

Interview: Jiang Zemin to be remembered for historical role in China's reform, opening-up, says biographer

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NEW YORK, Dec. 4 (Xinhua) -- Former Chinese leader Jiang Zemin, who passed away on Wednesday, played a key role in China's reform and opening-up, a leading U.S. expert on China has said.

"Future historians, looking back, will point to the term of Jiang's leadership as the time when China solidified and made permanent the country's reform and opening-up commitment," said Robert Lawrence Kuhn, author of a 2005 biography, "The Man Who Changed China: The Life and Legacy of Jiang Zemin."

"When I woke to the news of Jiang's death, I felt as if I had lost a member of my own family -- that's what happens when one dedicates years to writing a biography," Kuhn said in a recent written interview with Xinhua.

"It is important to point out that Jiang had a long history of pioneering reform, as he had been intimately involved with the establishment of the original special economic zones in the early and mid-1980s," Kuhn said.

Jiang made the critical decision to back and implement former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping's call for reform and opening-up, during and after Deng's famed "southern tour" in 1992, he said.

Establishing socialist market economy was made clear as China's guiding economic ideology at the 14th CPC National Congress in October 1992, setting the trajectory for a double-digit GDP growth in China, Kuhn added.

In the face of high inflation in 1995 and 1996, the Asian financial crisis and other challenges, "Jiang kept China steady and stable and committed to reform and opening-up, and, working with then Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji, achieved the major milestone of China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001," Kuhn said.

**"History will record that China's WTO accession was an economic triumph that set the irreversible trajectory of China's reform and opening-up and sustained economic growth," he added.
"History will be kind to Jiang Zemin," Kuhn said.**

Jiang's effervescent personality engaged foreign leaders and foreign media and his love of languages gave him cross-cultural insights, said Kuhn, adding that Jiang's state visit to the United States in 1997 was a great success.

When Jiang gave his speech in English at Harvard University during the visit, he "won plaudits from all by the way he responded with confidence and humor. Americans had a different opinion of China as a result," Kuhn recalled.

Besides, Jiang's legendary interview with CBS journalist Mike Wallace on TV program 60 Minutes in 2000 is still considered one of the most outstanding interviews of a national leader in modern times, according to Kuhn.

"Jiang was confident, clever and humorous ... it was one of the most effective ways for Americans to get to know the real China," he said.

"He was always seeking to improve his communications with foreigners by communicating in their language," he added.

(Web editor: Cai Hairuo, Liang Jun)

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