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Shanghai Tango: A Memoir



Synopsis

This unusual memoir describes how China's foremost male ballet dancer (and colonel in the People's Army) underwent China's first sex-change operation and became the Shanghai Ballet's prima ballerina. This book is suitable for fans of "Running with Scissors"; "Self-Made Man", and fans of "Transamerica". Fans of ballet and modern dance. Anyone interested in gender issues, and in Chinese culture and customs. Jin Xing is a former prima ballerina, one of the brightest stars of the Shanghai Ballet. But her journey to international fame has been fraught with difficulty because Jin Xing was in fact born a man. From an early age she was intensely uncomfortable with her gender. Unable to understand or put words to her feelings, she immersed herself in ballet dancing, her first love. Aged 9, she joined the People's Liberation Army, where she received both dance and military training and attained the rank of colonel. The curtains opened on a new act in her life when, at the age of 19, she received a scholarship to study dance in New York. It was there that she discovered for the first time that it was possible to change sex. In an instant, what had been the province of dreams became a real opportunity. She took the courageous decision to return to China to face the authorities, quit the army, and confront the world with her decision to become a woman. As dramatic, graceful and deeply felt as a pas de deux, "Shanghai Tango" is a deeply personal and inspiring account of growing up in a body that feels alien and of braving pioneering surgery in communist China.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Jin Xing is still one of China's foremost ballerinas; she is a mother of three and lives in Shanghai.

Fantastic story, especially since I met the dancer!

Bookshelves: dead-tree-books, historical-fiction, 2-star-review, m-mRead from August 08 to 09, 2013
If you know the story of Mao's Last Dancer, then this story will seem rather boring. It is very similar in terms of the major plot points, but with a lot less detail and beauty in the written word. I felt that the book does explore the emotional state of Jin Xing, but it barely scratches the surface of those emotions, which is quite a let down for the reader. It seems to gloss over a lot that happens in Jin's life at that time with little to no explanation of how Jin felt. Each scene gave you but the briefest of glimpses of Jin's inner thoughts and feelings, I wanted so much more.

I enjoyed Shanghai Tango tremendously. Not because it's the best written memoir ever, but more because it's the truest voice I've read yet. If you're interested in the subject matter i.e. art, crossdressing, transgender issues and most importantly, a journey to self-discovery, I definitely recommend this book.

My cousin sent me the book after watching the Jin Xing Dance Company's U.S. debut in Stanford. A fascinating personality and remarkable journey. The book is engaging and interesting, worth reading. The writing style is alright, the end is a bit rushy. Overall, an enjoyable quick read.

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