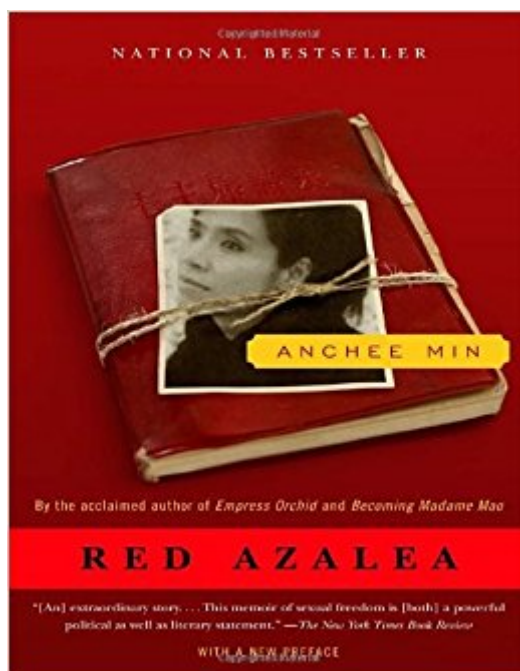


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Red Azalea



Synopsis

Red Azalea is Anchee Min's celebrated memoir of growing up in the last years of Mao's China. As a child, she 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. A revelatory and disturbing portrait of China, Anchee Min's memoir 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

Anchee Min's raw, abrupt writing style is a good vehicle for this compelling account of her life during China's misbegotten Cultural Revolution. From party loyalist to disillusioned communal farm serf to candidate for the starring role in an important propaganda film, her journey embodies the phrase "the personal is political." Surely few documented lives have been so victimized by politics as hers was. With all its rough edges, her spare, direct prose speaks through remembered pain to put experience into a larger perspective. Leaving the incredibly cramped quarters of her intellectualized family for the huge labor farm was an adventure that quickly soured, redeemed only by the dangerous passion she shared with an admired woman named Yan. The punishment meted out to a heterosexual couple found making love in the fields at night reflects the risks she and Yan were taking. Later, selected as the potential lead for a propaganda film, she competed fiercely with other

young women equally desperate to escape the brutalities of farm life. Her story demonstrates how love does not depend on gender. One of the most remarkable sections of this memoir details the efforts she undertook to have a love affair with a party official referred to only as the Supervisor -- trying to connect in the midst of an anonymous crowd at a mountain Buddhist temple, and meeting him after dark in a notorious public park frequented by scores of others searching for love, or sex, in the midst of a regime that repressed sexual expression along with political freedoms.

Anchee Min has created a powerful sense of life in China during its darkest period: the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The year was 1966, revolution powered by the Red Army just began to crumple the country. 9-year-old Min was the most excellent student in her grade for her revolutionary mind. She had memorized Mao's Little Red Book, secretly criticized her parents' reactionary (counter-revolutionary) behaviors, sang heroic operas raved by Jiang Ching (Madame Mao) and was selected as the head of student Red Guard. Utterly ignorant of the revolution's poignant consequence, Min, after all, was too young to understand the meaning of public criticisms and purges. Manipulated and brainwashed by the Party members at her school, Min openly criticized and betrayed her most favorite teacher by accusing her as being a spy from the United States. At the age of 17, Min was told that she needed to be a model to the graduates as a student leader. The ambitious I'll-go-where-Chairman-Mao's-finger-points attitude stirred Min's heart and made her eager to devote herself in hardship at the Red Fire Farm. Upon cancelling her residency in Shanghai, along with million other youths Min joined the Advanced 7th Company to plant rice in leech-filled water along the eastern coast. There Min finally caught up with the terror and hardship of Mao's ambitious revolution. She befriended with and eventually worshipped and fell in love with Party commander Yan. Here Min contrasted the dark horror of Communist China, the purges and the criticisms with her own desirous passion. She picked fight with the deputy commander Lu who diligently sought to catch Yan's mistakes.

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