

*Biographical Dictionary of New Chinese Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders.*

Edited by Wenxian Zhang and Ilan Alon.

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Despite being one of the largest economies in the world, China is a region that remains poorly understood by many Westerners. As China transitioned from a planned economy to a market economy over the past thirty years, a new business elite has emerged. Many of these leaders came to power from within the Chinese state-run organizations, while others capitalized on new entrepreneurial ventures, the opportunity to trade and invest abroad, or helped pioneer innovations in traditional Chinese industries which have resulted in previously unimagined wealth and influence.

As direct foreign investment, both inward and outward, continues to gather momentum, the need to understand the leaders of Chinese corporations is increasingly important. The *Biographical Dictionary of New Chinese Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders* is therefore a welcome addition to corporate and academic libraries. The encyclopedia provides up-to-date coverage of the major players in China's new economy. Perhaps the greatest strength of this volume is the contributions from scholars who drew upon Chinese-language sources. While some of the more famous individuals are profiled in standard English language sources, the use of Chinese language material provides insight into the upbringing, (shaping forces) and history which is often absent in the English sources. Less well-known individuals are simply not profiled in other English language sources. While most libraries will have access to *Who's Who*, only a minority of the individuals profiled in this book are indexed in directories such as *Who's Who*.

Most of the entries provide fascinating insight into the lives of these prominent leaders. Many of the executives profiled here survived the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when schools were closed, mass migrations were forced, and intellectuals were sent to re-education camps. The book does not shy away from covering how this period affected the entrepreneurs profiled. Also covered are some of the troubling aspects associated with mixing corporate innovation with a tradition of state controlled industries. The example of Jingwei Li recounts the story of a man who was raised in an orphanage and received only four years of elementary schooling before going to work as a cook's assistant. As an adult, a curious mind and strong work ethic led him to recognize the potential for a sports drink as China geared up for the 1984 Olympics. The drink he developed and successfully marketed became one of the most recognized brands in Asia. When China began converting state-owned enterprises into private companies, Li hoped to buy the company he made famous, yet ongoing conflict with state officials made this unlikely. Li was ultimately forced out of the company under a cloud of suspicion as government authorities awarded the right to purchase the company to other buyers.

The bulk of the entries consist of business executives, although some entries are Chinese economists and high-ranking business officials. The geographic focus is on mainland China, but there is some coverage of people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia who conduct significant business with the People's Republic of China. Entries range from 400 to 1,000 words, depending on the significance of the individual. Each entry is signed and contains a list of sources. All the individual entries contain the name in Chinese characters.

This encyclopedia will be of interest to business libraries of all sizes, research institutes, and students studying current events.

Perhaps the book's greatest strength is also its weakness. The value of this book is in its keen insight into the background and influences of China's current business elite. The information here is difficult to find elsewhere, and yet its subject is such a rapidly evolving target, the book will become dated relatively quickly. It is hoped that there will be additional editions of this highly useful resource in the coming years.

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