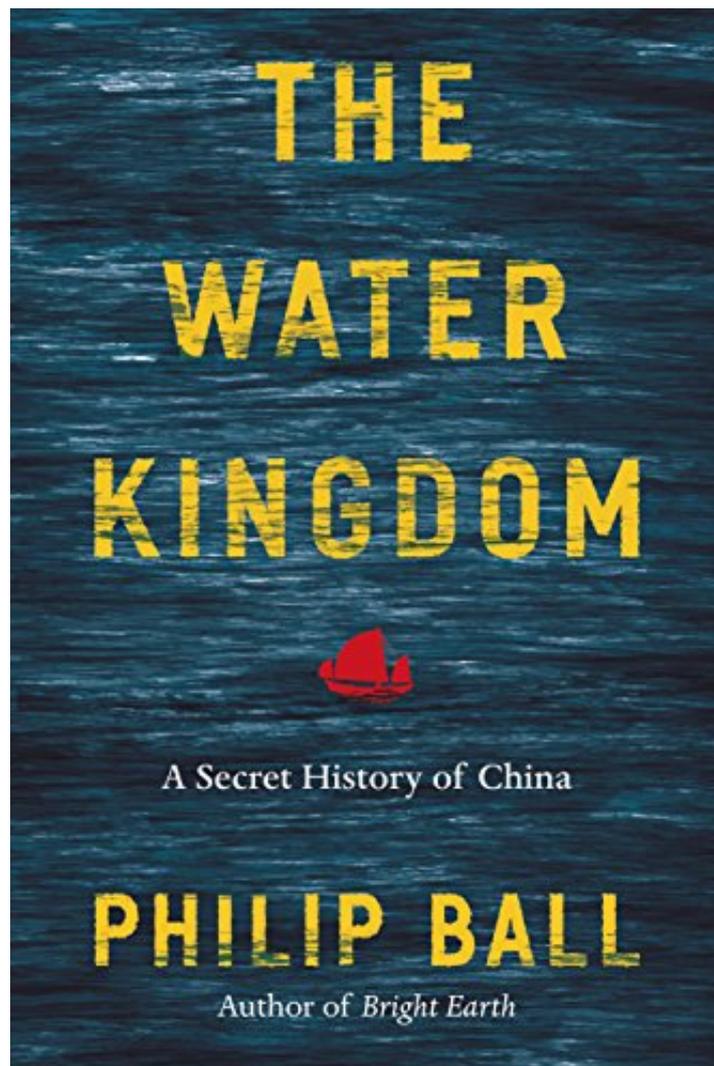


The Water Kingdom: A Secret History of China

by

Philip Ball



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Synopsis

From the Yangtze to the Yellow River, China is traversed by great waterways, which have defined its politics and ways of life for centuries. Water has been so integral to China's culture, economy, and growth and development that it provides a window on the whole sweep of Chinese history. In *The Water Kingdom*, renowned writer Philip Ball opens that window to offer an epic and powerful new way of thinking about Chinese civilization. Water, Ball shows, is a key that unlocks much of Chinese culture. In *The Water Kingdom*, he takes us on a grand journey through China's past and present, showing how the complexity and energy of the country and its history repeatedly come back to the challenges, opportunities, and inspiration provided by the waterways. Drawing on stories from travelers and explorers, poets and painters, bureaucrats and activists, all of whom have been influenced by an environment shaped and permeated by water, Ball explores how the ubiquitous relationship of the Chinese people to water has made it an enduring metaphor for philosophical thought and artistic expression. From the Han emperors to Mao, the ability to manage the waters — to provide irrigation and defend against floods — was a barometer of political legitimacy, often resulting in engineering works on a gigantic scale. It is a struggle that continues today, as the strain of economic growth on water resources may be the greatest threat to China's future. *The Water Kingdom* offers an unusual and fascinating history, uncovering just how much of China's art, politics, and outlook have been defined by the links between humanity and nature.

Sort review

"A rewarding read. . . . At its most fascinating when describing how in China the laws of nature seem to have embedded in them a moral precept. . . . Ball puts water beautifully back at the heart of China's story." — *Economist*
"In his excellent, smartly written new book, *The Water Kingdom*, Ball identifies water as 'one of the most constant, significant and illuminating themes' in China's history and culture. . . . Along the way, the book punctures myths and draws illuminating connections." — *Financial Times*
"Ball's journey along the history, politics, and culture of China's waterways encompasses many heroes of Chinese hydrology, men who grappled with elemental forces and imperial censure and sometimes came out on top. . . . Ball argues that China's future, like the past, can be read in the fate of its water." — *Guardian*
"This is a book about water in China in virtually any context imaginable. As Ball, a longtime former editor of *Nature* says, he draws on 'travellers and explorers, poets and painters, philosophers, bureaucrats and activists, who have themselves struggled to come to terms with what it means to live within a world so shaped and permeated by water.' Historically, water figures in ancient Chinese myths as essential for human life and as a fundamental force of nature that has always ravaged China with the relentless flooding its great rivers cause. Water is a prerequisite for agricultural abundance and urban expansion. It appears as a basic component in Chinese

philosophy, one of the basic five elements. Here, Ball considers water, in political, economic, and social aspects, as a factor in environmental pollution, political corruption, and social upheaval (the Three Gorges Dam project is a case in point). The book closes with a consideration of the 'fluid art of expression'—how water relates to Chinese painting, serves as a metaphor in literature, and is used by contemporary artists who perform their works in water. This book will serve diverse readers interested in China from the historical to the most contemporary perspectives. Suitable for all audiences. Recommended." — Choice"Ball's passion for Chinese culture, and his broad reading on history, myth, and culture rewards readers with fascinating insights distilled from these sources, along with his own experiences. . . . For teachers, this book provides interesting nuggets to add to existing lectures on Confucianism (such as the deep historical importance of water control and administration from Yu the Great on), Daoism (the hermit man of the mountains and the idea of Dao as water), or Chinese painting and poetry (looking at imagery and wording which might be critical of current rulers or policies). For advanced students with a background in Chinese history and culture, this book provides extensive food for thought, as well as a good bibliography of essential readings." — World History Connected"What a splendid idea: to write a history of China through its relationship with water. Far-fetched, you might think: not in the least, as you will find immediately when you start to read this fascinating book. You will never think of China in quite the same way again." -- Martin Jacques, author of *When China Rules the World*"The language of water has been spoken in China since the earliest times. This remarkable book explains why, and is one of the very few that will be respected both in the West and in China." -- Xinran, author of *The Good Women of China*"The Water Kingdom presents us with an epic portrait of China's water management history and its deep interlacing with culture currents. It's essential reading for any serious understanding of the dynamic relations between humans and nature, not only in China, but in the world at large." -- Xiaolu Guo, author of *I am China* --This text refers to the paperback edition.About the AuthorPhilip Ball is a freelance writer and broadcaster, and was an editor at Nature for more than twenty years. He writes regularly in the scientific and popular media and has written many books on the interactions of the sciences, the arts, and wider culture, including *H2O: A Biography of Water* and *The Music Instinct*. His book *Critical Mass* won the 2005 Aventis Prize for Science Books. Ball is also a presenter of Science Stories, the BBC Radio 4 series on the history of science. He trained as a chemist at the University of Oxford and as a physicist at the University of Bristol. He lives in London. --This text refers to the paperback edition.Review"This is a one-stop examination of water's primacy in Chinese history, and a well-written one at that." ---Publishers Weekly Starred Review --This text refers to an alternate kindle_edition edition.Read more

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What people say about this book

Eddie Choo, "A masterful overview of China as a hydraulic kingdom. Wittfogel suggested that China was an example of a hydraulic kingdom - where the management of water, the construction of irrigation and canals meant that despotism arose easily. Philip Ball shows how this concept might apply to China, seeing how the management of water was a matter of political survival and legitimacy. The management of water is a understated reality of China and deserves to be explored further."

Jay Bancroft, "is terrific history of China in a book that is not A very well researched and written book. Subject can be a bit dry to some extent. However, is terrific history of China in a book that is not overwhelming is size, length. The angle of the 2 main rivers in China as so important in the history of the country is a really good one."

daniel wrobel, "Interesting angle on China. I continued to be amazed by examples of how water and it's management have played such a huge role in shaping China's history. The look at ancient China and how even Chinese characters are influenced by water was eye opening. Wonderfully researched and truly fascinating. Recommended for anyone looking to understand China's history through a new lense."

Sanders, "Should be read by millions.. Excellent book. Full of new information and truly innovative thinking. Should be made compulsory reading in high schools."

Steven, "Readable, well-researched, engrossing. A popular book about how issues of water -- rivers, dams, canals, irrigation -- have shaped Chinese history, language and culture."

Scott Pearce, "Five Stars. Good job"

Agnes Lin, "Good book.. Good book."

Steve B, "China's history as an entanglement of river dragons. A generally fascinating lens on China's history: this novice certainly learned a lot! But beware: be prepared for the clear mountain streams of the initial chapters to turn into some confusing muddy whirlpools in the middle section before reaching some satisfying conclusions at the end. That meandering middle is probably worse, if, like me, you are not already familiar with China and Chinese history. Thus if you are looking for a general introduction to Chinese history this book may not be the best choice. But I do not regret the effort to push on through. Overall a very worthy read."

Jamie Cawley, "The best introduction to understanding China. Many people try to explain China to westerners but, through the lens of water in China's mythology, history, technology, art, etc.

Philip Ball does an astonishingly good job of explaining it all. I read this book with pleasure but after I finished it was stunned to observe how thoroughly it had covered the main streams of Chinese culture, how much learning I had gained from it. I am an interested and critical student of Chinese issues as I live in China (4 years so far) and this is the best and most enjoyable book on the subject, from prehistory to Xi Jinping. Certainly the best book to start understanding Zhongguo, China."

Dr. B. Prynne, "A history of China and the country's relationship with water. This is a fascinating book, telling the history of China in terms of how the rulers of the times dealt with issues to do with water - flooding of rivers, drought and especially the amazing early maritime history of China. I enjoyed it immensely, and the author's huge knowledge and easy literary style make it an easy read although it is full of complex insights into China's past. However, I found the chronology and the themes sometimes made for leaping from one period to another to illustrate points about a variety of themes, was slightly irritating."

Mr P Wilkinson, "Full of excellent facts.. Informative."

sailor75, "The Water Kingdom. This is a challenging read (for me) but as I have got into it I find it fascinating. An insight into Chinese history and religious thinking."

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