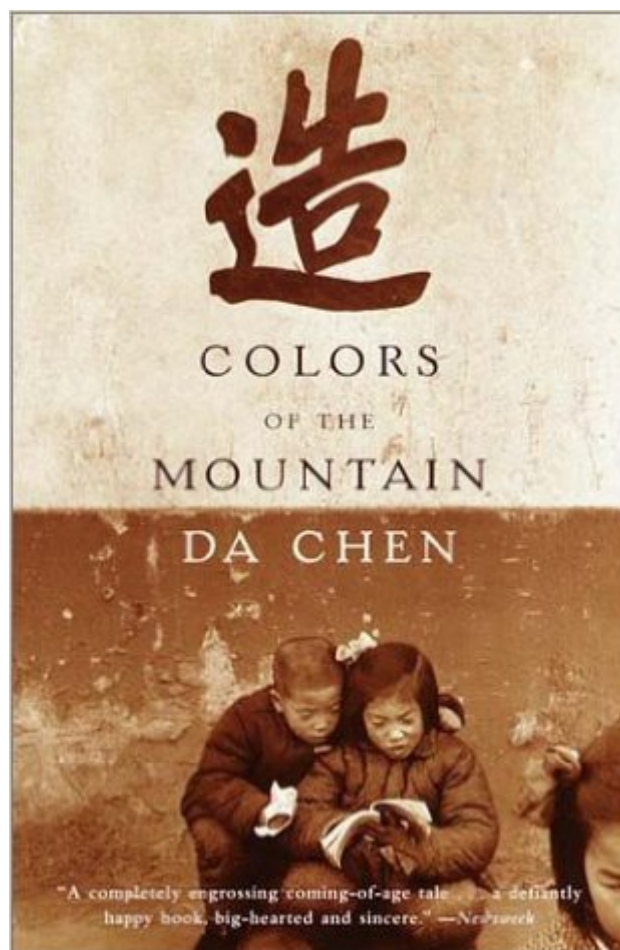


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Colors Of The Mountain



Synopsis

Colors of the Mountain is a classic story of triumph over adversity, a memoir of a boyhood full of spunk, mischief, and love, and a welcome introduction to an amazing young writer. Da Chen was born in 1962, in the Year of Great Starvation. Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution engulfed millions of Chinese citizens, and the Red Guard enforced Mao's brutal communist regime. Chen's family belonged to the despised landlord class, and his father and grandfather were routinely beaten and sent to labor camps, the family of eight left without a breadwinner. Despite this background of poverty and danger, Da Chen grows up to be resilient, tough, and funny, learning how to defend himself and how to work toward his future. By the final pages, when he says his last goodbyes to his father and boards the bus to Beijing to attend college, Da Chen has become a hopeful man astonishing in his resilience and cheerful strength.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Da Chen's tale is both entertaining and inspiring. His perseverance and hope despite the chaotic times of the Cultural Revolution are uplifting. His story illustrates the power of the human spirit, and also the profound impact that kind adults (his cousin, Wen Qui, and his English teacher, Professor Wei) can have on an impressionable youngster, as he stood at various crossroads in his life. If you enjoyed reading Gus Lee's coming-of-age story, "China Boy," you'll also appreciate this book. Hopefully, the author will write a sequel to further track his adventures, from country bumpkin to prestigious Beijing Language Institute, and later, Columbia University Law School.

As with many recent memoirs, "Colors of the Mountain" is a warm-hearted, plain spoken, attempt at understanding a childhood -- one more difficult than most of us can possibly imagine. A born artist, Da Chen seems to have spent most of his life in America determining how to come to grips with this impossible youth. Most reader criticisms have to do with the book's flawed factual details -- but what writer is going to remember the names of office-holders and bureaucrats from when he was nine years old? The more important point is that Da Chen made something out of this remarkably trying childhood and became a remarkable man and writer. That is why the book was written. I look forward to the sequel.

Colors of the Mountain is the story of Da Chen's coming of age in post revolutionary, rural China. The son of a family of "landlords", a despised class in China at this time, the book is semi autobiographical and is an inspirational tale of prevailing against long odds. It is also a wonderful window into life in rural China--the nature of the countryside, the characters all small towns seem to produce in doves all over the planet, the struggles that everyone must endure off in the "boonies". (One suspects that these elements of the story probably aren't far from what life is currently, China being the place it is.) On the whole I found the narrative to be compelling, the characters memorable and the story quite well structured. If there is a major flaw in the novel it's that the language is sometimes repetitive and awkward--one can intuit that English is obviously not Mr. Chen's native tongue. On the whole, however, this flaw in the end just adds to the charm and mood of the tale far more than it detracts from it. I bought 5 or 6 copies of this to give out as Christmas gifts this past December and everyone who I gave it to has enjoyed it. You will too.

I have no way of knowing whether this story is true or not. It certainly feels authentic to me. It is strange to me how the cultural revolution is remembered differently among several of the Chinese I know. Everyone admits it was a tough time, but some are willing to let Mao off the hook in the name of order. Others see Mao as a killer. Hey, they aren't mutually exclusive views! Mao was a killer and he provided order for China. Which do you prefer, life or order? Like a recession, it is serious when you are unemployed and mild when others are out of work. If you and your family survived without being damaged by the cultural revolution you may think it wasn't all that bad. However, Da Chen's family was almost destroyed by it. It seems that all sides would consider this huge historical event a bit more deeply than it appears they do. It seems kind of silly that in a country as large as the US or the even larger China one would categorically say what one family could or could not experience based upon some generalized study of the culture. Life is full of oddities and exceptions. The facts

are that under Communism there are totalitarian powers given to the party and those are excersized all the way down to individuals and often in petty, vicious and horrible ways. And to say that because it was Da Chen's grandfather that was the landlord and therefore it wouldn't have affected the author is a very odd criticism given that families, even in the west, carry stigma from outcast ancestors for generations. It would be great to see verification one way or the other, but in any case it is a powerful story of life as an outcast. It is an easy read that you won't want to put down until you finish it.

I bought this book on a whim, and then read it in one 8-hour stretch. Da is just a couple years older than me, and it was amazing to compare my middle class life in America in the 70's to his life in China at the same time. This comparison was invited because Da and I were very much alike as kids, even though he was half a world away. The best autobiographies remind you that individuals can have many different kinds of experience, but People are much the same everywhere. I wouldn't worry too much about the negative reviews I've read here. They're just jealous. I bet that person is Han, still trying to stick it to Da after all these years. "Facts" are more than irrelevant in a book like this. The only important thing is how Da saw his own life at the time. The book succeeds remarkably in this respect. And Da's command of colloquial English is shockingly good. It's quite a feat that he wrote this book in English. If I didn't know he was a born Chinese-speaker, I probably never would've guessed. Bravo.

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