to visionary despot whose epic struggle to build a revolutionary realm of Red Virtue took the lives of more of his subjects than did any other leader in human history. Short illuminates crucial episodes in Mao's life and career which until now have been deliberately obscured. He reveals Mao's decisive role in the outbreak of the Korean war, and shows convincingly that the great political movements that followed were the logical, inevitable consequence of the deeply held ideas of a lifetime. Was Mao's life a tragic failure, imprisoned by his revolution? Or an unparalleled achievement of the human spirit, paving the way to a new Chinese golden age?

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