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The Chinese Century: A Photographic History of the Last Hundred Years

UK Endeavor Group, Annping Chin, Jonathan D Spence

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China is one of the great question marks on the world stage as we approach the third millennium. No longer a sleeping giant, neither is China a stable ally of the West. Economically it is an emerging powerhouse, and politically it is precariously balanced between the free market and military dictatorship. There could be no better time to try to understand China's history--the distance it has traveled, and where it may be going from here--than today.

The Chinese Century tells the story in over two hundred and fifty rare, eloquent photographs that have been chosen from archives, libraries, and private collections throughout China, Taiwan, and the West. Many of the photographs have never been seen outside China. Like a time machine, they let us see historical events that for most of us have existed until now only in words: the lives of the rural peasants and the privileged elite from the time of the Qing dynasty to the People's Republic, the opulence and squalor that the European colonial powers brought to China in their concession areas, the cities within Chinese cities that were inhabited exclusively by Europeans. Here are the rare photos of the Boxer Rebellion and the Rape of Nanking, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. There are quirky moments, as well, such as American soldiers during the Second World War eating their K rations with chopsticks, and private photographs of Mao Zedong covered in river mud after a leisurely swim.

The photographs are paired with a stunning historical text by one of the West's most respected China scholars, Jonathan D. Spence, writing here for the first time with his wife, Annping Chin. The narrative traces the nation's disintegration into civil and world war, Communist revolution, and its slow reemergence as a military and economic superpower. Focusing on the lives of ordinary Chinese as well as on the towering figures such as Chiang Kai-shek and Meo Zedong, Spence weaves an intricate and fascinating social, political, and military history.

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