Reading Roundup

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May 26, 2009 in The Five-List Plan by The China Beat | No comments

1. A very cool set of reports from 1949 on what happened in Shanghai sixty years ago when the Communist Party took control (Hat tip: Shanghaiist).

2. Alec Ash continues with brief insights on critical issues. Here’s a nugget on the Chinese “brain drain.”

3. A very smart review of Zhao’s memoir by Richard Rigby at East Asia Forum:

What was not generally known at the time to outside observers was Zhao’s determination, mentioned several times in the book, that he not go down in history as the General Secretary who approved unleashing the PLA against the demonstrators.

In so doing he sealed his political fate, but also ensured his name would be added to the (all too long) list of upright officials who throughout Chinese history did the right thing – to their cost, but to their own, and China’s, ultimate credit.

The fascination of the book, though, goes much further than Zhao’s account of the June 4 events.

It will be mined in great detail by many for the insights it provides into the evolution of the economic reform program, the twists and turns of internal party struggles, the paramount role of Deng Xiaoping (but even his power was not unlimited), the serious differences within the reform camp over political reform (and in Zhao’s case, the way his thinking on this issue changed, and continued to do following his removal from power), Zhao’s insightful pen-portraits of his erstwhile colleagues, and his frank admissions of various policy mistakes (in particular the mishandling of the price reform of 1988).

Most of all, the book stands out as the sole account of how things worked – and in some, but not all ways, presumably still do – at the very top of the Chinese political system, by one who was there.

(Go to East Asia Forum for more.)

4. Check out an intriguing new blog (hat tip: Victor Mair) called The China Society Pages that features translations of quirky Chinese new stories (some of which also appear at CNReviews), including recent entries like “Husband and Wife Sue His Former Mistress,” “Widowed Chicken Disconsolate over Loss of Rooster,” and “Man Stabs Father 6 Times Killing Him, Then Goes Back to Bed.” You get the idea.

5. China is trying to manage its international profile the same way it does at home: by creating media, this time aimed at foreigners. Hear the story at NPR.