



Legacies: A Chinese Mosaic

Bette Bao Lord

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Urgent and timeless, *Legacies* brings us closer than we have ever been to penetrating the great conundrum of China in the twentieth century. It could only have been written by Bette Bao Lord -- born in China, raised in America, author of the bestselling novel *Spring Moon*, wife of a former American ambassador to China, resident in Beijing during the "China Spring" of 1989. Lord's unique web of relationships and her sensitive insight have enabled her to observe Chinese life both high and low, Communist and dissident, intellectual and ordinary.

Lord interweaves her own story, and that of her clansmen, with the voices of men and women who recall the tumultuous experience of the last fifty years, and the legacy of the Cultural Revolution. In precise, subtle prose, Lord explores the reality of Red Guards and reeducation camps, of friends and families severed by political disgrace, and captures the individual voices of those caught up in them: the seven-year-old girl with a heart full of hate for her father; the journalist whose girlfriend believes the Party newspapers, not him; the imprisoned scholar who hid his writings in his quilt for years; the anti-revolutionary who tells his bitter story in a vein of high farce. All bear heartbreaking witness to the surreal quality of Chinese society today -- and to the astonishing resilience, humor, and heroic equanimity of the Chinese spirit.

Legacies: A Chinese Mosaic Details

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Josiah says

The author writes from a unique perspective: born in China, emmigrated to the USA at 8 years old, returned to China 27 years later as wife of special assistant to Henry Kissinger, then lived in China for 4 years as wife of the US ambassador.

In this book she shares pieces of family history entwined with the current events revolving around the China Spring and massacre of 1989. Each chapter includes a true vignette from various Chinese people who lived through the Liberation and Cultural Revolution of Mao.

I highly recommend this book as a primer on how regular people - from peddler to cadre - were affected by Mao Ze Dong and his sycophants.

Writing: A+

Vocabulary: A

Plot: A+

Worldview: Reporting

S-J says

Definitely on my top ten best books ever read list. My favourite chapter is The Vermilion Kite.

De Bookworm says

There are books which are hard to put down once you start reading. This is one of those books. But what makes it nice is that each chapter is self-contained although there is a thread that connects the whole book so, it is still possible to read it part by part. These "legacies" are accounts of people in China living in and around the time of June 1989. From the back cover, " It could only have been written by Bette Bao Lord-- born in China, raised in America, author of 'Spring Moon' (novel) , wife of a former American ambassador to China, resident in Beijing during the "China Spring" of 1989.

Connie says

This book, the stories told by Chinese and collected by the Chinese wife of an American ambassador to China, is sobering and haunting. Husbands are betrayed by wives, friends cannot trust each other, good citizens are imprisoned for years, never knowing what they did wrong, hopes and dreams are non-existent or shattered. What is right for today may be punishable tomorrow. I grieve.

Allison says

Really interesting, tragic stories of the communist revolution in China---especially compelling if you are interested in Chinese political history, and if you vividly remember where you were when the US got news of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989.

Diane Lybbert says

Very interesting book of stories collected by the author Bette Bao Lord (the Chinese-born wife of the US Ambassador to China), told by the people whose lives the stories examine. The stories are dated from the 1989 student's rebellion in Tienanmen Square. Rather than lay out a factual explanation of Chinese Communism, these essays describe the lives of individual people. Compelling and fascinating cultural study.

Kathe says

This is one of my very favorite books. Lord shares the compelling stories of those who lived through the Chinese Revolution. Magnificent! This is my kind of nonfiction, telling about history through personal accounts.

Deb says

This was a book that I had a hard time putting down. Each chapter tells of an individual story from those who lived through China's Cultural Revolution (under Mao Zedong) and up to the time of the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. These stories involved former Chinese citizen, Bette Bao Lord's family, friends and acquaintances and were recorded and written down to shed light on the difficulties, the anguish and the complexities of relationships during a very turbulent era in China's changing sociopolitical atmosphere. These stories tell of families being torn apart physically and emotionally, citizens being betrayed and tortured by those who embraced the new Maoist and Communist ideology. What I found very interesting were the stories told by the former youths of China who sided with or joined the "Red Guard". It was rather haunting when these once zealous attackers of the "Four Olds" explained how they justified their horrendous treatment of anybody or anything that followed or supported the old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas. Sometimes, certain non-fiction can be a bit dry but I did not find this the case in Legacies: A Chinese Mosaic.

Note: This was a book that I received from a member at Bookcrossing.com

Everett says

Poignant and touching.

Monica says

This book made me happy to live in America. China, and its oppressive years between the Communist Revolution, the Cultural Revolution, and up to Tiananmen Square, is a dreary place to try to assert your own sense of self. Bette Bao Lord reports and tells the stories of ordinary Chinese citizens who were falsely jailed, beaten, or psychologically ruined due to the paranoid and oppressive government. Neighbor turns on neighbor and family must shun the accused. This account was depressing, and it was a reminder to me of how dangerous political powers can be. Pragmatically, the book also serves as a good history lesson on China's major events from WWII to Tiananmen Square, 1989. Essentially, do not take freedom of speech or freedom to assembly for granted - ever.

Kelley says

Bette Bao Lord has written a narrative that sensitively portrays the China of 1989 and the turbulent decades prior. In the book, Chinese people recount their lives as Lord focuses her lens on the hope/anguish of the ill-fated student-led pro-democracy demonstration in Tiananmen Square of 1989. The stories of various people show the tragedies that have befallen modern China, including the Japanese occupation of World War 2, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution. Common people, her relatives, and intellectuals contribute their personal stories to help bring greater poignancy to these times. As I am a current resident in China, I don't think this book reflects the contemporary experience the country in 2014, yet this still provides moving testimony of the challenges of the past. Bao captures the voices of the times, which is why I recommend this book to anyone who wants to gain a better understanding of what makes modern China what it is today.

Ellen says

This book came to me from the library's discard pile. I'm from a super small town and we don't even have library sales (because no one would buy anything and it's easier to just sell the books). I took this one at least 5 years ago and it sat on a shelf. In moving in to my own apartment, this was one of the books I snagged to bring with me to get off of the pile of unread books and I kind of wish I had left it where I found it. It was entirely too dry for me and I had a hard time finishing it but I did force myself to finish.

This is the story of an ambassador's wife in China in 1989 which was a rough time in China to say the least. Perhaps, it was the cultural differences that made this book so hard for me to read. Mrs. Lord was born in China, raised in the US and returned to China. Unless you're a history buff, I'd suggest skipping it but I'm not a history buff. My review on my blog isn't any better.... in fact it's the same and I gave this one only 1 star.

Tracy says

I simply could not finish this book and goodness knows I tried. The writing style was so very dry that it was impossible for me to remain interested.

Susan Chow-Dukhan says

Bette Bao Lord's narrative about her encounters with friends and relatives during her stay in China and the stories told to her by her clansmen and people she connected with gives the reader an emotional look into China's past.

Some of the stories and descriptions of the impact of the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards and the Tiananmen Square Massacre were similar to what I was told by my parents and relatives when I visited China over two decades, starting from the mid-70's.

This was a fascinating book for me to read, as I felt it gave me a better insight into the behaviour and demeanor of the people I met. Having been born and raised in Canada, I grew up to expect the rights and freedom of thought that is encouraged in our community. When we encounter others who appear to be cowed by authority or acting overly supportive of the political situation, we may be guilty of judging them as being too weak to stand up for their rights. Instead, we should try to be more aware of the life they've been subjected to and admire them for their ability to survive.

Salinda says

I really enjoyed this book. But then I find Chinese history so interesting.
