



The Man Who Changed China: The Life and Legacy of Jiang Zemin

By Robert Lawrence Kuhn

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Jiang Zemin's life and leadership sweep through almost eighty tumultuous years of Chinese history: Japanese occupation, Civil War, Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square, and, more recently, dramatic economic growth, tensions with Taiwan, and opportunities and confrontations with America. Jiang's story is an epic of war, deprivation, revolution, political turmoil, social convulsion, economic reform, national transformation, and international resurgence. To Robert Lawrence Kuhn, a longtime China observer, understanding the legacy of Jiang Zemin is essential for understanding the challenges of contemporary China. By examining Jiang's life, we observe the clash between China's traditional culture and chaotic history, and we appreciate how its changes impact the entire world.

In *The Man Who Changed China*, Kuhn, who was cited by the *Asian Wall Street Journal* for the "unprecedented access" he was given in the course of writing this book, has produced what the Journal called "probably the closest thing to an authorized biography that's possible in Communist China." Here a reader will find a complex and nuanced portrait of China's senior leader, whose policies continue to exert great influence over the course of his country. Kuhn offers insight into how the Japanese occupation during Jiang's teenage years imprinted his psyche for life, how he became a Communist, and how, decades later, he struggled to transform the Party in the face of withering criticism.

In a sense, Kuhn argues, Jiang's early skeptics got it right: He was a transitional figure—but not in the way they had meant. With unshakable if paternalistic vision, a lifelong love of Chinese civilization, and backroom political skills that no one had anticipated, Jiang Zemin became an unexpected agent of change, effecting the transition from a traumatized society to a confident, prosperous country rapidly ascending in the new world order. Kuhn shows how Jiang led China through an amazing metamorphosis—from a fretful country destabilized by the turmoil and crackdown in Tiananmen Square into a vibrant nation that became a primary engine of global economic growth. Above all Jiang is a Chinese patriot—and it is important to appreciate what that really means. In offering this unusually intimate and comprehensive personal and political

biography, Kuhn demonstrates that Jiang Zemin's life personifies the history of contemporary China, giving invaluable insight into what China is today and will become in the future.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This biography tries to counter the Western perception of Jiang Zemin (b. 1926) as a dictator of Communist China and emphasizes instead how far Chinese leadership has come since the days of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. A mild-mannered but patriotic grassroots organizer of protests during the Japanese occupation, Jiang matured into a good-natured technocrat who was, according to the author (host of PBS's series *Closer to Truth* and a former adviser to the Chinese government), without greater political ambition while serving as mayor of Shanghai. But he avoided political pitfalls in his dealings with student protesters in Shanghai in the period leading to the Tiananmen Square massacre—dealings Kuhn tries to portray as firm but not unkind. As China's head of state from 1993 to 2003, Jiang was, in Kuhn's view, a visionary who put a new face on China through his love of science and technology as well as a series of important foreign policy encounters; the author emphasizes Jiang's tension-fraught relationship with the Western press, his quirky style of winning over foreign leaders through bursting into song and his support of America's war on terror. Though detailed and readable, the book is at times cloying: the less flattering points in Jiang's career—his role in squelching mass movements seen as threatening stability and his power-amassing maneuvers—are glossed over. 32 pages of b&w photos.

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From [Booklist](#)

The previous biography of Jiang Zemin dates to 1998 (*Tiger on the Brink: Jiang Zemin and China's New Elite*, by Bruce Gilley), justifying a refresher on the now-retired leader of China. Kuhn's portrait is positive, frequently laudatory, and liberally doses its chronicle of Jiang's life with anecdotes from his friends and family. His personal story echoes that of Communist-ruled China; during the Cultural Revolution, for example, Maoists compelled the university-educated Jiang to perform manual labor. Kuhn's work does not often criticize the official policies and actions of China under Jiang's leadership, seeming content with describing them. This approach gives the work a year-in-review hue—for each year of Jiang's political life, Kuhn paraphrases his speeches, gives details of his meetings with foreign leaders, and quotes at length his interviews with journalists. In presenting the avuncular, English-speaking Jiang's public persona, Kuhn pins his activities to the consensus-driven political mores of the Chinese Communist Party's top echelons and leverages the politics China watchers will demand from the author's info-packed biography. *Gilbert Taylor*
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From the Author

Bruce Gilley ("In China's Own Eyes," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005) is correct that my biography, *The Man Who Changed China: The Life and Legacy of Jiang Zemin*, portrays Jiang as he might see himself. My intention (as stated in the book itself, on pages 691–92) was to move beyond all the hype and bias about China so as to understand how Chinese leaders think.

Jiang didn't choose me; I chose Jiang. The book was my idea; I planned it, financed it, and wrote it to trace China's story through eight tumultuous decades of trauma and transformation. I had help—translators, researchers, editors—but I maintained absolute editorial control and made every editorial decision, and no one in China ever thought otherwise.

My rendition of events, such as the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia in 1999, differs markedly from that of the official Chinese media. In a publisher's note, Chinese readers are advised: "Certain

viewpoints and opinions of the author, as a Westerner, bear a definite distance from those of our own. Hopefully the reader will understand."

My book is unprecedented—the first biography of a living leader published on the mainland. Furthermore, there is inside information in it that Chinese media and officials aver that they never knew. One reporter complained publicly about the fact that this breakthrough was made by a foreigner.

What does Jiang himself think about the book? "He [Kuhn] wrote very objectively; he didn't beautify me," Jiang was quoted publicly as saying, "... but he got my wedding date wrong."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Julie Nealy:

This The Man Who Changed China: The Life and Legacy of Jiang Zemin book is simply not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book is definitely information inside this guide incredible fresh, you will get info which is getting deeper an individual read a lot of information you will get. This The Man Who Changed China: The Life and Legacy of Jiang Zemin without we realize teach the one who examining it become critical in pondering and analyzing. Don't possibly be worry The Man Who Changed China: The Life and Legacy of Jiang Zemin can bring if you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' turn into full because you can have it with your lovely laptop even cell phone. This The Man Who Changed China: The Life and Legacy of Jiang Zemin having good arrangement in word along with layout, so you will not feel uninterested in reading.

Gerald Wright:

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