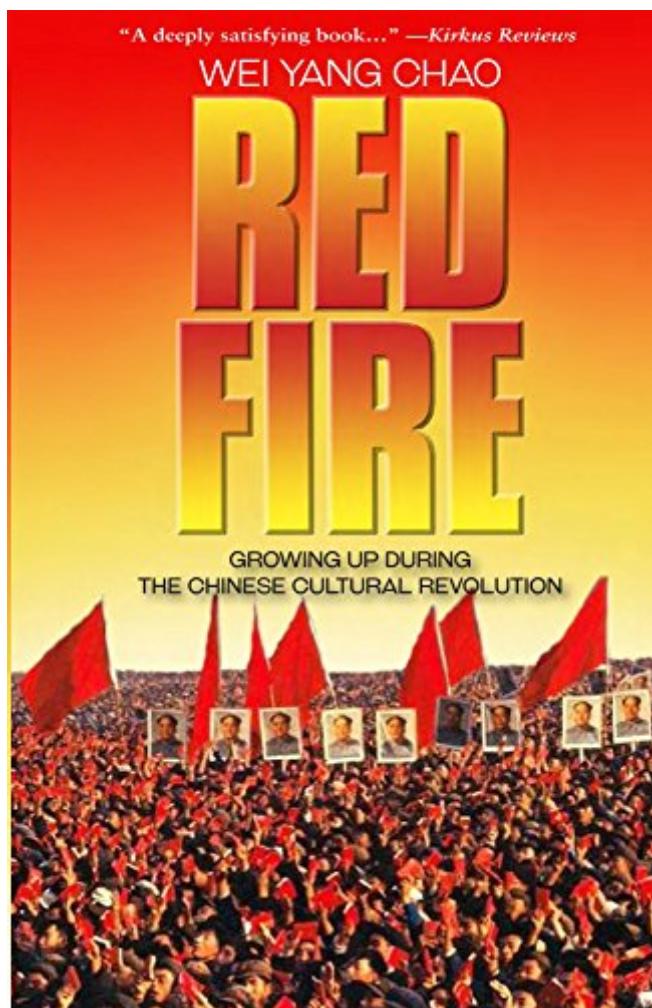


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Red Fire: Growing Up During The Chinese Cultural Revolution



Synopsis

In August 1966, a 14-year-old boy in Beijing is thrust into violence and chaos as Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution begins to blaze across China. Red Fire is Wei Yang Chao's riveting historical memoir about that era. He tells how rebels attacked and publicly humiliated his family, upended his education. Swept up in events, he finds himself at the center during mass rallies of Red Guards at Tiananmen Square where Mao appeared. As violence grows in the aftermath. He witnesses attacks on teachers and professors, and the disintegration of his parents' lives as tolerance and freedom crumble and he himself is cast into exile. Red Fire gives readers the powerful, unprecedented account of a young survivor, 50 years after the revolution—a story told with real force and heartbreaking honesty.

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Customer Reviews

This account of the terrible and life-changing years of the Cultural Revolution in China is told with

earnest and heartbreaking honesty by the author who lived through this historic time. It is hard for me to imagine how he and millions of others withstood such pain, loss and humiliation to enlarge relatively healthy and able to keep on living. My only regret about this book is that it was too short. I would have enjoyed knowing more about the years of readjustment after the ordeal. The author cuts the account short just as change is starting with the visit of Nixon to China. Anyone interested in China or modern cultural history will enjoy this book.

in years of China’s cultural and political changes and live it again all through the narrative of an incredibly passionate young man, suffering and confusion does not weaken his characters, who later find himself the ability of acceptance to the heartbroken reality. This novel is worth reading by everyone of the same generation, or younger, those that may or may not have lived through the decade of the Cultural Revolution in China.

This book made events of the Cultural Revolution real. I did not know about those times, especially what happened in Beijing in those years. Very impressed. Red Fire: Growing Up During The Chinese Cultural Revolution

Red Fire is the first-hand account of a teen boy growing up during the Cultural Revolution in China in the 1960s. The story is at times confusing (some flashbacks, unfamiliar names, extremely difficult philosophical content, and some graphic violence to grapple with), but it’s worth the effort. The author vividly writes of first his fervor for the Revolution, but then he begins to question what he is seeing and experiencing. Watching his own parents be struggled against appears to be the final straw in his philosophy. The author is eventually sent away to be “re-educated.” I found this book to be difficult to read for several reasons. First of all, even though I have studied Communism as played out in both the USSR and in China, it was still difficult to read about the violent treatment of people, sometimes for no reason at all other than someone had seized power over another. The base depravity and cruelty of humankind is difficult to observe. Secondly, I found parts of the book to be chilling in that they read very much like some of today’s news stories. Has mankind learned nothing in the past fifty years? Apparently not. Rebellion simply for the sake of rebellion never ends well. This book would be good for high schoolers and college students to read. (Any adult, for that matter.) I think they especially need to read it because I see so many of them blindly espousing beliefs and mimicking actions without really thinking through the natural consequences or logical implications of

those actions. We have enough history in this world to see plenty of patterns of behavior. There is truly nothing new under the sun. If people ignore what has happened before, if people do not learn from history, then we are all indeed doomed to repeat it. Thus, this book would be an excellent example from which people could learn what happens when people blindly worship the thoughts of a fallible human with no regard for others and take to forcing those beliefs on others at whatever cost. I gratefully received this book as an eARC from the author, publisher, and NetGalley in exchange for my unbiased review.

At fourteen, a boy is caught up in the 1966 Cultural Revolution created by Chairman Mao to enforce the leader's vision of Chinese ideology. Huge bands of children and young adults, known as The Red Guard, were persuaded to accept this concept and became involved in humiliating citizens accused of being counterrevolutionaries, school teachers of spreading anti-Mao propaganda, and any individual accused of individual thought or emotion. *Red Fire* is Wei Yang Chao's memoir of his awakening after early, rather uncomfortable, participation in the madness. At first, Wei was entranced by the concept and fervor behind this revolutionary behavior. But, after witnessing his family being subjected to "struggle sessions," i.e. public humiliation and beatings, for their role as landowners that put them at odds with Mao's mandated policies, he began to doubt his commitment. As time went on, his resistance to the radical behavior cast him as a pariah and he became an outcast in his own country. He was sent for re-education far from home and his family. There is pathos in his story. The cruel and thoughtless actions of the controlled and witless devotees to Mao's policies began to send vibrations of doubt and disgust through him until actual rage took over and he could no longer accept the mind control that swept China. The author's confusion is obvious and one can only wonder how the revolution was ever accepted by the masses in the first place. But, as Wei explains it, "loyalty worked a kind of black magic in those years, and we were all of us thoroughly bewitched." As further explanation of the hypnotism of the nation during the Cultural Revolution, the author tells of the massive "pilgrimages" of 1966, actually journeys to spread revolutionary ideas and to learn from one another, when a hundred million people went on the road to visit locations that served as a "sacred" base for revolutionary action. Although China is an atheist nation, Mao was considered a god and his mandates were blindly followed. There is murkiness in this memoir that sometimes makes it hard to follow, but Wei forges ahead and drags the reader

through struggles that even his own mind labored to comprehend. The book is a vivid study of ruthless power and convoluted thinking that challenges the freedom of people everywhere. It is a must read, particularly during this time of world disorder and division. Although the reader might still be perplexed at all the confusion, I strongly recommend reading it. It is very enlightening.

Schuyler T Wallace
Author of TIN LIZARD TALES

This is a first hand account of what it meant to grow up during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. It's not the political, but the human side of the story. A fast, easy read.

Red Fire is one young man's story of survival. I can clearly imagine what it must have been like for the many thousands caught in the Cultural Revolution. It sheds light on an important time in history, for China and the world. A good read.

Gave up at half way point. Too dry and boring, complicated and confusing. Have to say I lost interest long before quitting.

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