



The Matchmaker, the Apprentice, and the Football Fan: More Stories of China

Zhu Wen (Translation), Julia Lovell (Translation)

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The Matchmaker, the Apprentice, and the Football Fan moves between anarchic campuses, maddening communist factories, and the victims of China's economic miracle to showcase the absurdity, injustice, and socialist Gothic of everyday Chinese life.

In "The Football Fan," readers fall in with an intriguingly unreliable narrator who may or may not have killed his elderly neighbor for a few hundred yuan. The bemused antihero of "Reeducation" is appalled to discover that, ten years after graduating during the pro-democracy protests of 1989, his alma mater has summoned him back for a punitive bout of political reeducation with a troublesome ex-girlfriend. "Da Ma's Way of Talking" is a fast, funny recollection of China's picaresque late 1980s, told through the life and times of one of our student narrator's more controversial classmates; while "The Apprentice" plunges us into the comic vexations of life in a more-or-less planned economy, as an enthusiastic young graduate is over-exercised by his table-tennis-fanatic bosses, deprived of sleep by gambling-addicted colleagues, and stuffed with hard-boiled eggs by an overzealous landlady. Full of acute observations, political bite, and piercing insight into friendships and romance, these stories further establish Zhu Wen as a fearless commentator on human nature and contemporary China.

The Matchmaker, the Apprentice, and the Football Fan: More Stories of China Details

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From Reader Review The Matchmaker, the Apprentice, and the Football Fan: More Stories of China for online ebook

Bonnie says

I received this book in a Goodreads Giveaway. My opinion may be for sale, but I promise not for the price of a book.

I lived and worked in China on and off from the early 80's to the mid 90's, so stories about that time truly resonate with me. These stories(all but the first) are beautiful and true illustrations of a unique moment in history. It is hard to explain to people what it is like to be in a country whose people were blocked from outside information for 40 years (and were shunned, imprisoned, and sometimes killed for seeking access to knowledge beyond what the state wished for you to know.) These stories capture a flash in time where the doors were just beginning to open bringing people from a sort of 19th century prison (much had not changed since feudal times) to a pale iteration of freedom, but freedom nonetheless.

Some things are easy to understand -- the rapid advances in technology make sense to people. In 1984 only Party officials had cars. Those Chinese made cars that did exist looked like they came off the set of Chinatown. The car factories had not seen updates since the 30's. I visited a village in Southwest China where I was asked if American people really lived like the people in Hotel (A Dynasty-like show which had just started airing there as part of a "cultural exchange.") Harder to convey is the uncertainty of living in a country where for many years saying anything considered elitist, or even being found to have been educated, would get you ripped from your family sent to re-education work camps or "rebaking" schools, often for years. The sense of disconnection, fear and uncertainty was so pervasive during that time. It was terrifying and toxic more than liberating and empowering. These stories convey that time of social whiplash perfectly. These are also beautifully written stories which draw you in and keep you guessing throughout. This would have been a 5 star but for my feelings about the first story, which seemed completely allegorical and out of synch with the other stories. Were it possible, this would be a 4 1/2.

B. Cheng says

One of the stranger books I've read recently. It's a book of short stories with seemingly very little connection between them, most (many? all?) take part in the years just after 1989, which explains a bit the strange nature of things and the feeling that nobody is on solid ground, but then again, the events of '89 weren't as intensely felt (or even known) outside of Beijing and a few other cities. As a football fan, that part of the title was what led me to the book though there was little about football in that story. That story, like many in the book, had glimpses of the author's (black) humor and great prose, but the problem remains that it was only glimpses and even though it was a book of short stories, it still felt like a slog to get to the end.

This is only for those taking a deep dive into Chinese literature, having already read many other modern authors and even then, this is a book to avoid.

Roy Kesey says

Zhu Wen's first collection, I Love Dollars, was terrific, and this new one measures up beautifully--it's a

powerful set of stories about people for whom things go sideways. The plots tend to be cool but spintered, sad and inconclusive in conclusive-feeling ways. Compared to *ILD*, modern Chinese history is more present here, and a few of the stories (esp. "Reeducation") edge more solidly into satire. The translation by Julia Lovell (who also did *ILD*) is very nicely handled.

A few favored bits:

The Nanjing summer has a talent for making you feel like an internal organ—hot, sticky, visceral, the blood pulsing through you—trapped inside the crowded, overheated body of the city.
"Da Ma's Way of Talking"

He was still nodding as if he needed someone to tell him to stop.
"The Matchmaker"

But Hu Pingping suddenly whispered something in my ear: "I hope we're riding to our deaths." Needless to say, I didn't feel much like sleeping after that. I looked anxiously around me. Outside, it was pitch-dark; I had no idea where we were. "Why d'you say something like that?" I asked her uneasily. "Just making conversation," she replied.
"Reeducation"

Steven Buechler says

I received a copy of this book through a promotion on Goodreads.com

The complexities of China are hard for us to grasp in the West. Not only are the usual barriers of language, culture and distance, a problem for us who want to know about China but the whole complex bureaucracy governing the country is keen on keeping what life is like for the average citizen a secret. In Zhu Wen's *The Matchmaker, The Apprentice, & The Football Fan* we are given a glimpse of life in China for the past thirty years or so.

Page 1 - Da Ma's Way of Talking

In the summer of 1989, I was assigned to a job in an electrical engineering company in Nanjing. My train pulled in at one in the afternoon, and as I walked out of the station - two large bags slung over my shoulder - I was ambushed by a mob of peasant girls delegated by hotels to pester people for business. The sweat was pouring off me, and I was not in a good mood. 'Get lost,' I told them. "I live here; I don't need a hotel."

In this collection of short stories, we are given insight in the personal lives of the people of China. Each short story is long enough for the reader to get to know the protagonist - what they think, what they like, who they are, etc - and develop some sort of empathy with them.

Page 21 - The Matchmaker

When Li Zi and I were together, he did most of the talking. He was good at it, and it brought him pleasure, too. Once a class monitor, always a class monitor; he seemed set on keeping an eye on my moral and social well-being for the rest of our lives. Ten years later, Li Zi's perorations had become even wordier, even more long-winded than they had been at college, but they didn't bother me, truly, because I wasn't listening. Whom had I listened to over the years? No one, which was why I was in the mess I found myself in now. While Li Zi was passionately holding forth, his wife Wang Qing would usually bring us something to eat, and I would obediently swallow it down. Not with unseemly greed, of course, but steadily and methodically. In fact the rhythms of my chewing synchronized exactly with those of Li Zi's speech. But there were limits to my former classmate's generosity (though he liked to be generous when the situation required it) so if he wasn't in the mood to watch three pounds of sugar-roasted chestnuts disappear down my throat, he tended to shut up.

One of the beauty of these stories is not so much about learning about China but seeing how similar the feelings and emotions the people have with us here. Yes, some of the customs different and off, but many of the protagonists of these stories have similar experiences to us in the west that we can relate too.

Page 48 - The Apprentice

On Wednesday morning, the seven of us - all fresh out of university - were notified that we should go to the office in the transport depot to sign our apprenticeship contracts. I was overjoyed with the factory to which I had chosen to devote my life. I'd done a couple of work placements there while still at college, and I had been delighted by how much the workers swore - and particular by how freely and foully they expressed their contempt for the upper-level leadership of both the factory and the country as a whole. They liked a drink, too, which struck me as another good thing, since it only increased their already impressive level of frankness. Since July, I had been eagerly anticipating my elevation to the working class.

The language used in the book is simple to understand. Each story has one or two characters which allows the reader to relate to the situations the story deals with.

Page 65-66 - The Football Fan

My name is Chen Zhiqiang. I'm twenty-five years old. I used to work at the Xinhua Printing Factory. My father worked at the same factory all his life. He'd never smoked a cigarette in his life and then died of lung cancer before he was fifty. No one could understand it.

The funny thing about my father is that he never once went to hospital until the end. He was an unremarkable man in most ways, but at least he stayed healthy most of his life: and nothing particularly bad- no serious illness or personal misfortune - ever happened to him. Well, not until the illness that killed him, anyway.

When the government started reforming our industries, the printing plant introduced a new system for health insurance: the factory gave employees twenty yuan a month per person for medical costs. Anything beyond that first twenty yuan, the factory only paid 20 percent - the rest had to be covered by the individual in question. Every month, my father took that extra twenty yuan back to my mother; he was the envy of all his colleagues. I remember him being pretty delighted with himself about it. Every month he was obsessed with pocketing every cent of that twenty yuan.

Eventually, though, he just had to go to hospital to find out what was wrong with him. It was the first time he'd been in his life. The doctors told him to make his funeral arrangements. He fainted on the spot. I remember Father when he was close to death: I remember his chewing on a bone, like a dog, an almost savage glare in his eyes. I felt somehow as if he were chewing on that twenty yuan that he'd saved every month all those years on medical fees.

The Matchmaker, The Apprentice, & The Football Fan by Zhu Wen gives great insight into modern China. It is an interesting read well worth the time.

Jane says

My thanks to Wen Zhu and Goodreads First Reads Giveaway for my copy of *The Matchmaker, the Apprentice, and the Football Fan: More Stories of China* that I won in the Giveaway.

The insightful look into aspects of life in China is told with humor without the loss of realism. Each story tells of a different aspect of life in China and its recent history to give the reader a great deal to think about.

Lynn says

Interesting from a perspective about learning Chinese thought and culture, these stories present people who have individual thoughts but are trapped inside a system which doesn't value individuals. People in these stories are all university graduates and men who are required to follow people in their graduating class, the factory workers and owners and keep their minds to themselves. One misstep can derail a life. The stories are detached and distant from other humans. Interesting but not engaging. I view this collection of short stories as something to learn from but like the characters in the stories have no lives, I felt detached from this book also.
