

Hardcover: US

Screaming horses,
broken minds
tell atomic
bomb's story

Though written in a clinically descriptive fashion, Charles Pellegrino's book combines science and the memories of bombing survivors to horrifying effect

BY JEFFREY BURKE
BLOOMBERG

The hand-drawn illustrations of origami cranes that open *The Last Train From Hiroshima* are the only truly pleasant thing the book offers.

I don't mean to say Charles Pellegrino has written poorly in this account of people affected by the two atomic bombs dropped on Japan in August 1945. The human suffering is as unavoidable as it is incalculable. It comes with large doses of science that can be heavy going. And of course, the knowledge that we live in an era of nuclear proliferation hangs over every page. That last point highlights the value of this sort of unpleasantness.

Pellegrino sets out to capture experiences of dozens of people caught within the devastation zones of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Using physics and forensic archaeology, he details the workings of the bombs and their many effects on living and inanimate things.

He follows several survivors closely during the aftermath, with special interest in those who lived through both attacks. Pellegrino says there were about 30 of those, of which one, an engineer named Tsutomu Yamaguchi, died earlier this month at age 93, according to his obituary in the *New York Times*.

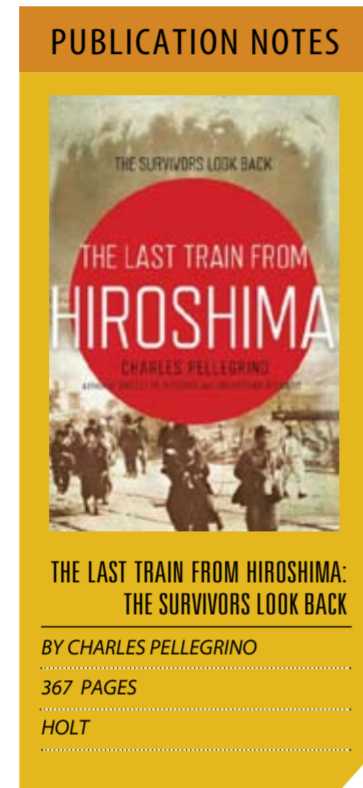
For many, death came quickly. Pellegrino writes that a Mrs Aoyama, who happened to be right below the detonation Point Zero, had one of the fastest deaths in all human history. Before a single nerve could begin to sense pain, she and her nerves ceased to be.

INCREDIBLE SUFFERING

Others endured extensive burns, shrapnel-type injuries, radiation sickness. Some experienced suffering one can only hope was cushioned by shock, like the man heard making rhythmic clicking on the road surface as if he were dancing down the street with metal taps on his shoes, Pellegrino writes. "But he wore no shoes. In fact, his feet were gone and the bony stumps of two tibiae — chipping and fracturing with each step against the pavement — were the source of the tapping."

A young girl had this picture etched into memory: "The screams of the horses as they broke free from the stables and ran toward her with flames leaping from their backs."

Pellegrino, a scientific consultant on James Cameron's movie *Avatar*



and his Titanic expeditions, has written books that dissect the myth and fact in subjects such as Pompeii and Atlantis. Here he is often, like a pathologist, coolly descriptive, yet he depicts with compassion some of the psychological damage. Besides survivors' guilt, some never forgave themselves for not helping others, even when they could have done little.

Many books have been written by and about the bombing victims since John Hersey's 1946 profile of six survivors in *Hiroshima*. Pellegrino's effort may be the first to combine science and memories comprehensively. I wish, though, he had been more scientific in annotating his sources.

The notes at the book's end are unreferenced by page or anything else to the narrative. The selected bibliography lists almost exclusively scientific texts. Whence came all the human experiences and talk and thoughts he presents?

Pellegrino writes that he benefited from conversations with experts and from encounters with eyewitness participants dating back three decades. The extent of the details and conversations recalled sometimes strains plausibility. Yet even if the writer stepped in now and then for narrative value, it's hard to see how he could possibly overstate such horrors.

Pleco for iPhone and iPod touch

BY DAVID CHEN
STAFF REPORTER

For serious students of Mandarin who use electronic dictionaries, there's really only one game in town, Pleco Software.

This small New York company has been producing its excellent software for Palm and Windows Mobile devices for nearly a decade, and offers electronic versions of some of the best dictionaries around for native English speakers, including John De Francis' ABC Chinese-English Comprehensive Dictionary.

Last month the company released Pleco for the iPhone and iPod touch, which is available in a free version and as a full-feature package for US\$149.95. The wait has been worth it, especially for devoted Pleco users.

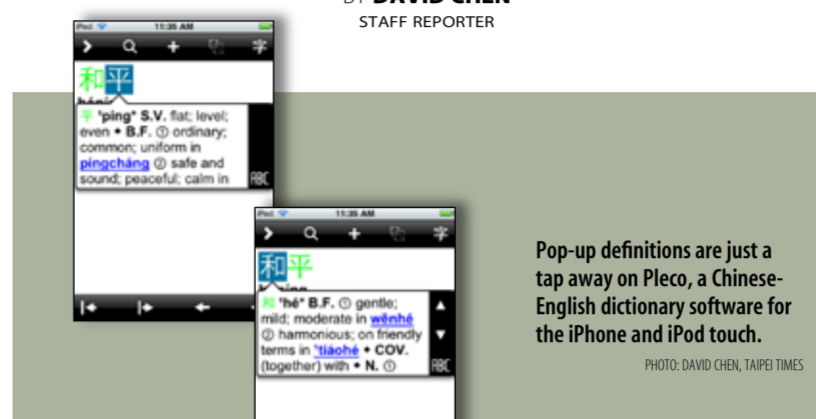
Having tried all three platforms, I found the iPhone version the easiest to use (I tested it on a second generation iPod touch). There are no major changes in functionality from the Palm and Window Mobile versions, but the iPhone's interface and processing power takes Pleco to a new level.

Everything runs smoother and quicker, whether searching for definitions in English or Chinese or scrolling through one of the multiple dictionaries that Pleco offers. And the iPhone's slick graphics make the experience all the more sweeter: fly through a long list of words with the flick of a finger and get an instantaneous response wherever you tap.

Searching for a word in Chinese or English is simple. Tap the search bar at the top of the screen, and type English or Hanyu Pinyin on the pop-up keyboard. Or you can input Chinese characters by scrolling through a page of radicals arranged by their number of strokes. For the die-hards, there's also an option to use Zhuyin Fuhao (注音符号) (commonly called bopomofo).

But the easiest way to input Chinese characters is to draw them with your finger using Pleco's well-designed handwriting recognizer, available as an "add-on" purchase. This feature is great for looking up an unfamiliar word, particularly if you want to avoid the laborious task of searching for the character by radical. The screen is highly responsive to the touch and you're given plenty of space to scribble, much more than the iPhone's own Chinese input system. The software is very good at guessing what character you're trying to write, no matter how crudely rendered — something that beginner students will appreciate.

Pleco has a seemingly endless list of features that cater to the student of Mandarin. Some notable functions: tap a button to hear a recorded pronunciation, which alternates between male and female voices; tap another to instantly switch between traditional and simplified



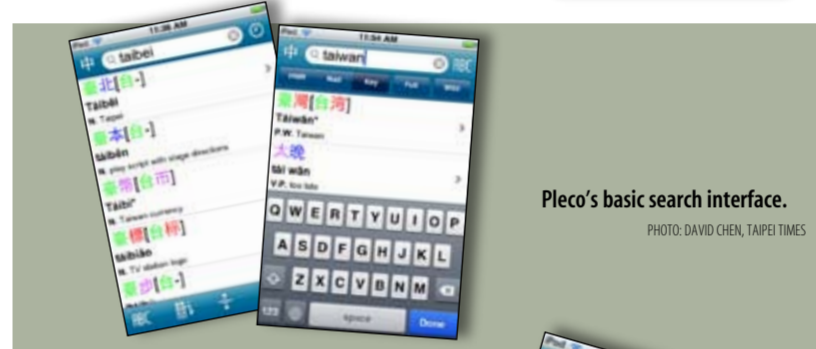
Pop-up definitions are just a tap away on Pleco, a Chinese-English dictionary software for the iPhone and iPod touch.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES



Pleco has an animated plug-in that shows you the stroke order for writing Chinese characters.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES



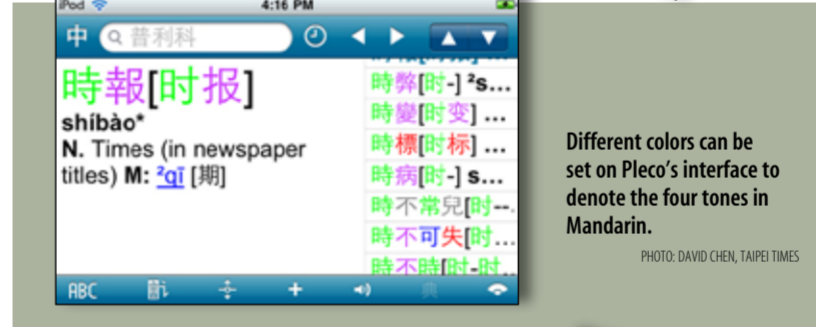
Pleco's basic search interface.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES



Writing Chinese characters with your finger is easy with Pleco.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES



Pleco's basic search interface in landscape mode.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

characters; one software plug-in provides animations showing the stroke order for each character, which is an excellent tool for practicing your calligraphy skills. Many of these functions are available as add-on purchases or come with the full software package.

A particularly nice feature is the pop-up definitions, which can be viewed anywhere you see a Chinese character. Say you're looking at the entry for *heping* (和平, peace), you can view the meanings for each part of this compound: tap directly on *he* (和), and a balloon instantly appears with the character's definition and pronunciation; the same goes for tapping on *ping* (平). This cross-referencing function is also useful for reading the example sentences in Chinese provided in many entries.

The pop-up definitions also come in handy with a Pleco add-on unique to the iPhone: The Reader is a built-in Web browser and document viewer. The browser is set up so that when you copy Chinese text from a Web site, it automatically appears on the pasteboard, where you can tap on each character for the pop-up definition and pronunciation. You can actually do this directly in the browser by switching to "live mode," but this makes Web pages slower to load (according to the manual, this function is still at the "experimental" stage).

The Reader also has a nifty feature that lets you upload and download documents from iPhone to your computer via a Wi-Fi network. Unfortunately, the document viewer doesn't work well. The Web browser is supposed to let you view Microsoft Word documents and text files, but I only got a blank screen. Pleco is aware of the problem and is working on it for the future releases.

There is one thing missing from the iPhone version that some old-hand Pleco users will miss: the ability to create flashcards, which is also slated for a future release. And a note for new users: even though the basic search functions are intuitive, plan to spend time reading the manual and online forums to get the most out of Pleco.

All in all, Pleco has taken advantage of the iPhone platform to make a great piece of software even better. The free version, available on iTunes, comes with the open source CEDICT dictionary. There are three paid packages available, ranging from US\$50 for the basic bundle to US\$150 for the full-featured version, which includes seven dictionaries. The add-on features, such as the handwriting recognizer and document reader, cost between US\$10 to US\$15 if you don't purchase the full version. And in a sign of goodwill, those who have either the Palm or Windows Mobile versions can transfer their licenses to their iPhone for free.

Hardcover: UK

China's charismatic 'last empress'

The irresistible Soong Mayling could have ruled the world had she lived 50 years later and chosen a different husband, writes Hannah Pakula

BY JULIA LOVELL
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

Until recently, there was a received, unkind wisdom about Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and his wife, Soong Mayling (宋美齡), also known as Madame Chiang Kai-shek, which went something like this: After seizing control of China in 1927, the two of them dissipated popular goodwill over the next 20 years: strangling dissent, filling their Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) with fascist carpet-baggers, failing to attend to China's most glaring socioeconomic problems. The Chiangs, this version of the story concludes, were 20th-century China's also-rans: a gangster-warlord and his luxury-loving moll who lost it all to the Communists in 1949 through inhumanity, corruption and incompetence.

Hannah Pakula, however, in her fascinating but overlong biography of Madame Chiang, argues that — at the height of her influence during the 1940s — Soong was one of the most

powerful and brilliant women in the world. "The real brains and boss" in the Chiang partnership, she was a political celebrity who mesmerized the American public with her diamond-encrusted cheongsams and charmed the US government out of billions of US dollars of aid for China's war effort.

The daughter of a self-made Methodist millionaire, Soong was packed off to get an American education aged only 10. A decade later she graduated at the top of her class and returned to China to launch herself into the best career open in the 1920s to a pampered daughter of the Shanghai business aristocracy: hunting down a rich and powerful husband. In 1927, Chiang — a successful career soldier who had just dragged China back together by purging the country's left wing, and fighting or bribing separatist warlords into submission — was probably the best option around. And for the stiff, socially inept Chiang, Soong was a fine prize: beautiful, charming

and invaluable Americanized — the ideal "mouth and ears" to win support in the west for his new KMT government.

Soong's talents as an international propagandist for her husband's regime shone through the dark years of World War II. In 1942, she took herself off on a triumphant 10-month publicity tour of the US, preaching the gospel of eternal friendship between China and America, pleading eloquently for "the moral support" (and dollars) "of democratic people everywhere." She brought a cheering Congress to the verge of tears; she drew tens of thousands to her public lectures; *Time* named her and Chiang "Man and wife of the year." At a rally held in her honor in the Hollywood bowl, dozens of cinema legends — Marlene Dietrich, Ginger Rogers, Rita Hayworth and so on — provided a warm-up parade before Soong appeared on stage to lecture her 30,000-strong audience on China's war effort.

Through Pakula's account,



PUBLICATION NOTES



THE LAST EMPRESS:
MADAME CHIANG KAI-SHEK AND
THE BIRTH OF MODERN CHINA

BY HANNAH PAKULA
787 PAGES
WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON

Chiang — a monomaniac with a filthy temper, who maintained to the end of his life that women should not wear trousers

— emerges in almost every way as less appealing: less glamorous, less savvy, less eloquent. After an attempt to teach her husband English ended with him greeting a British ambassador "Kiss me, Lampon," Soong spoke for Chiang not only in the US, but also at key negotiations with Western leaders. At the 1943 Cairo conference, Soong — the only woman in a room of Allied strongmen that included Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin — frequently interrupted the official interpreter to complain that the Generalissimo's meaning had not been fully expressed: "If you will allow me," she purred, "I shall put before you his real thoughts."

There was plenty of steel to her, of course. In the middle of one of her Washington charm offensives, Roosevelt asked her what she would do with troublesome striking laborers: "the beautiful, small hand came up and slid across her

throat." There was also a good deal of humbug about her patriotic sermons around the US. While famine stalked wartime China, she was dazzling the Americans with her gold-trimmed dresses and jade earrings, dancing from one champagne reception to another, and spending half a million US dollars on fur coats. She would, Pakula suggests, have dropped her humorless, puritanical husband (who refused to touch alcohol, coffee or even tea) like a hot potato had the right opportunity come along. On one visit to America, she allegedly propositioned — in a highly businesslike manner — a potential presidential candidate: if he were elected, she told the lucky man's representative, "he and I would rule the world."

Soong was never a woman short on a sense of self-worth. While Churchill was in Washington in 1943 — not a particularly slow year for World War II — she summoned him to an audience in New York. He explained that the pressures of work made a trip

north impossible, and persuaded Roosevelt to invite her for lunch at the White House. "The invitation was refused with some hauteur. Madame was of the opinion that I should make the pilgrimage." When Churchill offered to meet her halfway, his suggestion was dismissed as "facetious."

Pakula's story of Soong's conquest of the US is extraordinary, but elsewhere the book drags more than it ought to. For a biographer supposedly dedicated to giving Soong top billing over her less photogenic husband (that "crabbed little bastard," in the words of one of his American detractors), Pakula sidelines her prima donna with curious frequency. For chapters on end, we lose sight of the bejeweled Soong amid floods of slow, male-dominated detail about revolutions and wars. Somewhere among it all is a glittering cameo of an ambitious, over-indulged woman who — had she been born 50 years later — truly might have ruled the world.