

(田纪云：我很怀念胡赵时代的中南海大院)**

Tian Jiyun: I Miss Zhongnanhai Compound during Hu Yaobang-Zhao Ziyang Era

Translated by Hemant Adlakha

Honorary Fellow, ICS, and Associate Professor,
Centre for Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies, JNU, New Delhi
haidemeng@gmail.com

Summary

First as the general secretary and then as the Deputy Prime Minister, I spent twelve springs and autumns within the Red Walls of the Zhongnanhai compound. These twelve years have left me with too many and at the same time too profound memories. Some of these memories are unforgettable and will remain with me for my lifetime. Here, I am happy to recount a few of them and will talk about the style and customs of the way the State Council used to function

Source: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/KLsnSSfVOaYy1LXSjDuBsw>

WeChat: September 17, 2020

Author: Tian Jiyun

The author, Tian Jiyun was among the top ranks of the Chinese leadership

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Tian Jiyun (1929 -)

Tian Jiyun (born on June 4, 1929, in Feicheng, Shandong province) became CPC member at the young age of 18. He appeared on China's national political stage as a strong supporter of Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Open Door Policy. From 1981 to 1983 he served as the deputy secretary general of China's State Council. In 1983, he was promoted to the post of secretary general. He was inducted into the CPC polit bureau in 1987. He served as vice premier of the State Council between 1983 and 1993. He was elected the vice chairman of the NPC for two successive terms in 1993 and 1998, respectively. He has the unique distinction of serving a galaxy of top Party and the PRC leaders from Hu Yaobang to Zhao Ziyang to Jiang Zemin to Li Peng. He drew everyone's attention after he unleashed a fierce attack on the anti-Reform "leftists" in a speech delivered at the Central Party School in Beijing in 1992. In the speech, Tian Jiyun advised the "leftists" to establish their own "economic zones" where they can preserve all the "worst" features of the old Maoist era. He stepped down from active politics in 2002 – Translator's note.

I joined the Eighth Route Army when I was 12 years old. I have never had the opportunity to receive formal higher education. I did not have a political background and I lived in the countryside for a very long period. To me, Zhongnanhai (中南海) was always like a distant destination. However, the tide of history swept me into the Zhongnanhai – first as the CPC secretary general and then as the deputy premier of the P RChina. I spent twelve springs and autumns within the Red Walls of the Zhongnanhai compound. The twelve years I lived inside the Zhongnanhai, have left me with too many profound memories. Some of these memories are unforgettable and will remain with me for my lifetime. Here, I am happy to recount a few of them and will talk about the style and customs of the way the State Council used to function. Under long and fine leadership of Premier Zhao Ziyang, the General Office of the State Council established quite many excellent traditions. I am happy to recount four of the most lasting impressions here:*

I.

First, the General Office staff belonged to all parts of China; they (the staff) did not enter through connections; they were not "exclusive"; and there were no "factions." We worked in full harmony and got along very well with each other.



President Jiang Zemin, vice premier Tian Jiyun and Premier Li Peng Photo: gettyimages.fi

Internally, in our written correspondence, from the premier to ordinary staff member – everyone addressed each other as “comrade”; never addressed each other using designations. When I first arrived at the State Council, I felt it was like grandma Liu¹ of the “A Dream of Red Chamber” entering the Grandview Garden, totally confused in the vast compound and not knowing East from West and North from South. As regards the functioning and structure of the General Office, the confusion was more akin to the clueless Second Monk.² Faced with such a

* Zhao Ziyang, 赵紫阳 Zhào zǐ yáng, was a high-ranking political leader in the People’s Republic of China. He was the 3rd premier of the PRC between 1980 and 1987, vice chairman of the CPC from 1981 to 1982, and general secretary of the CPC from 1987 to 1989. Apparently he was unceremoniously removed from the post during the 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement and put under house arrest inside the Zhongnanhai compound. He was never allowed to step out of the Zhongnanhai and he passed away at his residence in January, 2005. His memoir, Prisoner of the State, The Secret Journal of Zhao Ziyang, was published posthumously in 2009 – Translator’s note.
 ** Hua Guofeng, 华国锋 Huá Guófēng (1921 – 2008) was Chinese premier during 1976-1980 and Chairman of the CPC from 1976 to 1981. He was Mao’s chosen successor and became famous for the slogan “Two Whateverisms,” that is, ‘whatever Chairman Mao has said is correct, whatever Chairman Mao has done is correct.’

confused scenario, I decided to do three things to begin with:

A. To get acquainted with the internal working environment as soon as possible. I remain grateful to the staff both in the general office and in the secretariat of the State Council for the help and cooperation I received from them.

Soon I was introduced to Ms. Liu Bingqing (she belonged to Hui³ nationality and her husband served as life-long secretary under Comrade Hua Guofeng**), who had been employed since the days of Premier Zhou Enlai and was a veteran of several CPC regimes. Ms. Qingbing knew inside out of the “culture” of the State Council. She used to swing by my office during her free hours for a chit-chat, and she used to brief me on the general functioning of the general office. Often, she took me

Hua had to step down from both his party post and premiership, under pressure from the pro-Reform faction within the CPC led by Deng Xiaoping and Li Xiannian etc. Hu Yaobang had replaced Hua as the party general secretary in 1981 and Zhao Ziyang replaced Hua as the State Premier in 1980, respectively.

¹ *Dream of the Red Chamber* is an 18th –century novel written by Cao Xueqin and is considered to be the greatest novel of Chinese literature.

² Granny Liu is one of several important characters in the novel. She is a country rustic and visits the grand mansion on two occasions, as narrated in the story.

³ The Hui people are an East Asian ethnoreligious group predominantly composed of Chinese speaking adherents of Islam distributed throughout China. They are mainly from the north-western provinces and Zhongyuan region in China.

around in the compound and exposed me to various departments under the State Council. I am extremely indebted to her for the “education” I received from my interaction with her.



Source: YouTube



Zhao Ziyang (1928-2005)

B. Second task I acquainted myself with was the documentation.

As soon as I arrived at the State Council, I was assigned the task of economic work which involved sifting through voluminous policy documents. My specific assignment was to restrict quantity and ensure quality. I must admit,

the important task as it was, I knew I couldn't afford to make mistakes. When dealing with key documents, my style of functioning was “collective work.” I always believed in calling over to my office the particular document-related department in-charge along with the author of the document; to go through the document meticulously, to chew each and every word in the document and critically examine every aspect.

Hou Ying, Zhou Suohong, Li Shuwen, Zhang Kezhi, An Chengxin and many others, among whom several went on to serve as the deputy heads of the Secretariat, often collaborated with me in scrutinizing the policy papers. In this way, I learnt a lot from my colleagues. Remember, the voluminous number of such documents was relatively large during the 1980s.

C. Integrate with the masses and shun “exclusivity”

On this front, I must say my long years of experience during the war years came in handy. My family had still not arrived in Beijing, so I used to have my meals in the canteen together with several colleagues. In the common dining hall, I had to stand in the queue and collect my meal from the counter. The only advantage I enjoyed was for all the secretary generals there was table

reserved and I never had to struggle to find a seat with bowl in my hand. Eating together with colleagues in the dining hall helped narrow down the differences among the staff. In no time I got acquainted with a large number of staff members who would soon become very informal and talked about various things. All these experiences proved to be extremely helpful for me to get going in the role I were to play at the State Council general secretariat. Indeed this experience also helped me greatly in my later work as the deputy premier of the State Council.

II. Recruiting talent

During my first term as vice premier, I also worked as Secretary-General of the State Council and as Secretary of the Party Leadership Group of the State Council, in charge of cadres. But I must proudly say no one ever approached me for individual promotion or out of the turn appointment. I presided over the search committee and promoted numerous individuals to higher positions but no one ever invited me over for a dinner or luncheon. Nor did I ever receive personal gifts. No one ever

⁴ “Red Envelope” is traditional Chinese ritual of, mostly children, receiving gifts or paper money from grandparents on the eve of the Chinese New Year; in more recent times, the Chinese New Year gift-giving ritual has been used as a way of bribing officials – **Translator’s note.**

handed over to me a “red envelope”⁴ – in fact, the term “red envelope” was never heard of in those days.

Or, for that matter, I also never heard in those days someone being sacked because of corruption charges or indulging in unhealthy practices.



Hu Yaobang, a great CPC ‘liberal’ leader

Source: ejinsight.com

III. Diligence and arduous work culture

The State Council organs are very frugal. For example, since the days of Premier Zhou Enlai, there has been this rule that one must pay for one’s cup of tea in the State Council meeting room. In the early 1980s too, everyone attending the meeting was charged one *mao*⁵ for a cup of tea. Later in the decade, due to price rise the cost of a cup of tea was increased to double, i. e., 2 *mao*. Thankfully, hot boiling drinking water was still served free.⁶ Until in the late 1980s, even

⁵ *mao* is a unit of Chinese currency; 10 *mao* is equal to 1 *yuan* or *renminbi* (RMB)

⁶ In China, traditionally everyone keeps taking sips of hot water mixed with Chinese tea leaves the whole day. A big 2-litre hot water thermos is a must for every Chinese, in all seasons.

lunch was provided to members on payment of 8 *mao* and an alcohol drink was charged 4 *mao*.

The location of North Gate of the State Council is not in symmetry with the central compound inside the Zhongnanhai. In 1985, someone suggested to carry out repair work to amend it. However, considering the state of the economy the plan to repair was not carried out. In the following year, secretary generals after deliberations among themselves decided to replace the main table in the central conference room of the State Council with a more trendy oval-shaped conference table. When Premier Zhao Ziyang noticed it – he was the first top leader to visit the conference room since the new conference table was bought – he expressed his displeasure and criticised the “extravagance.” Hence, no replacement of furniture took place in the rest of the building.



Hua Guofeng, transitional Chinese leader

Photo: nytimes.com

Premier Zhao Ziyang was always very careful and prudent with expenditure. He was opposed to extravagance and waste, and always

emphasised ostentation. In order to curb wasteful expenditure on official banquets, he introduced strict regulations to serve only “four dishes and one soup.” Although this decision faced stiff resistance and could not be effectively implemented, it did play a key role in curbing unhealthy tendencies at the time. He expected from the cadres to be diligent, arduous and maintain a simple life-style. He set example for others by strictly following such strict regulations and discipline. He never built for himself a large house or a lavish office or spent money on high-end furniture etc. He did everything frugally and did not waste even a penny of the country.

IV. Leaders maintained simple living, did not travel in expensive cars and followed a down-to-earth and pragmatic life-style

During my first tenure as the vice premier, I accompanied top leaders on inspection tours to various places on several occasions. During those days, the top leading comrades always maintained a very practical and prudent travel itinerary. They will travel together in the same vehicle with the support staff and will be always seen chatting with the accompanying officials. I myself used to often stop on the way and go down to mix with common people, will visit factories, will visit construction sites and go to people’s home unannounced – in order to understand the situation and learn from first-hand experience. Since I used to make such

detours unannounced, I never expected the places to be sanitized or properly cleaned-up, I never allowed fancy or fake show to be put up, and I never let my staff alert the local authorities in advance of my visits.

At every level in the State Council work, the officials or a “work unit” (单位 *Dānwèi*) is expected to maintain high standards of responsibility and efficiency; it is expected of them to be thorough and be meticulous in collating views of all concerned. The job of the State Council is highly demanding and it has to coordinate between and among all bureaus. Often situation demands that we as leaders go down to lower work units in order to grasp the real contradictions and conflicting views.

Once it so happened that I had to intervene in a situation which involved the placement of a large number of displaced workers in a province. Carrying clear orders from the Premier, I, accompanied by some local officials arrived at the work site. I then proceeded to attend the province-level party committee meeting and we

arrived at a broad consensus and understanding as to how to resolve the problem. Our solution to resolve the problem provided us the opportunity to recommend the solution to all other provinces and cities besieged with the similar issues. Long after I relinquished my State Council portfolio, I always remembered and continue to remember the work ethics we had followed during the 1980s. I have always remembered all those comrades who had helped me in carrying out my responsibilities and tasks which were assigned to me. From time to time, I do get chance to invite them over for a meal or a drink and gossip with them.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am grateful to you for your help and support.

The views expressed here are those of the translator and not necessarily of the Institute of Chinese Studies

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INSTITUTE OF CHINESE STUDIES

8/17, Sri Ram Road, Civil Lines,
Delhi 110054, INDIA
T: +91 (0) 11 2393 8202
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