



Old Land, New Tales: Twenty Short Stories by Writers of the Shaanxi Region in China

Chen Zhongshi , Jia Pingwa

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In this captivating collection from the Shaanxi region, considered the cradle of Chinese civilization, twenty disparate and unique voices come together to show a China caught between new-world advancements and old-world traditions. From the homeland of China's first dynasty and the world-famous terra-cotta warriors, these tales show rugged rural life colliding with fast-paced city life; hollow arranged marriages juxtaposed with torrid forbidden love affairs; and the vanity of newly minted millionaires clashing with the desperation of the poor. Through the eyes of award-winning authors, we see a changing China—from the Cultural Revolution to the country's infamous one-child policy—giving us a profound look at the evolution of a land that is at once ancient and modern.

Old Land, New Tales: Twenty Short Stories by Writers of the Shaanxi Region in China Details

Date : Published July 15th 2014 by AmazonCrossing
ISBN :
Author : Chen Zhongshi , Jia Pingwa
Format : Kindle Edition 442 pages
Genre : Fiction, Short Stories, Drama

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From Reader Review Old Land, New Tales: Twenty Short Stories by Writers of the Shaanxi Region in China for online ebook

Janet Ursel says

As a fascinating glimpse into Chinese culture and mindsets, I would recommend this collection to anyone with a taste for the exotic. The stories here are set in different historic time periods, from two or three centuries ago, up to the present. One thing that struck me rather strongly was the enduring sexism that was so evident both in the stories and in the choice of authors: only three of the twenty are women. It came as no surprise that they were among the strongest stories – they pretty well had to be to get past the selection committee, which had an obvious bias for older males. Of course, this is also a part of Chinese culture – the reverence and respect for age, so foreign to our contemporary Western culture, but rather difficult to criticize. This also came through in several of the stories, in which older people are never referred to with contempt and often with open reverence. Seeing as I'm on the downhill slope of middle age myself, I found myself rather liking the attitude.

And of course, when you have schoolchildren singing, without the slightest trace of irony: "I am a good child/ I love the Chinese Communist Party" you know you're really not in Kansas anymore.

On one memorable occasion, I literally hooted out loud, when one story opened with: "The art gallery has employed two kinds of people since the national reform: those who are too incompetent to survive the socialist market, and those who are too artistic to satisfy it." And that is as close to social criticism as you are going to get in this volume, but I loved the cheek of it.

All in all, though, it was an interesting read and a volume that will remain on my shelves.

I also won this book in a Goodreads Giveaway.

[Complete review here](#)

Shirley says

The stories opened my eyes to Chinese history and culture.

"Elder Sister" (p. 5) A twenty-seven-year-old unmarried woman living in her parents' home was considered a disgrace in Chinese culture.

"My Dear Sister! Limin was such a rotten piece of meat that even a fly wouldn't take a second look. While everyone shunned him like a plague, you fell in love with him." (p. 10) What a sad tale reflecting human frailty and the impact of culture.

"A Tale of Li Shisan and the Millstone" During China's Cultural Revolution Emperor Jiaqing demanded the destruction of operas, shadowpuppet plays, and scripts. (p. 35) Pages 36-39 describe the survival of a culture that was destined for extinction.

"The Country Wife" Lookin' for love in all the wrong places, lookin' for love. I didn't care for this story. Can't translators write without using American obscenities? (p. 41)

"He went to the fields and dug the ground hard, stripped to the waist, sweat wriggling like earthworms down his dusty back." (p. 66)

"Rain: The Story of Hiroshima" (p. 181)

August 6-Memorial date to bombing of Hiroshima-The story of Sadako and the paper cranes (p. 200)

140,000 people died. "The torch built after the war, to keep the flame of peace alive, still burns behind the monument. It is said that the flame shall be kept burning until there are no more nuclear weapons in the world." (p. 200)

"My heart feels empty. . . . Kamo is not there. . . . Only the green grass, swaying in the breeze, quivers slightly with life. The sky overhead is blue and clean; white clouds float along, going somewhere. The sea, reaching far from the hillside, rolls its waves in mist. The bright white sun comes to shine over the land, dazzling." (p. 206)

"A wave of solid heat shot at them, a burning wave overwhelming their bodies, their senses. blisters rose instantly on their arms, faces, bodies-and then the skin started peeling." (p. 216)

This page graphically describes the horrors and devastation of a nuclear bomb. (p. 217)

The black rain ran down faces and limbs. There was nowhere to hide. The rainfall ". . . caused the survivors lifelong injury; deadly injury." (p. 218-219)

"Who Would Go to the Scaffold" The fantasies of the stage wage war with the realities of life. (p. 225)

"The Butcher's Knife" is a haunting and grim tale with the suspense of Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum".(p. 267)

"Mountain Forest Lasting Forever" (p. 314)Where there is predator and prey, my favor goes toward the prey.

"Sister Yinxiu" (p. 333) The pigkeeper widow's first real love

This is a challenging read that is well worth the time it takes read and explore the background and culture of China's Shaanxi Region.

Claire says

I received Old Land, New Tales as part of a Goodreads giveaway.

Through 20 short stories by acclaimed Chinese authors, Westerners get a glimpse of the ancient traditions and modern social/political systems that has made the country what it is today. Tales explore a full range of human relationships, including marriage, parenthood, friendship, and forbidden love.

Though the stories only average about 20 pages, they pack a lot of punch. The characters are beautifully drawn and manage to impact the reader even in the brief time you meet them, and even when the reader is from a completely different culture. Each author does a fantastic job of hearkening back to China's rich cultural past, and how these traditions impact modern political policy and social attitudes. There's a nice variation of stories, too--some are timeless and could take place in the 20th century or the 12th, while others

explore policy unique to modern China (such as the one-child policy).

A really lovely collection of stories.

Anne Gardner says

There is no way to characterize this collection as a whole. Some stories were poignant; others felt flat and forced. Everything had an unfamiliar taste, in a way I have not encountered before. I have read world literature fairly extensively and I have never felt as alien as a reader. I wanted to like these. I waited for something to happen, some sense of knowing, some message. Sadness settled like a perpetual fog. And perhaps that is the message.

Magill says

I won this through the Goodreads Giveaway.

Having read a significant number of books about China, the vast majority being non-fiction, I was curious about this book of short stories.

There are several issues here that contribute to the rating:

- 1) the majority of the authors have survived through the cultural revolution, some who may well have been sent into the country-side and whose education may have been impacted; but their "success" during the cultural revolution itself would suggest a degree of comfort with the limitations placed on artistic expression; including themes which elevate the "noble" peasant.
- 2) whether it is the Chinese style or the translation, a number of the stories are uneven, awkward and rough - perhaps they flow better in the original language, or maybe they follow a cultural norm, but for whatever reason, they do not seem to translate well. Some are better than others, in direct comparison with one another.
- 3) if you really want to experience Chinese experience and voices, a book like "The Corpse Walker: Real Life Stories China from the Bottom Up" is better written, translated and representative.

Readers more familiar with Chinese authors may find this book of interest as a curiosity to compare to the work of authors less "awarded" than the ones in this book.

Lori says

I was a goodreads first reads winner of the book " Old Land New Tales;Twenty Short Stories by Writers of the Shaanxi Region in China. this was a great book of short stories. there are many talented writers who contributed to this well done book. I liked some better than others. I liked "the Walking Stick" a younger man meets an elderly man who is using a walking stick. the older man talks of his life to the younger man. now the younger man looks back because he is now older.one of my favorite stories is "Rain, the story of Hiroshima." this story actually takes place in Japan. it is told through the eyes of a young Chinese woman living there. she lives next door to two sisters.and their dog." the woman eventually tell the young Chinese woman about the day the bomb was dropped in 1945 and their memories of that horrible day. It also tells how this has affected their lives. A very good story!I also liked the story called "Lei Pring'er a simple woman

who loves to sing" the story "Stargazing" was very touching. A young man takes in a baby boy who just lost his parents he he raises the boy as his own, a young woman who sees them in the park is charmed by seeing them, and decides to meet them" one story I had a hard time reading was " Mountain Forest Lasting Forever. it is about a hunter in the forest following an injured mother bear and her cub with a rifle. well written but I found myself wishing that Boa constrictor actually did lash out at the hunter. sad ending in this story. This was a well put together book. It offered short stories from some of the most talented writers in China. Glad i got the chance to read this book.

Tony Laplume says

I always have a hard time making it all the way through short story collections, whether by single or multiple contributors. When I say I sometimes struggled through *Old Land, New Tales*, this is not solely a judgment on this particular one, then.

On the whole, I enjoyed it. (Clearly. Star rating and all.) A short breakdown in the most succinct terms possible:

"Elder Sister" 3 stars

"A Tale of Li Shisan and the Millstone" 4 stars

"The Country Wife" 4 stars

"Oh, a Colt!" 4 stars

"The Walking Stick" 5 stars

"A Trip for Love: The Story of an Unmarried Mother" 5 stars

"Love's Unknown Variable" 3 stars

"Rain: The Story of Hiroshima" 5 stars

"Who Would Go to the Scaffold" 4 stars

"The Soul of the Great Wall" 4 stars

"The Butcher's Knife" 3 stars

"The Portrait of the Ancestor" 4 stars

"One Family in the Desert" 3 stars

"Mountain Forest Lasting Forever" 3 stars

"Sister Yinxiu" 4 stars

"Lei Ping'er" 3 stars

"The Bloodstained Dress" 5 stars

"At the Foot of Mount Yanzhi" 4 stars

"Stargazing" 4 stars

"Wife, or Otherwise" 3 stars

I'd call it an excellent sampling of modern Chinese life, from the war years to revolution years to today. Recommended if you want something like that.

Samantha says

I received this book through the Goodreads first reads program. I have not finished reading it yet and will update my review as soon as I do. I do enjoy the fact that I am reading a book with Chinese writers and getting a different perspective on life through these stories. It is a book, I would not buy for myself, and I am glad I have the chance to broaden my horizons.

Julie says

I received a free copy of Old Land, New Tales via a Goodreads giveaway. I extend my thanks for the opportunity provided by the Goodreads giveaway.

I like that the book included a brief bio for each author. They are all impressively credentialed, and gifted writers. If you would like to learn something about the Shaanxi region of China, I think this is a must read. The writing is excellent, and each story has at least one unique facet about the Shaanxi culture.

Angel Serpentine says

I won a copy of this book through Goodreads First Reads.

I'll note that I come from a Chinese family and have a firm understanding of the language, and I believe, the culture, albeit a preserved version of traditional ideals and customs more so than modern day adaptations. So it is supremely fascinating to read these stories translated to English and covering such a wide range of topics. In particular, seeing the impact of history on how a writer's sentiments and overall outlook on life, is a peek into the grander scheme of a tumultuous Chinese history where voices were suppressed, but have now been freed.

In terms of topics of the stories, some are mundane; others, gripping. But they all share in common their artful use of language to communicate much more than what they have written. It is a synthesis of countless centuries of Chinese citizens reflecting on the lives they have lived and the understanding they have gained from coming from a place so rich in culture and traditions.

Mandarin is very difficult to learn. Speaking it, sure: it's not terrible. But reading and writing it is an arduous job for native English-speakers (such as myself) and that's why this collection simplifies the task so much.

The translation preserves much of the true meaning behind the original sayings- there are idioms and figures of speech and proverbs. And through these, we catch a glimpse of the full meaning behind each carefully translated word, each meticulously written character.

This is really a very good collection of short stories. Perhaps not the best you'll ever read, but it is interesting and an accessible medium by which to explore and learn about the modern-day Chinese culture. I recommend it to anyone who wants to expand their cultural horizons.

Side-note: Sorry if I come off as super pretentious in this review. I just have the deepest appreciation for my heritage and want to communicate the vast meaning I feel every word contains.
