

CHINESE STYLE



THE

DIPLOMATIC

CAREER

OF

WU JIANMIN



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The Diplomatic Career of
Wu Jianmin



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Text: Wang Fan

Editor: Wang Zhi

Translators: Wang Guozhen Zhao Ximing

English Editors: H.M.Paul G.Murray

Designer: Wang Zhi

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The Diplomatic Career of Wu Jianmin

FOREWORD

After simply reading its table of contents, I was fairly positive that *Chinese Style—The Diplomatic Career of Wu Jianmin* would be a great success. Now, having actually read the text, I realize my first opinion was most definitely correct.

Wu is only one year older than me, which puts us in the same age bracket. Before reading the book, I knew his personal diplomatic experiences from the newspaper reports. As the book contains many things which were not covered in the newspapers, I find the book informative and interesting. I am therefore certain that readers will gain a better understanding of Wu's diplomatic career.

In 1991 I held the post of Deputy Mayor of Shanghai City in charge of foreign affairs and foreign trade, and later I held the concurrent post of Director of the Administrative Commission of Pudong New Area. About 70 percent of the delegations of foreign government leaders and important members pay a visit to Shanghai after visiting Beijing, and I have thus enjoyed close contact with many people in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including Mr. Wu Jianmin. Before taking up the post of ambassador to the Netherlands in June 1994, he came to Shanghai and we were given the opportunity of exchanging opinions. In addition, he often gave me “assignments” from the many foreign countries in which he was stationed. A specific example is that on the basis of his confidence

in the continuous improvement in China's human rights situation, he advised the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the UN Commission on Human Rights that they should visit China. It fell to me to receive the advance group of the team and I subsequently arranged a very open item for inspection in Shanghai. It was the first time that China had received such a delegation and Jianmin did not give me any "enjoinment" unexpectedly. But we had a tacit cooperation and, I am pleased to say, made a success in all respects of the visit. All the visitors were able to see the actual situation for themselves.

In 1998 I was transferred to the Central Foreign Affairs Office and the Information Office of the State Council. This organ has the major task of "introducing China to the outside world", and so I had increasingly closer contact with Jianmin. In 1999 the Information Office and the UNESCO jointly hosted the Chinese Cultural Week in Paris, a new large-scale trans-cultural project. During both planning the project in Beijing and holding the activity in Paris, I naturally found myself asking Ambassador Wu Jianmin for advice and left some "assignments" for him as a result of our consultations. He unfailingly "responded to every plea and came up with a solution" no matter whether the problem was large or small.

Sticking to the truth is recognized as the golden rule for a good biography and "artistic truth" should never be used to replace "real truth". Under such a precondition, some biographies attach greater importance to the lives of their subject, others to specific times. In my opinion, this biography belongs to the latter type. The author has considered things as they stand and sought truth from facts, and is cautious in his analysis. He has the ability to embed his original thoughts in the indirect connection and careful treatment of various disparate events. Critics have already praised this book as being "objective and vivid, possessed of much information, at once natural, and profound" and it is, I believe, a reliable piece of work.

Chinese Style—The Diplomatic Career of Wu Jianmin describes many great moments in the life of its subject. In 1991, when China's diplomacy was experiencing a difficult period, Wu Jianmin served as the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was also Director of the

its Information Department. He responded to foreign journalists with a combination of calmness, intelligence, and a unique style of putting facts first and explaining the truth. He clarified misunderstandings, refuted attacks, and let the facts speak for themselves. In 1996 Jianmin took the posts of China's Permanent Delegate and Ambassador Extraordinary in the UN Office in Geneva and other international organizations based in Switzerland. He organized the united frontline of the third world for the UN Human Rights Conference and reversed a situation disadvantageous to China, defeating the United States' proposal against China by 27 ayes, 20 nos, and six abstainers. From 1998 to 2003 Jianmin held the post of China's Ambassador to France. During this period he participated in the application of the Shanghai World Expo in 2010 and helped to bring about the reciprocal visits of Chinese President Jiang Zemin and French President Jacques Chirac to each other's countries. He was awarded the "Grand Officier" Medal by French President Jacques Chirac, something which is usually only awarded to foreign heads of State. In 2003 Wu Jianmin accepted the post of President of the China Foreign Affairs University and in this capacity has made a significant new contribution to education in diplomacy. Most of the stories about him involve great events in recent foreign affairs. In fact *Chinese Style—The Diplomatic Career of Wu Jianmin* describes these events with the elected subject as the prime mover. It is fairly obvious that Jianmin has given personal details to the author and the results of these interviews give the volume its strength. The result, certainly in the opinion of this reviewer, is that, when reading the book, we are not only presented with his personal stories but also have the opportunity to learn more about some of the great events in China's recent foreign affairs, paralleling its economic development.

I have heard that Wang Fan spent four years interviewing people, relevant figures, researching his information, and composing the book under review. The result is both interesting and beneficial to readers.

Let us share the precious memories that are thus presented to us.

ZHAO QIZHENG

FORMER MINISTER OF THE INFORMATION OFFICE
OF THE PRC STATE COUNCIL

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1 STRIKING A BRILLIANT POSE IN FRANCE

November 6, 1998. Paris Orly Airport.

Emerging from the plane he took, Wu Jianmin found a fine day with the sun shining brightly from the blue sky.

Wu came in his capacity as the Chinese Ambassador to France.

WHETHER IT IS TOO LONG TO WAIT FOR TWO MONTHS
TO PRESENT THE CREDENTIALS

It was late autumn in Europe, a season in which the skies are often overcast with frequent rain and cold winds. However, on the day Wu Jianmin arrived in Paris, the sun shone brightly in a clear blue sky with only a few white clouds. Surely, he told himself this must be a good omen for his work in France.

According to international convention, after the new ambassador arrived, the Director of the Protocol Department of the host country should have an audience with him as soon as possible in order to arrange the matter of submitting his credentials to that country's head of State. On the afternoon of the day Wu Jianmin and his wife stepped off the plane in Paris, Monsieur Glasser, Director of the Protocol Department of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, paid a call on Wu.

"We have already noticed," he said, "that Ambassador Wu often visited other countries neighboring France but never stayed in France for any length of time, which has in the past made us a little envious. Now, however, we are extremely pleased to welcome you. This welcome I mostly warmly extend on behalf of President Jacques Chirac, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine."

Wu Jianmin's bilateral diplomatic life had begun in Belgium, a country which neighbors France, and the Netherlands. At the time of being offered the post in Paris, he had been stationed in Geneva. From the words of Monsieur Glasser, Wu Jianmin felt that the French truly understood his real situation. Monsieur Glasser then turned his attention to Wu Jianmin's wife, Shi Yanhua, "And do you not feel a little regret," he said, "that you come to France at the expense of resigning from your own ambassadorial post?"

Shi Yanhua had, previously, been a very experienced diplomat in her own right. Since the mid-1970s, she had successively acted as an interpreter for Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Li Xiannian and Deng Yingchao. Ji Chaozhu, respected as the model of interpreters in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, praised her as "an excellent dragoman". She accompanied both Party and State leaders on official visits to foreign countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. In addition, she also took charge of the interpreting work for a number of important diplomatic negotiations and was involved in the drafting of various diplomatic documents of significant historical import. For example, two of the three communiqués upon which the political relationship between China and the United States were based contained her painstaking efforts. Indeed, she acted in an ambassadorial capacity

even earlier than her husband, Wu Jianmin.

However, Shi Yanhua was modest and paid little attention to herself when making decisions of international significance. She answered Monsieur Glasser very quietly, saying, “No. On the one hand, I’m still a diplomat, and will be working hard in the Embassy and continuing to engage in diplomatic undertakings; on the other hand, I’m extremely interested in French culture. I’m very happy to come to France and anticipate learning a great deal about French culture.” This simple, dignified answer made a very good impression on the Protocol Director. French people are traditionally proud of their culture and are very happy when others appreciate it also.

In line with the regulations respecting French diplomatic protocol, the French Government would not arrange a ceremony of presenting credentials until four or maybe five new ambassadors had arrived in the capital. However, on this occasion only the ambassadors from China and Mongolia were waiting, so Monsieur Glasser said the ceremony wouldn’t be arranged immediately—perhaps not even within the year. France has also another regulation: Before the new ambassador presents his credentials, he is not allowed to have an audience with any personage above Cabinet ministerial level.

Wu Jianmin learned that the presenting of credentials was arranged for January 15 of the next year. In diplomatic affairs, a mere bagatelle can reflect certain political meaning. Take, for example, the presenting of credentials. The Protocol Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs usually arranges such things according to the schedule of the chief of the State and the number of new ambassadors arriving over a one or two month period. If the event is postponed for an unreasonably long time, there might be some diplomatic problem in the relationship between the two countries.

As far back as when Wu Jianmin acted as Chinese Ambassador to the Netherlands, he was fully aware of the fact that if someone in his position wanted to truly make something happen, he should first establish a good relationship with the most important political figures of the host country and find a way to communicate with them directly. On the occasion of the ambassadorial session held in August,

Wu Jianmin was informed that he would be appointed as Chinese Ambassador to France. So twice he took the opportunity of walking up for a seemingly casual chat with Cai Fangbo, the current incumbent, about the situation in France. Upon learning that Cai had a good relationship with President Jacques Chirac and had often invited him to dinner at the ambassadorial residence, Wu Jianmin was extremely impressed and hoped to establish a similarly close relationship with the French President as soon as possible.

However, according to the arrangement made by the French diplomatic protocol, he couldn't contact the upper-class personages in France for at least two months. Moreover, the French President was scheduled to have a group audience with foreign ambassadors on January 7, but those who had not so far presented their credentials were unable to attend. Wu chafed at the fact that he was losing an important chance of directly contacting the French President.

In France, the Foreign Minister is a member of the cabinet. The foreign ambassador can only have an audience with him after submitting his credentials. Thus, Wu Jianmin went to visit Secretary-General Bertrand Dufourcq of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France, to consult with him as to whether he could submit the credentials in advance.

All Bertrand Dufourcq could do was to repeat the convention of France, to which Wu Jianmin replied, "If the time of submitting the credentials were delayed until mid-January, I would not be able to join the activities of the group audience hosted by the President on January 7. Outside observers might put the wrong kind of interpretation on it, which neither of us want to see. Of course, we Chinese are a patient race, and I also have the sincerest respect for French policy. But let me illustrate something: Your Ambassador Pierre Morel arrived in Beijing on October 12, 1996 and China arranged the submission of credentials on November 14. It was also drawing near the end of the year and Chinese President Jiang Zemin was particularly busy. However, France is special. China made special arrangements for it. Now, so far as I am concerned, one month's waiting is acceptable. But I do wonder whether it is too long to wait for two months in order to present these

credentials?”

Bertrand Dufourcq thought that what Wu had said was reasonable and promised to try and sort out a special arrangement, but at the same time making the point, “However, it is all dependant upon the President.” On December 7, when Wu Jianmin met Jean-David Levitte, French President’s counselor for foreign affairs, he was told that President Jacques Chirac, considering it not good that the Chinese Ambassador couldn’t join the group audience, agreed to arrange the ceremony of receiving the credentials within the year.

THE TALKS WITH PRESIDENT JACQUES CHIRAC FOR THE FIRST TIME LASTED 45 MINUTES

On December 9, Wu Jianmin received a formal notice that the time for submission of credentials had been brought forward to December 16.

Previously Wu Jianmin hadn’t had any significant degree of close contact with President Jacques Chirac. When accompanying Jiang Zemin on his visit to France in 1994, Jacques Chirac, then Mayor of Paris, went to many other Departments in pursuit of the Presidency. Wu was no stranger to him. As early as during the period of President Charles de Gaulle, Jacques Chirac was the Director of the General Office of the President. He acted as French Prime Minister in 1974, set up the Rally for the Republic and acted as its Chairman. Subsequently, he twice accepted the post of Prime Minister and was elected as President in 1995.

Moreover, Wu Jianmin also learned that Jacques Chirac had a great deal of foresight and was known for his judicious judgment in respect of China, to say nothing of the fact that he was first and foremost a man of the people. When Deng Xiaoping visited France in 1975, Jacques Chirac, being Prime Minister at that time, predicted that “the end of this century will belong to China, once again holding its own destiny in its own hands.” During his visit to China in 1997, he declined with thanks the Chinese Government’s arrangement of accommodating him at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse and chose

instead to lodge at a French-invested hotel. In order to abide by the traffic regulations the same as ordinary citizens, he demanded that his driver stop his car when the traffic light turned red, something that left both his own and Chinese security personnel totally bewildered. Hence, Wu Jianmin eagerly anticipated knowing more about this charismatic senior politician through his own observation and contact, with a view to further promoting the Sino-France relationship.

The ceremony of presenting the credentials was held at the Ambassadorial Hall of the Elysée Palace. After Wu Jianmin arrived at noon on December 16, he was informed that President Jacques Chirac would like to have a talk with him after the submission of credentials.

During the ceremonial photo call, President Jacques Chirac asked Wu Jianmin to stand between him and the French Foreign Minister. Wu Jianmin declined the honor several times, but the French President insisted. Wu thought back to the words of Premier Zhou Enlai, "When we are guests, we should comply with the wishes of the host; when we are hosts, we should suit the convenience of our guests." So, he complied with President Jacques Chirac's wish and posed for the photo.

Coming out of the Ambassadorial Hall, President Jacques Chirac led Wu Jianmin to a joining drawing room and began to talk with Wu. Such an occasion is usually purely formal and doesn't last long.

Wu Jianmin, having just come from the front line of Geneva talks on human rights, first praised President Jacques Chirac for his pioneering advocacy of ending confrontation to conduct dialogue on these issues. He also stated that the French President's proposition was extremely wise and would most certainly be welcomed by developing countries. He also spoke highly of France, particularly in respect of the fact that it didn't join in putting forth the anti-China proposal, and, Wu added, this provided a good lead among the EU countries.

President Jacques Chirac recalled his talk with Chinese Premier Li Peng during the Asia-Europe Summit held in Bangkok in 1996, during which he disclosed that France would no longer participate in putting forward the anti-China proposal. It was also during that Summit that the French President clearly stated that it made absolutely no sense to have any confrontation with China, a country with its own culture,

history and tradition. He concluded that it was futile to insulate China with a population of more than 1 billion.

President Jacques Chirac told Wu Jianmin he wished to invite Chinese President Jiang Zemin to visit France in 1999, a very strong indication of the the great importance he felt for Sino-French relations.

"Maintaining an exchange of high-level visits between China and France," said President Jacques Chirac, "is of great significance in developing the bilateral relationship between our two nations." His opinion was reflected to some extent in the Sino-French Joint Declaration—Establishing Comprehensive Partnership Toward the 21st Century, which he signed with President Jiang Zemin on May 16, 1997.

Many years of diplomatic work also made Wu Jianmin profoundly aware that the relationship between China and France is really a relationship between individual persons. In the course of developing a bilateral relationship, summit diplomacy occupied a prominent position, the quality of which exerted a great influence on the development of the bilateral relationship. Any ambassador, from no matter where, should actively promote summit diplomacy if possible, and never ever miss the fleeting chance that may come his or her way.

President Jacques Chirac was pleased to see that Wu Jianmin also realized the significance of this occasion. Upon departing, Wu Jianmin glanced at his watch and found that his first talk with President Jacques Chirac had lasted no less than 45 minutes. Two uncommon details had appeared in the submission of credentials.

Five days later, Jean-David Levitte told Wu Jianmin over supper, "You have left a deep impression on the President." Wu Jianmin thanked Jean-David Levitte for his efforts in arranging the credentials. Reverte responded by applying Wu Jianmin's words when narrating that China set great store by its relationship with France: "China is China."

Wu Jianmin had never worked in France as a diplomat before, but he knew the importance of Sino-French ties. This, in fact, had found expression in the fact that all previous Chinese Ambassadors to France, such as Huang Zhen, Zeng Tao, Han Kehua and Yao Guang, were all major figures in Chinese diplomatic circles when they took the post.

What had happened at the Geneva meeting told Wu Jianmin that the United States and some others still advocated hostility to and worked hard to contain China; it is therefore of great importance for China to maintain a good relationship with Europe. In Europe, it was France that was the first to put forward the policy of turning away from confrontation and instead advocating dialogue, and the first to publicize its relationship with China in the phrase “comprehensive partnership”. France is one of the major countries of Europe and a permanent member of the United Nations. What France does is extremely influential to its neighbors. The importance of establishing a good relationship with France goes significantly beyond the mere boundaries of a conventional bilateral relationship.

France cherishes a tradition of being independent and challenging hegemony; this is why China and France have a common understanding on the issue of many international affairs. In 1975, when talking about the Sino-French ties, Deng Xiaoping said that “the strands connecting China and France are more numerous than anyone can imagine.”

Because of this, Wu Jianmin felt a great sense of responsibility when offered the post of Chinese Ambassador to France. The Chinese Embassy in France boasted some 100 diplomats. With the addition of logistics personnel and casual staff, there were about 200 persons in the Embassy. A good job would require everybody pulling his or her weight.

Shortly after Wu Jianmin took the post, he called together all the members of the Embassy and made a speech. He first declared that he had a shortage of qualification and a deficiency of experience in engaging in bilateral diplomacy work, and knew himself to be inferior when compared with his predecessor Cai Fangbo. “Ambassador Cai worked in France for 23 years,” he said, “but I can only lay claim to 23 days.” He neatly made the point that he would like to be a good student first, and sincerely hoped that the present “experts on France” would give him as much advice as possible in order that he might do the best possible job.

Afterwards, Wu Jianmin brought forward the target with respect

to furthering the work on the original base and promoting the quality of the staff. To achieve this target, he required that everybody adopt a similar viewpoint. If not having the whole situation in mind, people would rapidly revert to being simple robots. And we must not forget that this overall situation referred to the international situation, the overall peace and stability of China and the Sino-France relationship. Wu required everybody, including those in the administrative and logistic departments, to comprehend the three overall situations.

Wu Jianmin stressed the importance of research and investigation. Decades of diplomatic life had provided him with intimate knowledge of it. Subsequent investigation and further research were the basis of his position.

Wu Jianmin also made a special demand on the young diplomats in the Embassy. "Go out of the Embassy," he told them, "and introduce China to French people in the language French people can understand." To help them along, Wu regularly chose a topic for them. He listened to them and gave them comments in person.

The reason for making this demand was, on the one hand, that it represented the professional style of Wu Jianmin and accorded to the needs of the work in France; and on the other hand, it showed that Wu paid serious attention to developing the diplomats of the next generation. He said much on this issue in his report made when he left Geneva. Moreover, his post in France would be the last in his diplomatic career. Now he would hand over this work to the next generation.

In order to do the best possible job, Wu Jianmin reminded all the members of the Embassy of what Chinese tradition calls "The Three Ones", namely "one family, one set of chess, and one heart". These three guaranteed that all the members of the Embassy would cooperate together. Given a big task, any member of any department would be able to handle it.