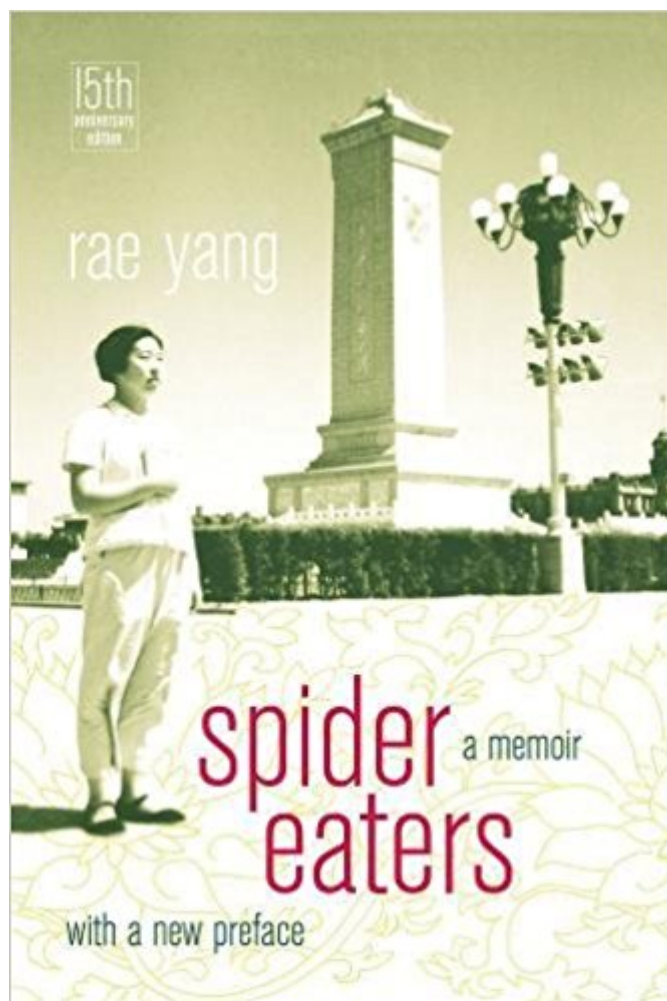




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Spider Eaters: A Memoir



Synopsis

Spider Eaters is at once a moving personal story, a fascinating family history, and a unique chronicle of political upheaval told by a Chinese woman who came of age during the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution. With stunning honesty and a lively, sly humor, Rae Yang records her life from her early years as the daughter of Chinese diplomats in Switzerland, to her girlhood at an elite middle school in Beijing, to her adolescent experience as a Red Guard and later as a laborer on a pig farm in the remote northern wilderness. She tells of her eventual disillusionment with the Maoist revolution, how remorse and despair nearly drove her to suicide, and how she struggled to make sense of conflicting events that often blurred the line between victim and victimizer, aristocrat and peasant, communist and counter-revolutionary. Moving gracefully between past and present, dream and reality, the author artfully conveys the vast complexity of life in China as well as the richness, confusion, and magic of her own inner life and struggle. Much of the power of the narrative derives from Yang's multi-generational, cross-class perspective. She invokes the myths, legends, folklore, and local customs that surrounded her and brings to life the many people who were instrumental in her life: her nanny, a poor woman who raised her from a baby and whose character is conveyed through the bedtime tales she spins; her father; and her beloved grandmother, who died as a result of the political persecution she suffered. Spanning the years from 1950 to 1980, Rae Yang's story is evocative, complex, and told with striking candor. It is one of the most immediate and engaging narratives of life in post-1949 China.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Moving, poetic, and honest, this is one of the best memoirs yet published of the Cultural Revolution in China."--"Kirkus Reviews

"Fifteen years after its first publication, *Spider Eaters* remains my go-to memoir about coming of age during the Mao years. Rae Yang's work is notable for its reflectiveness, complexity, psychological insight, and unflinching honesty. I commend this riveting work to a generation of readers for whom the cultural Revolution is now of 'merely' historical interest."#151;Gail Hershatter, University of California, Santa Cruz

"By oscillating between scenes that are bland in their matter-of-fact concreteness and ones that are almost unbelievable in their nightmarish cruelty and complexity, Rae Yang skillfully evokes the bizarre and contradictory 'revolutionary' world in which she grew up in Mao's China. *Spider Eaters* is a reminder of what a traumatic history the Chinese people have undergone this century and that a country's past#151;even when many would rather forget it#151;always lives irrevocably on within those who experienced it."#151;Orville Schell, author of *Mandate of Heaven*

"How can we expect anyone to know the United States without understanding the effect the Sixties had on all of us? Similarly, how can we know China without comprehending the impact the Sixties and the Cultural Revolution had on its politics, culture, and people? Rae Yang's *Spider Eaters* goes far in building that understanding. It is a gripping memoir."#151;Lisa See, author of *On Gold Mountain*

Very interesting, but horribly depressing. I kept having nightmares about the situation in the book/in history while reading this book for a class. Certainly good to read, though, and to understand this period in history.

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