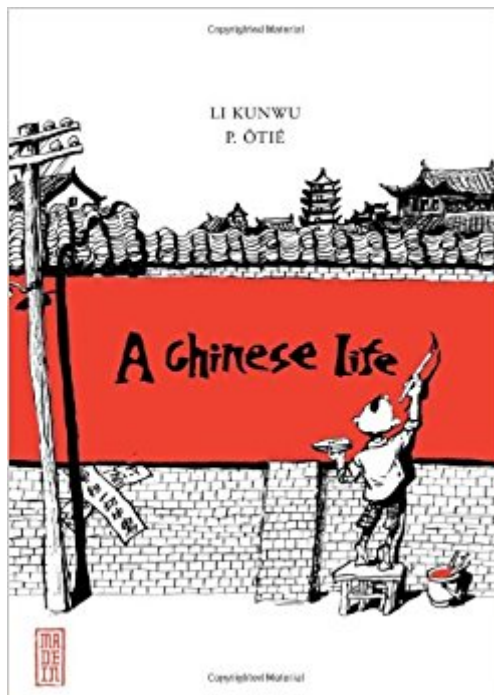


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A Chinese Life



Synopsis

A Chinese Life is an astonishing graphic novel set against the backdrop of the creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This distinctively drawn work chronicles the rise and reign of Chairman Mao Zedong, and his sweeping, often cataclysmic vision for the most populated country on the planet. Though the storyline is epic, the storytelling is intimate, reflecting the real life of the book's artist. Li Kunwu spent more than 30 years as a state artist for the Communist Party. He saw firsthand what was happening to his family, his neighbors, and his homeland during this extraordinary time. Working with Philippe Fâti, the artist has created a memoir of self and state, a rich, very human account of a major historical moment with contemporary consequences. Mao said, "The masses are the real heroes," but A Chinese Life shows those masses as real people. Praise for A Chinese Life: "This is an absorbing book—all 700 pages of it—reminiscent at times of Zhang Yimou's epic Chinese history film To Live, and reminiscent at others of George Orwell's 1984, recast as non-fiction." The Onion's A.V. Club

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review This poignant graphic memoir is an intimate yet sweeping account of the convulsive development of modern China, as seen through the pen of Li, a longtime artist for a Communist Party newspaper in Yunnan, and in collaboration with French writer Fâti. Li was a youngster in the late 1950s when his country embarked on the Great Leap Forward, resulting in

millions dying of starvation, followed by the Cultural Revolution, when millions more were persecuted, imprisoned, relocated, or, like Li's father, sent away for reeducation. The deprivations the nation faced during those turbulent two decades make China's subsequent turn to unfettered capitalism—which Li depicts in all its crass rapaciousness—all the more remarkable. Motivated by the twisted patriotism that gripped the nation, Li joined the military, which led to his becoming a government propaganda artist and then cartoonist for a provincial party newspaper. His engrossing, affecting chronicle introduces the West to a masterful graphic storyteller; his expressive drawings and command of narrative effectively and movingly convey this extraordinary epoch. Much has been written about China's devastating postwar era and its recent modernization, but the vividness of the comics medium, especially in the hands of as skilled a practitioner as Li, gives this rendition a unique power.

--Gordon Flagg

Li Kunwu has had more than 30 of his comics published in the three decades he's worked as a state artist. He lives in Kunming, Yunnan, China. Philippe Otié is a French diplomat who lives in Wuhan, China.

I have read a number of memoirs from contemporary China, and Li Kunwu's co-authored with French writer Philippe Otié is by far the best. *A Chinese Life* is a massive book in size and scope. Starting in 1950, Li chronicles his parents and then his own life (Li was born in 1955). The family endures many of the traumas of the 20th century in China - the Great Leap forward, the Cultural Revolution, etc. However, because Li's father was a prominent Communist Party member, they initially fared well. However, since they came from so-called "bourgeois" family background, the Li's were not immune from the self-destructive forces that was feeding on society. Li was a talented artist, but he joined the army and was forced to temporarily abandon his drawing skills. He strove to become a member of the Party like his father. Finally, he is called again to return to his artistic roots in making propaganda posters. This leads to his longtime job with one of the local newspapers. A couple of factors add to the uniqueness of this autobiography. Unlike many that are primarily set in Beijing or Shanghai, Li lives most of his life in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province. Although not exactly a backwater, Yunnan is a mountainous province and at 1300 miles away, Kunming is also quite removed from the hustle and bustle of the Eastern cities. Nevertheless, it is not immune either from the forces that are influencing the development of China. *A Chinese Life* is a brilliant graphic novel. Li's black and white drawing style tells us so much more than a strictly text

autobiography could. In addition, for Western readers, the illustrations are better able to show what the environment and surroundings were at the different eras. Indeed, this is one of the best graphic novels I have read. It deserves a Spinal Tap rating of 11. Li is such a talented artist, and he found the ideal writing partner in Otie, that together they have produced a book that marries the best of both worlds. A Chinese Life captures the turmoil and change of the second half of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st in China like no other book has.

A nice collaboration between a Chinese artist and a French collaborator (it is so easy to use the word collaborator when speaking about all things French!) Fascinating to hear about life in China from the point of view of a son of the privileged. I highly recommend this book as a good tool to put together the mosaic that is so foreign to most of us.

As a teacher of modern Chinese History, I cannot recommend this graphic novel too much both in terms of its content and the arresting quality of its graphic art. I have read few things that conveyed so well the tremendous changes endured (and also enjoyed) by the Chinese people over the last 64 years.

I am so happy to know this book. Each anecdote helps me to understand Modern Chinese history and cultural background.

An autobiography that gives an interesting insight into China's history and its effect on the average Chinese. Political propaganda and nationalism is very destructive - not only to the individual, but the entire human community.

This graphic novel is more than a comic. It's a historic document. The explanation about the Chinese life is awesome, also, the drawing style is unique. Five stars rating.

Beautiful and poignant. The struggle of a people and a nation. Right up there next to Persepolis.

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