

[PDF] Mao Zedong: A Life (A Penguin Life)

Jonathan Spence - pdf download free book



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Description:

From humble beginnings in rural Hunan, Mao Zedong became the "Great Helmsman" of Communist China. By the time he died in 1976, he had profoundly changed the course of history. His increasingly erratic whims and graspings at a wild utopia destabilized his immense achievements, and he was ultimately responsible for the deaths of perhaps 60 million people. Jonathan Spence brings great erudition to the story of this flawed colossus. He is particularly enlightening on Mao's early years--it is nearly two-thirds through the book before Mao stands on the walls of the Forbidden City in October 1949 and declares the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The young

revolutionary's infamous willfulness is soon apparent, yet Spence rounds out his character by, for example, quoting a poem to his beloved first wife and mentioning the profit he made from an early capitalist venture, a bookstore. *Mao Zedong* is excellent biography--and more. China was convulsed for nearly a century by almost constant war and revolution, and Spence uses the life of the man at the heart of so many historic events to elucidate the whole momentous epoch. In his many writings, Spence has proved a master at making complex themes easy to understand, and this compact book provides yet another example of his skills. --*John Stevenson* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Publishers Weekly In the latest of the concise Penguin Lives series, China historian Spence (*The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, etc.) blends historical facts with cultural analysis, creating a work that is fluid and informative despite its brevity. Portraying an intimate Mao (1893-1976), Spence leaves much of the political commentary to other historians, focusing instead on how a boy from the farm villages of Hunan rose to rule the most populous nation in the world. Spence gives readers a Mao who is smart but not wise, unexceptional in almost all qualities except his "inflexible will" and "ruthless self-confidence." He points out that, even at a young age, Mao's perception of governing foreshadowed much of how he eventually did rule: in an essay written about Lord Shang, a Qin dynasty minister, Mao argued that Shang's rule, considered by historians to be cruel, was just ("At the beginning of anything out of the ordinary, the mass of the people always dislike it"). "I have come," writes Spence, "to think of the enigmatic arena in which Mao seemed most at home as being that of order's opposite, the world of misrule." The shortness of the form enables Spence to accelerate the pace of Mao's life, thus adding drama to the sea change in Mao's character from naive idealist to cunning political infighter and center of a personality cult. The Mao who lingers on the last page is a somewhat diminished, Lear-like figure, estranged from his wife and ultimately unsure of whether his revolution had a future. When Henry Kissinger praised Mao's writings during their famous meeting, the chairman responded: "I think that, generally, people like me sound like a lot of big canons." (Oct.)

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