5-15-2009

Zhao’s Memoirs: 5 Places to Turn

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive

Part of the Asian History Commons, Asian Studies Commons, Chinese Studies Commons, and the International Relations Commons

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive/533
The biggest publishing news just now related to Tiananmen’s 20th anniversary is the release of Zhao Ziyang’s memoirs, a book that was apparently already being offered for sale in Hong Kong even before its official publication date and has been reviewed, excerpted, and discussed in various newspapers and magazines. We may at some point do an “In Case You Missed It” review of Prisoner of the State (or deal with it extensively in another fashion), but we weren’t able to do a “Coming Distractions” piece about it for a simple reason: we weren’t sent an advance copy.*

What we can do at this point is offer up a top 5 list, which directs readers to some of the most interesting things that others have been saying about the book, based either on reading it or in some cases simply ruminating on its appearance and how reports related to it have been making their way into or been kept out of China. Here are five things worth reading:

1. This blog post by Evan Osnos reflecting on the fact that this isn’t the first time that efforts by the Chinese authorities to keep someone silent have failed, even if in the case of this book it is appearing posthumously.

2. This smart piece by Geoff Dyer and Jamil Anderlini of the Financial Times that sums up many key points about Zhao and the book and includes some telling quotes.

3. Peking Duck on the ability, at least for a time, for Internet users in the PRC to access excerpts from the book in audio form, with an allusion to the role of tweets in spreading word of this possibility. Or go to Jeremy Goldkorn’s post on this same phenomenon as evidence that “China’s Net Nanny moves in mysterious ways,” a good line.

4. Speaking of turns of phrase, Perry Link’s Washington Post review of Zhao’s memoir ends with a striking one. In trying to capture the complexities of a situation in which there is often great discontent and yet the government stays in power, he writes that: “The seal continues to straddle the ball — insecure as ever, but still definitely on top.” (This sort of zoological analogy for a political situation may remind regular readers of Link’s best known New York Review of Books commentaries, which was about the complex workings of censorship and self-censorship and was called “China: The Anaconda in the Chandelier.”)

5. China Digital Times with a typically good set of excerpts from reviews and other coverage.

* Note to any publishers, authors, or agents who follow this blog: feel free to send advance copies of works that might interest our readers to China Beat c/o History Department, 200 Krieger Hall, University of California-Irvine, as they might end up the focus of a “Coming Distractions” post.