



Contemporary Affairs

**THE GOOD RULER:
From Herbert Hoover
to Richard Nixon**
by Bruce Kuklick
Rutgers Univ., 1988
202 pp. \$17.95

tics in Weimar Germany and warlord struggles in China (where he served as an adviser) before adopting Buddhism and emerging in a Nanking monastery with the name Chao Kung. After offering to serve as a Nazi spy in China (an offer refused by Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop), the "human chameleon," as the *New York Times* dubbed him, finally died in relative tranquility in wartime Shanghai in 1943.

Why did Wasserstein decide to resurrect this strange man and his career? Because, the Brandeis historian explains, "it seems somehow to mirror . . . the unquiet spirit of the age . . . [offering] us an unintended but revealing parody of the style and substances of politics, diplomacy, and religion in a period of lost ideological, social, and spiritual bearings."

What makes for a successful presidency? In answering this question, scholars too often focus on policy considerations and tendentious "what-if?" scenarios. All miss the point, says Kuklick, a professor of humanities at the University of Pennsylvania. Since the New Deal era, he argues, the key to presidential success has been the chief executive's ability to win the confidence and affection of the people.

Franklin D. Roosevelt changed American politics, setting the standard for the "inspirational presidency." In an increasingly secular society that wanted politics to be "religious and dramaturgical," the president became the "focus of the social order." The success or failure of the New Deal may remain a subject of intense controversy, but no one disputes that FDR was able to create a sense of optimism at a time of despair. Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy were also loved and admired by the people. Despite their relatively slight legislative accomplishments, they were able to make Americans feel good about themselves and their country.

Not so FDR's immediate predecessor, Herbert Hoover (perceived as cold-hearted when compassion was called for), or, more recently, Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson (both perceived as incapable of controlling domestic and international

developments), or Richard Nixon (who came across as devious). At crucial moments, all failed to convey "trust and assurance" to the public.

Kuklick's sensible-sounding thesis may soon be put to the test in the 1989-93 White House. History will judge whether an efficient pragmatist can match the political success of Ronald Reagan, the "Great Communicator."

**CHINA BUILDS
THE BOMB**

by John Wilson Lewis
and Xue Litai
Stanford, 1988
329 pp. \$29.50

**CHINA'S NUCLEAR
WEAPONS STRATEGY:**

**Tradition within
Evolution**

by Chong-Pin Lin
Lexington, 1988
272 pp. \$40

Why should the People's Republic of China, a nation with an income per capita of less than \$300, invest heavily in developing nuclear weapons and intercontinental missile systems? As these two pathbreaking books show, this sustained commitment of manpower, materiel, and money owes to several factors: traditional Chinese military strategy, current perceptions of foreign threats, the historical legacy of China's humiliation at the hands of foreign powers, and the overpowering will of one man—Mao Zedong.

In 1955, the Great Helmsman, eager to assert China's national independence and international strength in the wake of the Korean War and the Taiwan Strait crisis, set in motion a crash program, described in remarkable detail by Lewis, chairman of Stanford's International Strategic Institute, and Xue, a researcher at Stanford's Center for International Security and Arms Control. Supported by the Soviet Union until 1959, when Beijing-Moscow relations chilled, the program mobilized a small cadre of scientists and technicians to develop atomic and, later, hydrogen bombs. The first nuclear device was set off on October 16, 1964, at the Lop Nur test site—China's Alamogordo. During the 25 years since that day in the Xinjiang desert, the Chinese have developed a complete triad of delivery systems—air-, sea-, and land-based—and a total nuclear force third only to those of the United States and the Soviet Union.

To what purpose? Lin, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, finds that China's strategic nuclear doctrine is based on traditional concepts of war and deterrence, some dating to Sun Zi's *Art of War* (early 4th century, B.C.). Accordingly, China's leaders see their nuclear arsenal primarily as a means of denying an adversary Chinese territory rather than as a weapon for projecting force abroad.