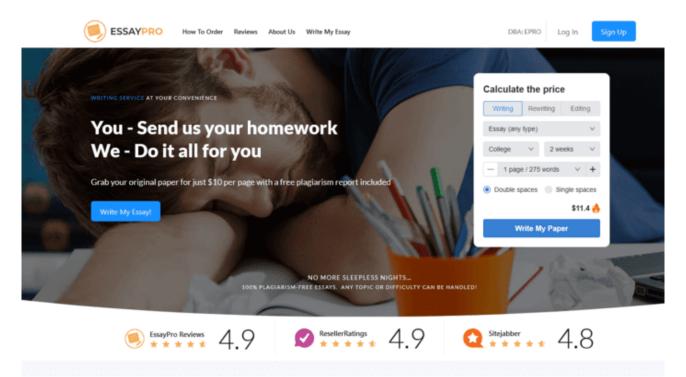
Charlotte Haldane's The Last Great Empress of China



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"Never again allow any women to hold supreme power in the state. It is against the house-law of our Dynasty, and should be strictly forbidden. Be careful not to permit eunuchs to meddle in Government matters. The Ming Dynasty was brought to ruin by eunuchs, and its fate should be a warning to my people" (Haldane 259). These were the final words of the last great empress of China, Tzu Hsi. In a sense this statement was ironic. For almost 50 years this one woman ruled China with a graceful but iron fist.
The Last Great Empress of China, written by Charlotte Haldane, is the story of how Tzu Hsi (1861-1908, rose to power and managed to keep it. Known by several names through out the course of her life, Tzu Hsi was intelligent, beautiful, and had a voice that could charm anyone. Chosen as an Imperial Concubine in the third class, Yehonala (as she was known at the time) took great care to win the <u>favor</u> of the current Empress Dowager. Her next step was to win the favor of the young Emperor Hsien Feng, which she accomplished with the help of the Chief Eunuch, who she had also won over. In her quest for ultimate

power the luckiest event that befell her was the birth of her son. Because the Empress Consort Sakota failed to produce an heir, Yenonala's son was to become the heir

apparent, raising her to the position of first <u>rank</u> concubine. Throughout the course of her life, Tzu Hsi played her cards well, continuously increasing her power.

Tzu Hsi's thirst for power caused her to be the center of several scandals over the course of her reign. It is said that she arranged the death of the Empress Consort Sakota (also known as the Tzu An) and two influential concubines whom she deemed a threat to her authority. Not being able to accomplish these deaths on her own, Tzu Hsi turned to those closest to her, the royal eunuchs. Though the eunuchs as a rule were not to speak unless spoken to first, the Chief Eunuch, whoever he was at the time, became her closest confidant.

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