



# Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China

By John Pomfret

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**Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China** By John Pomfret

**A first-hand account of the remarkable transformation of China over the past forty years as seen through the life of an award-winning journalist and his four Chinese classmates**

As a twenty-year-old exchange student from Stanford University, John Pomfret spent a year at Nanjing University in China. His fellow classmates were among those who survived the twin tragedies of Mao's rule—the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution—and whose success in government and private industry today are shaping China's future. Pomfret went on to a career in journalism, spending the bulk of his time in China. After attending the twentieth reunion of his class, he decided to reacquaint himself with some of his classmates. *Chinese Lessons* is their story and his own.

Beginning with Pomfret's first days in China, *Chinese Lessons* takes us back to the often torturous paths that brought together the Nanjing University History Class of 1982. One classmate's father was killed during the Cultural Revolution for the crime of being an intellectual; another classmate labored in the fields for years rather than agree to a Party-arranged marriage; a third was forced to publicly denounce and humiliate her father. As we watch Pomfret and his classmates begin to make their lives as adults, we see as never before the human cost and triumph of China's transition from near-feudal communism to first-world capitalism.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Pomfret's first sojourn in China came as an American exchange student at Nanjing University in 1981, near the outset of China's limited reopening to the West and its halting, chaotic and momentous conversion from Maoist totalitarianism to police state capitalism and status as world economic giant. Over the next two decades, he returned twice as a professional journalist and was an eyewitness to the events at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Pomfret's enthusiasm and personal access make this an engaging examination of three tumultuous decades, rooted in the stories of classmates whose remarkable grit and harrowing experiences neatly epitomize the sexual and cultural transformations, and the economic ups and downs, of China since the 1960s. At the same time, Pomfret draws on intimate conversations and personal diaries to paint idiosyncratic portraits with a vivid, literary flair. Viewing China's version of capitalism as an anomaly, and focused overwhelmingly within its national borders, the book's lack of a greater critical context will be limiting for some. But Pomfret's palpable and pithy first-hand depiction of the New China offers a swift, elucidating introduction to its awesome energies and troubling contradictions. (*Aug.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Tracing individual lives is a familiar way to make sense of history, and tracing the intersections of individuals is a familiar strategy for studying identity. Pomfret, a 1981 exchange student at Nanjing University and later an American journalist in China, does both in this coming-of-age story that reads like a novel, complete with conflict, intrigue, illicit sex, convincing villains, and sympathetic, flawed heroes, and drawing as much on Greek as Chinese notions of fate in the lives of individuals and states. Inverting Plato in typical American fashion, he looks at individuals--the small circle of friends whose lives first crossed at Nanjing University when China's "opening and reform" began--to understand the state in which they live. In so doing, he affords readers a glimpse of the intersection of two societies at a time when they were defining themselves as predominant world players. Regardless of whether what followed was guided by fate, Pomfret's narrative of it may prove helpful in realizing something other than collision between the U.S and China. *Steven Schroeder*

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## **Review**

"In this intimate and revealing book, John Pomfret shows why he is one of the great China correspondents of his generation: He has never held himself at a distance, but has plunged in, with vigor and an open mind. His approach to China has no tint of romanticism or awe; the lives he discovers and the stories he tells, including his own, are unvarnished, unexpected, and riveting." *Steve Coll, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning Ghost Wars*

"Chinese Lessons is an extraordinary book. Through telling the intimate stories of his former classmates, John Pomfret reveals a contemporary China where many individual lives have been thwarted and twisted. This is a book full of insights, honesty, and compassion. It touched me deeply." *Ha Jin, author of Waiting*

"John Pomfret has written a brilliant, insightful book describing the dark side and human cost of the 'Chinese economic miracle.' His feel for China, based on years of living there, his fluency in Chinese, and his reporting genius cut through the sham and spin." *James R. Lilley, former U.S. Ambassador to China and*

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### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Candice Delgado:**

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite e-book and reading a reserve. Beside you can solve your trouble; you can add your knowledge by the reserve entitled Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China. Try to make book Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China as your buddy. It means that it can to get your friend when you really feel alone and beside regarding course make you smarter than ever before. Yeah, it is very fortunated for you. The book makes you a lot more confidence because you can know everything by the book. So , let us make new experience and also knowledge with this book.

#### **Theodore Rios:**

This Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China book is just not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book is information inside this publication incredible fresh, you will get details which is getting deeper you actually read a lot of information you will get. This kind of Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China without we realize teach the one who looking at it become critical in thinking and analyzing. Don't be worry Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China can bring once you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' become full because you can have it inside your lovely laptop even phone. This Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China having excellent arrangement in word in addition to layout, so you will not feel uninterested in reading.

#### **Stacey Lawrence:**

Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that will increase your knowledge in vocab, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort to get every word into joy arrangement in writing Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China but doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource info that maybe you can be certainly one of it. This great information can certainly drawn you into brand new stage of crucial imagining.

#### **Sean Bass:**

In this era which is the greater man or who has ability to do something more are more important than other. Do you want to become one among it? It is just simple way to have that. What you are related is just spending your time not much but quite enough to get a look at some books. Among the books in the top listing in your reading list is Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China. This book which is qualified as The Hungry Hillside can get you closer in turning out to be precious person. By

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