

Trond Einar Jacobsen

China's shady princelings

Kinas skjulte prinser

Genre: Non-Fiction

Category: History

Year: 2012

Pages: 308

Some of the wealthiest people in the world today are the sons and daughters of China's first revolutionary leaders. It is a paradox that the children of communist officials have become billionaires. The key to their success is that they never lost their link to political power.

The first of these "red capitalists" was Deng Pufang, the oldest son of China's late leader, Deng Xiaoping. In the eighties, when he headed China's most profitable company with 171 subsidiaries, Deng Pufang was known as the Crown Prince. Later, when a large part of China's trade and industry was privatized and the People's Republic became a semi-capitalist country, the offspring of many other communist officials followed Deng Pufang's example. They also became capitalists, taking advantage of their political connections and power.

In 1995 Trond Einar Jacobsen wrote a book about Deng Pufang, *The Son*. This book was based on several interviews with Deng Pufang and his closest friends and colleagues. Jacobsen is married to a Chinese and has in-laws with connections – so called *guanxi* – in the Chinese capital. Later, Jacobsen got to know the offspring of other Chinese officials, and he learned how almost all of them made a fortune in the aftermath of the massacre in Beijing in 1989. This new book deals not only with Deng Pufang, but with a whole group of people – the "princelings", representing the absolute upper class in today's China.

Ironically, most of the princelings were accused of being counterrevolutionaries during the Cultural Revolution. This is also part of their story, and without knowing how these individuals suffered during the sixties and the seventies, it is difficult to understand why they are so obsessed with money today, and why they are so troubled by the Chinese people's demand for more freedom and democracy. The princelings betrayed the old revolution, but inherited the new, capitalist revolution that has transformed China.

Dinamo Forlag 2012



Trond Einar Jacobsen has studied at the University of Oslo and worked as a journalist in Norway's leading newspaper, *Aftenposten*. While travelling widely, he has written a novel and the documentary *The Son* (Sønner, 1995).

Since 1996 Jacobsen owns an art gallery for contemporary Chinese art, in Norway and in France. He is currently working on a novel with a story that takes place in Beijing.

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Published by:

Dinamo Forlag 2012
308 Pages

