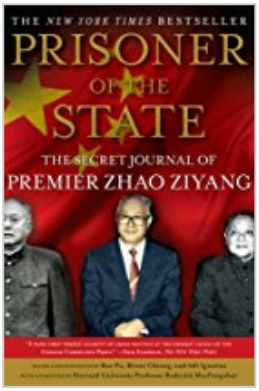

Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang

By Zhao Ziyang

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Prisoner of the State is the story of Premier Zhao Ziyang, the man who brought liberal change to China and who was dethroned at the height of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 for trying to stop the massacre. Zhao spent the last years of his life under house arrest. An occasional detail about his life would slip out, but scholars and citizens lamented that Zhao never had his final say.

But Zhao did produce a memoir, secretly recording on audio tapes the real story of what happened during modern China's most critical moments. He provides intimate details about the Tiananmen crackdown, describes the ploys and double crosses used by China's leaders, and exhorts China to adopt democracy in order to achieve long-term stability. His riveting, behind-the-scenes recollections form the basis of *Prisoner of the State*.

The China that Zhao portrays is not some long-lost dynasty. It is today's China, where its leaders accept economic freedom but resist political change. Zhao might have steered China's political system toward openness and tolerance had he survived. Although Zhao now speaks from the grave, his voice still has the moral power to make China sit up and listen.

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Editorial Review

Review
“A rare first-person account of crisis politics at the highest levels of the Chinese Communist Party.”
—Erik Eckholm, *The New York Times*

“Until the appearance of this posthumous work, not a single voice of dissent had ever emerged from the [Chinese Communist] party’s inner circle . . . Fascinating.”
—*The Economist*

“Zhao speaks from beyond the grave . . . the up-close-and-personal tone [of the book] stands out. Scholars will mine *Prisoner of the State* for historical nuances.”
—Perry Link, coeditor of *The Tiananmen Papers*

“[T]his book will be of special importance to anyone interested in what happened during the spring of 1989, culminating in the Tiananmen killings of June 3 and 4.”
—Jonathan Mirsky, *The New York Review of Books*

About the Author
ZHAO ZIYANG was the Premier of China from 1983 until 1987 when he became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, a position he held until 1989 when he was deposed and put under house arrest until his death in 2005.

Adi Ignatius is an American journalist who covered China for *The Wall Street Journal* during the Zhao Ziyang era. He is currently editor in chief of the Harvard Business Review.

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Preface

Adi Ignatius

It was an exhilarating moment for China and the world. In late 1987, at the end of a spirited Communist Party Congress that seemed to propel China on a more progressive course, a new team of leaders emerged, led by a preternaturally tranquil man named Zhao Ziyang.

Zhao wasn't an unknown: after an impressive career in the provinces guiding the first, baby steps of China's

recovery from Mao Zedong's lethally unsuccessful economic experiments, Zhao had been summoned to Beijing in 1980 and was soon named Premier, responsible for the economy.

Yet now he was being elevated to the most senior position in China's leadership: General Secretary of the Party. Since he was only sixty-eight years old -- a mere child among China's leaders -- he had to deal with an older generation of Party veterans who lacked official titles but nonetheless wielded ultimate authority. But the supreme leader of those octogenarians, Deng Xiaoping, had given Zhao the keys to the republic. It was his time to shine.

Zhao was unlike any previous Chinese leader. When the new inner core, the Standing Committee of the Politburo, appeared at the end of that Congress in 1987 for an unprecedented face-to-face with the international press corps at the Great Hall of the People, Zhao beamed with a relaxed confidence. He seemed to signal that China was ready to join the world, that it had begun a process of transforming not just its economy but also its tightfisted politics.

For the first time in memory, the entire Standing Committee appeared in Western attire, their Mao suits stashed away for this photo op aimed at telling the developed West that China was comfortable on stage. When a reporter commented on Zhao's impressive double-breasted pinstripe suit, Zhao, with a big grin, playfully pulled open the jacket to show off a lapel that indicated: made in China. A new era seemed to be at hand.

Over the next two years, however, things would spin out of control, for China and for Zhao. Missteps on the economy led to a rampant inflation that unnerved China's citizens and opened the door for China's more cautious leaders to seize authority and reimpose central controls.

And then, in April 1989, the Tiananmen protests erupted. By the time they were suppressed, less than two months later, Zhao was out of power and under house arrest in his home on a quiet alley in Beijing. China's most promising change agent had been disgraced, along with the policies he stood for.

Zhao spent the last sixteen years of his life, up until his death in 2005, in seclusion. An occasional detail about his life would slip out: reports of a golf excursion, a photo of his aging visage, a leaked letter to China's leaders. But China scholars often lamented that Zhao never had his final say, that he didn't leave his take on what really happened behind the scenes during the tumultuous years that he was in Beijing and, in particular, in 1989 during the Tiananmen protests, when he stood up to China's conservative forces and lost.

The fact is, Zhao did produce such a memoir, in complete secrecy. This book is the first time it is being made public.

Zhao, it turns out, methodically recorded his thoughts and recollections on some of modern China's most critical moments. He talked of the Tiananmen crackdown, of his clashes behind the scenes with his powerful rivals, of the often petty bickering that lay behind policy making, of how China had to evolve politically to achieve long-term stability.

Somehow, under the nose of his captors, Zhao found a way to record about thirty tapes, each about sixty minutes long. Judging from their contents, they were made around the year 2000. Members of his family say they knew nothing about the project. Zhao produced these audio journals mostly by recording over some low-quality cassette tapes that were lying around the house: kids' music and Peking Opera. He indicated their order by numbering them with faint pencil markings. There were no titles or other notes. The first few recordings, covering Tiananmen and other topics he was eager to address -- like allegations that Zhao had backstabbed his predecessor, Hu Yaobang, when Hu had been forced out of power in 1987 -- seem to have been made in discussion with friends. Their voices are heard on the tapes but have been edited out to protect

them and their families' security.

When Zhao finished the recordings after about two years, he found a way to pass tapes to several trusted friends. Each was given only a portion of the total recordings, clearly an attempt to hedge the risk that the tapes might be lost or confiscated. When Zhao died in 2005, some of the people who knew of the recordings launched a complex, clandestine effort to gather the materials in one place and then transcribe them for publication. Later, another set of the tapes, perhaps the originals, was found, hidden in plain view among the grandchildren's toys in Zhao's study. The audio recordings themselves have been returned to Zhao's family, who will decide how they should be preserved. Clips of the recordings will be released to the public upon the release of this book.

Prisoner of the State is a nearly complete presentation of Zhao's recorded journal. The book does not follow Zhao's precise sequence. Some chunks were rearranged and others trimmed to eliminate repetition and for greater readability. For instance, we open with sections that deal with the Tiananmen protests and crackdown of 1989 and with Zhao's many years under house arrest. We begin each chapter with brief editors' notes, in italics, to help set the stage for readers who aren't familiar with what was happening in China at the time. We also have inserted material throughout the book in brackets and footnotes to provide added clarity. Wherever these appear, these are our words, not Zhao's.

Although Zhao gave no instructions as to how or when the materials might be published or otherwise used, he clearly wanted his story to survive. Here's what he says at the start of Part 1, which covers the events leading up to the Tiananmen Massacre of June 4, 1989: "I jotted down some notes about the events surrounding the June Fourth incident because I was worried that I might start forgetting some of the specifics. I hoped that it might serve as a kind of historical record."

What is the significance of this journal? Above all, it is the first time that a leader of Zhao's stature in China has spoken frankly about life at the top. He provides an intimate look at one of the world's most opaque regimes. We learn about the triumphs and failures, the boasts and insecurities, of the man who tried to bring liberal change to China, and who made every effort to stop the Tiananmen Massacre. This is Zhao's version of history, and he perhaps was making his arguments for a future generation of leaders who may revisit his case and decide whether he should be rehabilitated in the memory of the Party, and of the nation.

The power structure that Zhao describes is chaotic, often bumbling. Competing factions rush to win over paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, whose nods of assent or rejection resonate through society as if handed down from an oracle. In this narrative, Deng is a conflicted figure who urges Zhao to move quickly with economic reforms but consistently fights back against anything that seems to challenge the Party's supremacy. He is at times portrayed not as the authority, but as a puppet, subject to manipulation by Zhao or his rivals, depending on who presents his case first. Zhao reflects on comments he made to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that upset Deng. His assumption, based on years in the inner circle, is that Deng could not have had such a reaction simply on his own: "I have yet to learn who it was or how that person managed to provoke Deng."

The China that Zhao portrays is not some long-lost dynasty. It is today's China, where the nation's leaders accept economic freedom but continue to intimidate and arrest anyone who tries to speak openly about political change. Although the central figures of Zhao's narrative have mostly passed from the scene, the system itself and its habits have not evolved. At the end of 2008, more than three hundred Chinese activists, marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, jointly signed Charter 08, a document that called on the Party to reform its political system and allow freedom of expression and an independent judiciary. Beijing responded as it always has: by interrogating many of the signatories and arresting some, including prominent dissident Liu Xiaobo.

China is still a nation where the Party's obsession with self-perpetuation drives its public behavior, and where patriotic voices that don't narrowly conform are silenced. That has consequences far beyond the political sphere. In 2003, when the deadly SARs virus began to spread in China, officials initially resorted to form by trying to control the news and cover up the extent of the problem. That lack of candor may have exposed many thousands more to possible infection.

This journal isn't comprehensive. It doesn't deal with Zhao's long and productive career, only the tumultuous three years before he fell from power. Yet his impressive achievements and the reputation he developed are worth remembering.

Zhao's rise to power traces to his success running economic policy in the provinces. Though born in Henan Province, he built his career in Guangdong, where he became Party chief in 1965 at the remarkably tender age of forty-six. Like countless other officials, he was purged during the Cultural Revolution; he was assigned the relatively menial task of being a fitter at the Xiangzhong Mechanics Factory in Hunan Province. Zhao Wujun, the youngest of his four sons (there is also one daughter), worked with him. The family lived in a small apartment nearby with a suitcase in the middle of the living room that served as the dinner table.

Zhao's return from exile shows the high regard Beijing's leaders had for him. As Zhao once described it to friends, in April 1971 the Zhao family was suddenly r...

Users Review

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