

[PDF] Gang Of One: Memoirs Of A Red Guard (American Lives)

Fan Shen - pdf download free book

Books Details:

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Author: Fan Shen

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Description:

From Publishers Weekly While the general outlines of this account of growing up in Communist China will be familiar to readers of recent Chinese memoir, the details can still shock and astound. Shen, age 12 at the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, recounts being complicit in arduous Red Guard activities that directly or indirectly led to several gruesome deaths of political "enemies" and later falling in love with and marrying the daughter of a man brutally tortured and killed by one of his fellow Red Guards. Shen (who now lives in Minnesota) also offers a snapshot of the political wiles needed to rebel against the fate one was assigned by the party: in order to both leave the abominable and oppressive conditions and to avoid persecution, Shen learned to feign political ardor, fabricate spy stories to confound the watchful authorities, pull strings with highly

placed friends and falsify health tests. Though he might seem to overly relish these clever maneuvers, Shen's portrait of the social and political climate in China is unambiguous: power rested in the hands of a few and professed loyalty to party ideologies made it unsafe to trust anyone; the only way to win was to use the party's rules to one's own ends. The memoir's title is significant (the Gang of Four were those responsible for the Cultural Revolution)â€"it spells out the need for self-absolution for his painful past as a Red Guard and expresses the utter loneliness forced on anyone trying to live for himself under a regime that could not care less.

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From This compulsively readable memoir in Tobias Wolff's American Lives series opens with a massive book burning. The author, then an adolescent caught up in the surging reforms of Mao's Cultural Revolution, now an English professor at a U.S. college, avidly participates. The ironies proliferate from there, as Shen comes of age amid spasmodic reversals of fortune: his parents are branded antirevolutionaries despite lifelong party loyalty; his own unfortunate penmanship error (a slip of the brush modifies "Long Live Chairman Mao!" to a damning "No Live Chairman Mao!") lands him in a remote peasant village for re-education. Shen's disillusionment with Maoism eventually deepens to a "thick and odious sludge of hatred" as he is tossed from one detested job assignment to another. The cycle of despair followed by Artful Dodger maneuverings makes for a somewhat repetitive story line, but Shen's wry, anecdotal storytelling style spurs one on, as does the desire to see him through to his eventual triumph--a passport and a seat aboard a 747 winging its way to San Francisco. *Jennifer Mattson*

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