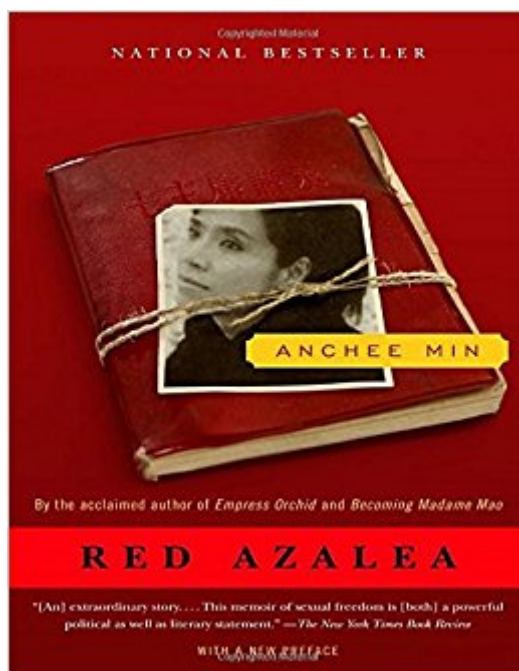


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Red Azalea



Synopsis

A revelatory and disturbing portrait of China, this is Anchee Min's celebrated memoir of growing up in the last years of Mao's China. As a child, Min was asked to publicly humiliate a teacher; at seventeen, she was sent to work at a labor collective. Forbidden to speak, dress, read, write, or love as she pleased, she found a lifeline in a secret love affair with another woman. Miraculously selected for the film version of one of Madame Mao's political operas, Min's life changed overnight. Then Chairman Mao suddenly died, taking with him an entire world. This national bestseller and New York Times Notable Book is exceptional for its candor, its poignancy, its courage, and for its prose which Newsweek calls "as delicate and evocative as a traditional Chinese brush painting."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an honest and frightening memoir of growing up in Communist China during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Min describes a systematically deprived Shanghai childhood (the family was forced into successively meaner quarters); school days spent as a member of the Red Guard, spouting the words of Chairman Mao and being forced to publicly betray her favorite teacher; and later teen years on a work farm in order to become a peasant because peasants were the only true vanguard of the revolution. The farm years, with their backbreaking workdays and heartbreaking, lonely nights, exemplify the grinding insanity of the Cultural Revolution, the terror and dehumanization it inflicted on ordinary Chinese. Eventually, Min was tapped by the party to be in the propaganda film Red Azalea, during the making of which she suffered more humiliation and political

subterfuge. What is so extraordinary is that Min managed to keep a tight hold on her spirit. Her autobiography is not just a coming-of-age story or history lesson; it is a tale of inner strength and courage that transcends time and place. Mary Ellen Sullivan --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Fascinating memoir of a young Chinese girl during the collapse of the Maoist regime. As a schoolgirl, Min distinguishes herself as a young communist--and a high point of her career as head of the Little Red Guard comes when she is persuaded to denounce her beloved teacher as a reactionary, thus ruining the woman's career and possibly placing her life in jeopardy. As a reward for this revolutionary act, Min is sent to Red Fire Farm near the China Sea to work as a peasant on the collective. Trying to cultivate the salty soil, preyed upon by leeches, toiling constantly in near starvation with her fellow ``soldiers," Min experiences firsthand the reasons why thousands died in these communes. Forbidden any contact with the opposite sex, Min falls in love with her female squad leader, Yan, and the two have a passionate affair shadowed by the constant threat of discovery and possible execution. Min then has the opportunity to escape the farm and compete for the starring role in comrade Jiang Ching's movie of Madam Mao's latest opera, Red Azalea. She attracts the interest of a man identified only as ``The Supervisor," a cultural advisor to Madam Mao, who makes Min the star, at the same time embarking on an affair with her. Min still loves Yan but finally comes to accept that circumstances must always divide them. Production of Red Azalea is curtailed by Mao's death, forcing the Supervisor to go into hiding to save his life. Min works menially in the movie studio for several more years, falling ill with TB, until an actress with whom she worked, who emigrated to America, urges her to emigrate too. The slight awkwardness of her English does not obscure the beauty of Min's poetic, distinctively Chinese diction. A haunting and quietly dramatic coming-of-age story with a cultural cataclysm as its backdrop. -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

What a fantastic experience it was to read such a book. A private look into China during the sixties and early seventies which reveals a society more Orwellian than anyone could imagine. Nacho Min writes of a life filled with individual style and repression from a time when there was to be no individuality, lofty societal goals replaced by "Lord of the Flies" policies placed on billions of people. Ms Min's writing style is simplistic, consisting of short little sentences holding more power than much of the long verse I've read. You ARE Anchee Min as you read this book, which is a beautiful, brutal

look at the strength of the individual.

I read *The Cooked Seed* before *The Red Azalea*, but after reading *Red Azalea* about Min's experiences in China's cultural revolution, I came to better understanding her fierce determination to survive in both China and America. I would suggest reading *Red Azalea* first before moving on to *Cooked Seed* to appreciate the choices she made and her search to find love and safety in both countries. Min is truly a success story, but the road to survive came at some dear costs. Leads one to wonder what they would do in those same circumstances.

I had hoped this book would have included more historical content instead of "Shades of Grey". Some of her descriptive writing was excellent and other sections were forced. It dragged at the end and didn't seem to fit the first part of the book. I will not be recommending this book.

Anchee Min has been out there for a while now and the accolades have seemingly died off. This is unfortunate but mirrors the way American readers, at least, tend to mostly get caught up in the whatever is newest thing. Initially enthralled, we may now sadly have become inured to the way, like many of the Chinese writers of her (our) generation, Anchee Min will no doubt have to bear the burden of the cultural revolution for the rest of her days. That her books are one of the ways she works this out is inevitable. Infinitely and intimately personal, Min helps us to see our own fearful blindness, greed, lust, and envy, while simultaneously challenging us with hope. *Red Azalea* is just one of the true life stories she uses to capture what it is like to try and be a human being in our world in which, after all, no country is more than a generation away from yet another "cultural revolution." Would that we all could be so courageous.

This cultural story is worth telling however the prose were stylistically hard to hold on to as the amount of sex overshadowed the horrific oppression of the people.

Anchee Min has written a very honest and compelling personal history of life in China under Mao. I think this is an important book for anyone interested in that time period in China's history to read. She writes in a very natural style that vibrates with life. Books like this serve a great purpose---that purpose is to make us aware that often what we see on the political and social surface of life has little bearing on the reality of day to day life for the average person and family. Books like this help us to see that we shouldn't take things at face value, but we should "look under the rug" so to speak to see

what is really going on. Anchee Min is not merely a survivor, but someone who came through her ordeal with her humanity and ability to love intact.

This heart-rending story of Anchee Min's early life during Mao's revolution shares her tears, sorrows and loss of hope as she grows from her mother's helper beginning at age five, to her life on a farm so her siblings can remain safely at home, and ultimately her escape from the drudgery of a peasant's hardship life to the film studios of Madame Mao. With each step, back breaking chore, loss of friends and the beginning of her questioning of Chairman Mao's messages, Ms. Min brings to life her trials behind the red curtain. Her skill for character, time and place are gifts to her readers, one that has us crying over her struggles, angry towards those who betrayed her trust and ultimately our delight that she finally realizes her own value and finds her strength to survive.

This book, to me, started out with the current book-club favorite theme of 'overcoming a significant obstacle to grow and go to another country'. Please don't mind the tongue in cheek. Anyway, as it rolled along, I did find myself becoming engaged in and with the main character and beginning to know the folks around her. I ended up liking the book. Especially because it kind of proved that not everybody goes along societal upheaval: change is difficult for everybody everywhere. We don't change until we absolutely have to and even then, we do it reluctantly. What I found especially interesting is that the author and I are very close in age. Here in the United States, Black Americans were stepping up and facing the fight for our Civil Rights. In China, civil rights were diminishing painfully. I was wearing miniskirts and my afro and going to college; she, on the other hand, was really struggling to live. My family didn't have much but through education, I achieved access to whatever I wanted. Her family didn't have much but finally through education, she achieved access to whatever she wanted. I don't know that I could have lived the life she did, and she probably feels the same way.

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