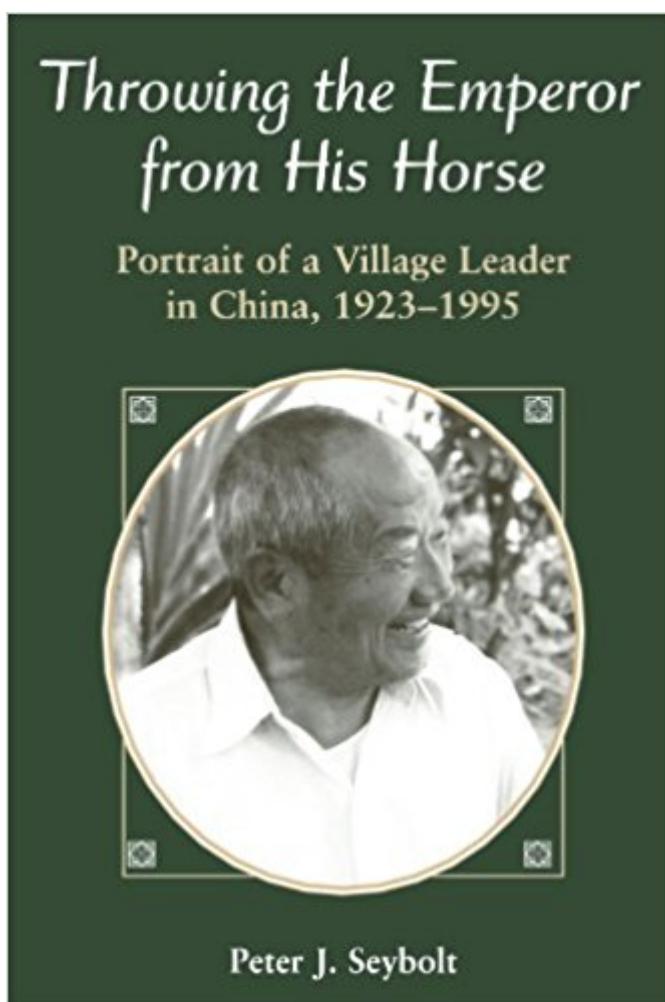


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Throwing The Emperor From His Horse: Portrait Of A Village Leader In China, 1923-1995



Synopsis

This engaging book sketches an intimate portrait of the life of Wang Fucheng, an illiterate peasant who served for thirty years as Communist party secretary of an impoverished village on the north China plain. Based on conversations over a seven-year period (1987–1994), between Wang Fucheng and Peter Seybolt the book unfolds as a continuous first-person narrative, framed by the author's overview and chapter introductions. Born in 1923, Wang Fucheng rose under the Communists from extreme poverty to a position of power and prestige in his village. His account provides a fascinating illustration of the process of social mobility during the Maoist era, the interaction between central and local leaders, and the way central policies were adapted at the village level. The book's compelling and evocative picture of life in rural China will appeal to scholars, students, and general readers alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Peter J. Seybolt is professor of history and director of the Asian Studies Program at the University of Vermont.

Interestingly written. Book is in good condition, barely used. Defiantly worth the price!!!

I can hardly say this is not a good book. Actually I have used this book in my modern China course and my students love it! However, I gradually found its problems: the book is based on the interviews Professor Seybolt gave to Wang Fucheng, an illiterate village leader and CCP party

member about his life experience over the years. I understand the reason why an illiterate farmer Wang Fucheng was chosen was because the author wants to avoid the overconcentration on the social elite's response to China's social upheaval, as many works tend to do. However, the price the author pays is that the narrator in this book basically lacks a critical and analytical ability to explain the rural life after 1949. During the Great Leap Forward, he simply let villagers grow turnip so they escaped famine; during the cultural revolution, he soon restored his leadership after several struggle sessions; In the "Criticize Lin Biao and criticize Confucius Campaign", Wang went as far as to think that Confucius was a big landlord in a nearby village! after the Cultural Revolution, he loves Deng's reform policy...It seems that Wang Fucheng so easily survived all turmoils and he never questions anything but just happily adapts himself to any situation and felt complacent---this reminds people of Zhang Yimou's To Live---yes just live on without reflection. The author's limitation of access to true feeling of the people is obvious---as a party member and rural cadre, Wang Fucheng would never tell an American interviewer his suspicion of Mao or distaste of the government, even if there is any. He must use self-censorship to ensure that whatever he tells an American is politically correct. Thus, what he tells in the book might all be true, but not all truths have been told. The question of authenticity should be considered when reading this type of books that are based on interviews between Americans and Chinese citizens who know too well what they can say while what not!A much better work about rural Chinese feelings is "Chen Village under Mao and Deng", I think. Only in the latter can you find the diverse and rich inner world of Chinese peasants. They are not just "living" in a rosy picture but also think, criticize, hate and doubt...

Very good book.

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