Of Successors, Memories, and Guidance: Qian Qichen Defines His Legacy

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In advance of the 16th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in November 2002, some observers of China wondered who would succeed China's éminence grise in foreign affairs, Politburo member and Vice Premier Qian Qichen, who was obligated to retire. Although he lacked the stature or political clout of Zhou Enlai or Chen Yi—foreign ministers in the 1950s and 1960s—Qian was credited with having been the principal architect of China's emergence from diplomatic isolation and disrepute in the wake of the 1989 disturbances and violent crackdown in Tiananmen Square. His low-key but dignified and professional management of China's principal foreign relations during the 1990s had won him promotion to the State Council in 1991, to a vice premiership in 1993, and to the Politburo in 1998. Qian's quiet grace and unflappable mastery of China's diplomacy won him many admirers in the West, as well.

The current division of responsibility for foreign affairs remains somewhat uncertain, nearly a year after the 10th National People's Congress set the current government hierarchy. General Secretary and State President Hu Jintao has taken an active role in foreign affairs, replacing Jiang Zemin in his head-of-state capacity. Premier Wen Jiabao, as head of government, also has undertaken several diplomatic missions. Jiang Zemin, both as head of the party's Central Military Commission and as the ranking party elder, retains both an interest and some influence in the foreign policymaking process. His former protégé, Politburo Standing Committee member Zeng Qinghong, is also believed to have some responsibility for foreign policy, although the exact nature of his role is not known. Within the party bureaucracy, Liu Huaqiu remains head of the party's Foreign Affairs Office, but his powers and responsibilities in that capacity are not well known outside of Zhongnanhai.

Qian's Continuing Influence

In the government apparatus, Wu Yi is the only one of the four vice premiers appointed last year who has appreciable foreign affairs experience, but much of her time has been taken up with her concurrent responsibilities as minister of health, rebuilding China's public health sector in the aftermath of the 2003 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Former foreign minister Tang Jiaxuan—who was reportedly handpicked by Qian to succeed him in that capacity—has become a state councillor and probably has principal supervisory responsibility over the Foreign Ministry. It would not seem likely that he will be promoted further, however, given his rather undistinguished tour as foreign minister (operating in Qian's shadow). Li Zhaoxing, appointed last year as foreign minister, is also considered close to Qian, but

like Tang, he is unlikely to advance further, mainly because his age (63) will require him to step down at the end of his current term, in 2008.

Within the Foreign Ministry leadership group, Qian's influence is understandably strong, since he was either the ranking vice minister, minister, or State Council overseer from 1982 until his retirement in 2003. Of the current vice ministers, for example, Dai Bingguo started his career in the Soviet and East European Affairs Department, where Qian also got his start; Wang Yi served under Tang Jiaxuan in Japan and the Asian Affairs Department; Zhang Yesui probably worked closely with Qian in the International Organizations Department in the mid-1990s; and Zhou Wenzhong rose rapidly in the American and Oceanian Affairs Department, in which Qian played a conspicuous policy role. Only Vice Minister Qiao Zonghuai (son of former foreign minister Qiao Guanhua), in charge of party affairs, and Vice Minister Lü Xinhua, responsible for administrative and financial matters, do not have clear links to Qian.

This is not to imply that Qian retains authority over personnel issues within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Rather, it would appear that during Qian's tenure as minister, the MFA developed an orderly meritocracy in its promotion patterns (step-by-step upward movement through departments, ambassadorships, and assistant and vice minister positions) that continues to the present. Moreover, the ministry rewards and maintains high professional standards that have brought to the fore a leading group of notably high quality, educational achievement, and international experience.

And Now, a Best-selling Author

Qian has, however, become even more of a celebrity among China's avid reading public with the publication in October 2003 of his book, *Ten Stories of a Diplomat* (*Waijiao shiji*).[1] Although China has no equivalent of a weekly best-seller list, Qian's book reportedly has been extremely popular; it has been prominently displayed in the major bookstores in Beijing, Shanghai, and other major urban centers for the last several months. Well designed and of high quality, the 450-page book contains numerous photographs of the author together with a broad array of international leaders. In a brief preface, Qian claims to have gotten the idea for the book after his retirement from the State Council in March 2003, and he asserts that he kept no notes or diaries during his official career (a habit he developed as an underground party cadre in the 1940s), instead having relied only on his memory. While that memory is no doubt prodigious, the extensive detail provided in the book, with features such as quotations from conversations and point papers, and the fact that the published draft was completed in only seven months suggest that he may have been planning the book for some time and probably enjoyed some access to MFA archives.

Qian is characteristically modest in his introduction to the book, claiming that the book is not a memoir, a history, or a theoretical essay but only 10 "stories" of his personal experience as a diplomat. He also appends five very interesting speeches he delivered during the 2000–2003 time frame to the Beijing University Institute of

International Relations, where he served as (honorary) director. The 10 stories/chapters—covering only Qian's tenure as foreign minister (1988–98)—are as follows:

1. "Normalizing Sino-Soviet Relations" (on events leading up to and including the 1989 visit to Beijing of former chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Mikhail Gorbachev)
2. "The Paris Conference on the Cambodia Question" (on China's role in the 1989 Paris Peace Accords that ended Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia)
3. "Flying to Baghdad" (on China's role in the United Nations Security Council's consideration of sanctions against Iraq after that country's invasion of Kuwait in 1990)
4. "'Funeral Diplomacy' in Tokyo" (on the process of establishing relations with Indonesia, which began at the funeral of Japan's Emperor Hirohito in 1989)
5. "Connecting with Seoul" (on the complex negotiations that led to the normalization of China's relations with South Korea in 1992)
6. "Dark Clouds Oppress the City, but the City Is Not Destroyed" (on dealing with Western—and particularly U.S.—sanctions against China following Tiananmen)
7. "From the Soviet Union to Russia" (on China's ties with post-Soviet Russia, including the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; the chapter also contains some reminiscences of Qian's first visit to Moscow in the early 1950s)
8. "Forging Bonds in Africa" (on Qian's assignment as ambassador to Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, China's relations with Africa in general, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Republic of South Africa in 1997)
9. "Two Struggles Involving Taiwan Diplomacy" (on China's disputes with France, over the sale of French frigates to Taiwan, and with the United States, over then–Taiwan president Lee Teng-hui's 1995 visit to Cornell University)
10. "The Return of Hong Kong and Macao" (on negotiations with the United Kingdom and Portugal for the 1997 restoration of Hong Kong and the 1999 return of Macao to Chinese sovereignty)

Qian's stories constitute a thorough and evidently accurate account of the Chinese negotiating record for these important international engagements, which marked not only China's recovery from its post-Tiananmen isolation but also its emergence as a significant international actor. The stories are included because they mostly represent diplomatic successes and because Qian played a key role in all of them, but they are not boastful or arrogant. They are detailed, focused, and generally free of the ideological cant that has characterized much of China's official and academic commentary on international relations. Neither does Qian rely on rote recitation of shopworn rhetoric from the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist catechism or on high socialist moral principles.

Qian relates his anecdotes without rancor, although his personal resentment—and that of other Chinese leaders—at China's post-Tiananmen diplomatic obloquy is not hard to discern. He presents his interlocutors' positions objectively and accurately, as he does with China's counterarguments. In the end, the stories come out not as morality plays about the triumph of socialist virtue over foreign evil, but as intricate diplomatic

engagements—often stretching out over years—in which China's victories are achieved by dint of hard work, attention to detail, tenacity, and Qian's diplomatic skill.

Of course, China's positions are generally presented as being anchored in principle, such as fair treatment, sovereignty, noninterference in internal affairs, and the righting of historical injustices. Foreign protagonists are given credit for having interests—at least as defined by Qian—but their failure to compromise in negotiations is generally attributed to lack of foresight, domestic political interference, or historical prejudice against China. Beijing's compromises, on the other hand, are generally presented as tactical in nature, instrumental in achieving China's longer-term purposes.

Looking Back at Sino-American Relations

Qian spends a considerable portion of his book recounting interactions with his U.S. counterparts during his term as foreign minister, in particular former president George H.W. Bush's national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft; his secretary of state, James A. Baker III; and former president Bill Clinton's secretary of state, Warren Christopher. He clearly has read the books written by all three,[2] and even tries to correct their recollections in spots. For example, he chides Scowcroft for believing that the Air Force aircraft carrying him and then–deputy secretary of state Lawrence Eagleburger on their secret mission to Beijing in July 1989 was in danger of being shot down, due to a failure to advise People's Republic of China (PRC) air defense forces of the plane's flight plan.[3] Qian insists that Chinese authorities had set the unidentified plane's flight plan and that there was no alarm on their part.[4]

Qian talks directly of the agreement worked out between China and the United States for improving relations step-by-step in late 1989. The plan was put together in part by letters between former president Bush and Deng Xiaoping, which were delivered by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in November. Deng proposed a four-step deal, beginning with China's agreement to allow Fang Lizhi to leave China,[5] followed by "appropriate" changes in U.S. policy toward China, to include the ending of post-Tiananmen sanctions, followed by preparation of several large-scale economic cooperation projects, and followed by a visit to Washington in 1990 by the newly appointed general secretary, Jiang Zemin.[6]

Scowcroft paid a second visit to Beijing in early December 1989 to get more details on Deng's "basket" proposals and promised to take them back to Washington for further consideration. Unfortunately, the U.S. press got wind of his visit, and the Chinese press published a photograph of Scowcroft toasting Qian at a banquet, which incited public outrage in Washington, ultimately making the deal impossible. Relations continued to be mired in controversy and anger. Qian insists—not very convincingly—that Scowcroft's belief that China got cold feet after the fall of Ceausescu in Romania (in late December) was incorrect.[7] It was Washington, Qian insists, that reevaluated the strategic situation, deciding it didn't really need to improve ties with China and believing that China might also fall victim to the same public pressures that had brought down most

of the socialist governments of Eastern Europe.[8] Qian does conclude the anecdote by noting that he and Scowcroft shared a hearty laugh about the toast during one of Qian's later visits to Washington.

Qian is considerably less generous to former secretary of state Baker, whom he evidently grew to distrust. He blames Baker's proclivity for "making deals" (*zuo jiaoyi*) for a misunderstanding that set back bilateral reconciliation during the Gulf War. China had been working cooperatively within the U.N. context to try to craft a resolution that would bring about Iraq's voluntary withdrawal from Kuwait, but was reluctant to agree to a resolution that authorized the use of force by the U.S.-led coalition. A bit more than a week before the vote was to take place (November 20, 1990), Baker (who was in Paris) called Qian with a "deal." If China would support the U.S. resolution on Iraq—or at least pledge not to veto it—Baker would be happy to invite Qian to make an official visit to Washington, with a visit to the Oval Office as part of the bargain. That would break the ban on high-level meetings that had been in effect since Tiananmen. Qian said he could not give a clear reply without seeing the text of the resolution, which Baker then read over the phone. Thinking he had Qian's agreement, Baker was angered when China abstained from the Security Council vote on November 28, 1990, and he tried to withdraw the invitation to Qian to visit the White House. Early-morning phone calls from the Chinese ambassador to Brent Scowcroft put the Oval Office meeting back on the schedule, but Qian felt mistreated and resentful.[9]

Whether those feelings played a role in how Baker was treated on his visit to Beijing the following November, Qian does not say. He does allow that the talks were "bitter" and difficult, and that Baker did not accomplish some of his unrealistic goals, notably on human rights. He particularly disparages the "prisoner list" that Baker sent in advance, which had only pinyin names for many prisoners and was "full of mistakes." Qian concludes that Baker ultimately was "satisfied" with the talks, but he probably bases that judgment on Baker's grudging admission that he accomplished a few things in his talks with Qian.[10]

Qian is careful in describing his relations with Warren Christopher, as the principal incident he discusses, in chapter 9, concerns then–Taiwan president Lee Teng-hui's visit to Cornell University in 1995. Qian met Christopher numerous times in various places over a four-year period, and the two men enjoyed a correct, if not cordial, relationship. Qian does not mention Christopher's disastrous trip to Beijing in March 1994, when he was treated every bit as rudely as Baker had been in 1991.[11] Qian describes his April 17, 1995, meeting with Christopher at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York in brief terms. "When we spoke about Lee Teng-hui's scheme to visit the United States, Christopher pledged clearly that the United States would not permit Lee to visit America, and said that a Lee visit to America was not consistent with the unofficial character of America's relations with Taiwan; at most, they were considering giving Lee an extended transit visa."[12] Qian does not mention what Christopher insists he said next. "I had also warned him that overwhelming congressional support for the Lee visit (reflected by the 97-1 and 360-0 votes in the Senate and House on resolutions endorsing the visit) could not be ignored. This warning was intended to alert Qian that a visa [to

visit Cornell University] might be issued."[13] That visa was issued on May 22, 1995, precipitating a serious crisis in U.S.-China relations, which Qian describes in detail.

Although he must be well aware of the conflicting accounts of what was said at the April 17 meeting, Qian refuses to let Christopher off the hook. "When the foreign minister of a superpower makes a promise externally, then unexpectedly goes back on his word, that cannot help but cause people to feel shock and indignation."[14] Interestingly, although he describes fully the retrogression in U.S.-China relations that ensued, Qian concedes that Lee's visit to Cornell was so heavily restricted by the U.S. side that it did, in fact, look unofficial, and that the visit fell far short of Taiwan's expectations.[15]

Qian concludes his description of this "struggle" in Taiwan diplomacy with an accurate account of the meeting between former president Clinton and former president Jiang Zemin at New York's Lincoln Center on October 25, 1995. Most Western descriptions of the "Straits crisis" continue the story on through March 1996, when China held large-scale military exercises along the coast of Fujian Province and launched ballistic missiles into closure areas less than 30 miles from Taiwan's principal seaports in an effort to intimidate Taiwanese voters prior to their presidential election. In response, the United States ordered two aircraft-carrier battle groups to the region—the largest naval deployment there since the Vietnam War. Tensions only eased after the reelection of Lee Teng-hui as president, and were signaled on the PRC side by a somewhat conciliatory press conference by Qian Qichen. Qian's book is curiously silent on that part of the story.

Reading What Wasn't Said

Ten Stories of a Diplomat makes no claim to being a complete history, much less an autobiography, and thus leaves many questions unanswered, many stories incomplete. There is little detail about Qian's own life and career in the book, aside from a few anecdotes of his student days in Moscow and accounts of his life as an ambassador in a remote and insignificant African outpost. Qian speaks little of his professional relationships, either with superiors or subordinates, and almost nothing is said about the Chinese foreign policymaking process. Always a cautious diplomat, Qian breaches no confidences, exposes no secrets.

Even so, Qian manages to tell some interesting tales. One of the most fascinating concerns China's decision to normalize relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea) in 1992. Qian details his lengthy negotiations with then–ROK foreign minister Lee Sang Ock, as well as his secret meeting in 1991 with then-president Roh Tae Woo, who wanted to set up a "secret channel" to establish relations. But, he is far too brief on the process of deciding to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea and on deliberations about how to get the North to go along.

Still, once the decision is made, Jiang Zemin orders Qian to go to North Korea to break the news to Kim Il Sung via a personal letter from Jiang. Qian describes an

anxious and surreal trip to the North in July 1992: an empty Sunan airfield, with no welcoming crowd and only then–foreign minister Kim Yong Nam on hand, and a short trip in a small, unbearably hot helicopter to Kim Il Sung's lakeside summer villa. Qian passes on Jiang's message—with all the flowery compliments and assurances of socialist solidarity he can muster—that China has decided the international situation and the situation on the Korean Peninsula have created appropriate conditions for China to normalize diplomatic relations with Seoul, and that China hopes Kim Il Sung will understand and support this action. Kim considers for a while, and replies that he has heard Jiang's message clearly and knows that China independently can decide its own foreign policy. He declares that North Korea will continue to advance its friendship with China, overcome all difficulties, and independently uphold and build socialism. He asks Qian to convey his regards to Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders, looks at the gifts Qian's delegation has brought, and leaves. Qian has a "simple" lunch with Kim Yong Nam, takes the helicopter back to Sunan, and is back in Beijing by mid-afternoon. Qian leaves much unsaid in his concluding comments that Kim Il Sung's actions and decisions "cannot but cause people to respect him."[16]

The only other Chinese leader who plays a significant role in Qian's book is Deng Xiaoping, whom he credits for setting out the correct diplomatic course for both the Soviet Union and the United States. Qian talks of policy planning sessions in Deng's house, and his pithy instructions for the first meeting with Gorbachev: "Handshakes only, no hugs" (*zhi woshou, buyong bao*).[17] He recounts in detail Deng's remarks to Scowcroft and quotes from his letters to former president Bush. As for Jiang Zemin and Li Peng, while they played key roles in China's foreign policy, they get scant attention in Qian's stories, aside from some ceremonial appearances and summits. Perhaps Qian is leaving them the opportunity to tell their stories in their own memoirs.

Finally, Qian's Beida speeches merit a special note. The five speeches, delivered to a graduate school audience between January 2000 and September 2003, cover a variety of contemporary topics, including globalization, the information revolution, China's relations with the United States and Japan, the United States after September 11, 2001, and the invasion of Iraq. They are not fundamentally of a piece with the rest of the book, but the speeches display the keenness of Qian's intellect, the breadth of his interests, and the thoroughly objective and clear quality of his analysis. They provide useful insights into the thinking of some Chinese about the world around them and about their role in it.

There is little point in speculating about what Qian did or didn't say in *Ten Stories of a Diplomat* and why, or about his motives for including certain stories or speeches in his book and not including others. Some may see the book as an effort on Qian's part to maintain his own influence after retirement or as part of Jiang Zemin's and other elders' plans to continue playing an important policy role. Some may see it simply as a moneymaking proposition. Others may see Qian's writings as part of a legacy, a record of the transformation of Chinese foreign policymaking over the last 20 years and an important set of guidelines for future diplomats and policymakers as China continues its growth into a larger, more cosmopolitan international role. Whatever the motivations or the judgment, *Waijiao shiji* is an important and interesting book, and one hopes that an

enterprising Chinese publishing house will soon translate it into English for the education and enjoyment of a larger audience.

Notes

[1] Qian Qichen, *Waijiao shiji* (Ten Stories of a Diplomat) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2003).
[2] George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998); James A. Baker III with Thomas M. Defrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy, Revolution, War and Peace, 1989–92* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995); Warren Christopher, *In the Stream of History: Shaping Foreign Policy for a New Era* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Warren Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime* (New York: Scribner, 2001).
[3] Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 105–6.
[4] Qian Qichen, *Waijiao shiji*, 173.
[5] Fang Lizhi, a dissident astrophysicist, had taken refuge in the U.S. embassy following the crackdown in Tiananmen, and negotiations for his being permitted to leave China deadlocked quickly. For details, see Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China Relations, 1989–2000* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2003), chap. 3 and 4.
[6] Ibid., 180.
[7] Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 179.
[8] Qian Qichen, *Waijiao shiji*, 183–84.
[9] Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 309–16, and Qian Qichen, *Waijiao shiji*, 96–97 and 103–4.
[10] Qian Qichen, *Waijiao shiji*, 191, and Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 590–94.
[11] Christopher's travails, which also involved human rights and dissidents, are described in Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China—An Investigative History* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), 405–9; see also Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 187–88.
[12] Qian Qichen, *Waijiao shiji*, 305.
[13] Christopher, *In the Stream of History*, 287.
[14] Qian Qichen, *Waijiao shiji*, 306.
[15] Ibid., 310.
[16] Ibid., 159.
[17] Ibid., 36.