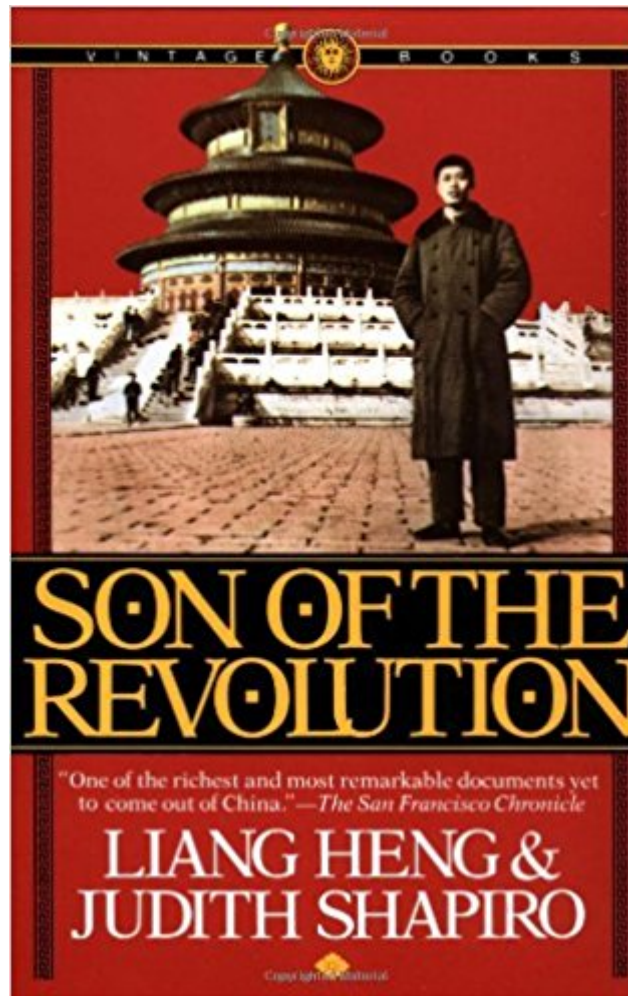




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Son Of The Revolution



Synopsis

An autobiography of a young Chinese man whose childhood and adolescence were spent in Mao's China during the Cultural Revolution.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Son of the Revolution is a spare book, the sort of small biography you might pick up and read in a couple of days some weekend. It packs an enormous punch, though. Liang Heng, its author, experienced essentially every side of the cultural revolution in China, and his graceful, somewhat understated prose only acts as a sort of smooth surface to the roiling undercurrent of those huge events. This book often gets assigned as a college-level textbook for History courses, and it's easy to see why. Liang Heng literally experienced almost everything about the cultural revolution first hand. In the course of the book, he lives both sides of almost any set of events you can think of. For example, as a young boy he's involved in a revolutionary group that's excitedly denouncing capitalist influences at its school. In a fit of enthusiasm, he draws a scathing poster of a favorite teacher. Almost immediately he feels tremendously guilty over the drawing. His father and he talk about the teacher's reaction, and Liang Heng goes to apologize. Then, just when the teacher's benevolence and the father's wisdom seem to have smoothed over this pang of overzealousness in the student, Liang Heng discovers that his father, too, has been denounced in a poster, and that he himself has been shut out of his revolutionary group -- as the son of an intellectual. Within a single day he's gone from revolutionary youth to excluded son of a reactionary. He goes home that night to find his sisters threatening to move away to live at school, so as to distance themselves from his

supposedly traitorous father. His father sits whispering, almost to himself, that the children should sincerely believe in the party and Mao, and that things will turn out right if they do so. This book is filled with tumultuous turns like that.

This book, by Liang Heng, apparently co-written by his wife Miss Shapiro, is a very quick read, one of those books with a well-flowing style to its prose and simplicity and power of its description. You don't want to put it down. It is a story of how Liang Heng grew up as his family was torn apart by the ever changing and erratic policies enforced by the state of which Chairman Mao sat at the helm. He was probably about five when his mother was branded a rightist deviationist. She had been encouraged to make criticisms of the party during the "Let one hundred flowers bloom" campaign and after honestly thinking it over, decided to criticize her bosses at the local police department for elitism and abuse of power. Of course, the Hundred Flowers campaign was eventually transformed into a rectification campaign. His mother was sent to the countryside, eventually being able to return once a month home to see her children and face the frenzied abuse of her husband, a very indoctrinated, humorless, pious party member and journalist at the local state run paper. Liang's father for political safety eventually got a new wife who, like the father, also had questionable associations and links with the old KMT regime. This new wife was posted as a school teacher in a far away city and due to bureaucratic restrictions on movement, they could not see each other for many years. The most vivid parts of the book deal with the cultural revolution. Liang Heng as a zealous primary school student, initially lifted himself up at the beginning of this time by making cartoons of his teachers accusing them of being capitalist roaders, bourgeois counterrevolutionaries, etc.

In recent years, a plethora of books have been written on the Cultural Revolution and the folks who had to live through it. This book is interesting, because the author begins with a description of his mother's detention as a result of the "anti-rightist" campaign, which preceded the Cultural Revolution by almost a decade. In some respects, there is nothing particularly unique about this, because every book I have read on the Cultural Revolution eventually becomes a repudiation of the system that produced it, or, at least, of Mao as a leader. But it is still helpful, because it puts the Cultural Revolution in context. The Cultural Revolution happened mainly because of too much power and or influence being given to one person. Liang Heng came from a "bad" family. Over and over again he mentions the influence that this superficial categorization has on his life. He is beaten and harassed as a child, and hounded throughout his life by the shadow of his past. This book is

fascinating as a study of how a regime which claimed to be building a classless society, actually created one that was exponentially more segmented than what had preceded it. It may take us a long time to fully understand the meaning of the Communist Revolution in 1949, and the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1977, or, for that matter, the revolution of 1911, which was really a pseudo revolution, because Sun Yat Sen was in power for only three months, and he was replaced by Yuan Shikai, who was one of the Empress Dowager's henchmen. What are we to conclude about the past century of China's history? Will it be viewed historically as a unique dynasty of its own, or an interlude between dynasties? And what of the new China that is currently developing?

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