

Brothers by yu hua

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Yu Hua is considered as one of China's most well-known contemporary novelists. He was born in 1960 in Hangzhou. He was raised in the coastal town of Haiyan, Zhejiang. After the Cultural Revolution, upon his father's bidding, he worked as a dentist for five years before shifting to his first love - literature. His first gained local acclaim in 1984 when he penned a series of short stories characterized by Kafka-esque scenes depicting trivial harshness using plain language with flawless precision. Book Review Yu Hua's novel ?? (Brothers) is a best-seller in China.

It follows the lives of two very opposite stepbrothers who got enmeshed in China's Cultural Revolution during Mao's period and later on, in China's Consumer Revolution. Yu Hua's work has been the subject of much discourse and heated debates in the Chinese literary circle - and, for good reason. Brothers has certainly stirred up some latent issues and pent-up emotions that had long been held back by the Chinese people. Yu Hua's " Brothers" is a story of Li Guang or better known as Baldy Li and his stepbrother, Song Gang. The main plot of the story is a love triangle set in China's industrial revolution.

What makes the plot complicated is that the love triangle is between step brothers Baldy Li and Song Gang, orphaned during the Cultural Revolution. They were fighting over same girl Lin Hong. Song Gang won Lin Hong's nod and defeated his brother. He marries Hong after he won her in a struggle akin to the scenes in byzantine " Cyrano de Bergerac. " To hide his ignominy, Baldy Li channel his frustrations to money-making activities. He worked hard to build a business empire as China's primary trash collector and scrap

distributor. Baldy Li generates massive income from selling garbage or being a scrap dealer.

Unsatiated, he ventures into more entrepreneurial activities that can generate him more money – real estate, designers' clothes, and so many others. He bought the village where he lived in when he was young. The same village that brought him so many painful memories and transformed it "like a B-52 bomber, carpet-bombing the formerly beautiful town." Song Gang, on the other hand, suffers a far more different fate than Baldy Li. As Li's fortune grows, Song Gang's fate spirals down. He jumps from job to job, each job becoming less and less dignified.

Gang found himself selling breast-enlargement creams and the business owner demands that he himself undergoes breast implant so he can convince more clients. Worse, Gang becomes seriously ill. Baldy Li's opportunistic instincts make him offer help to Gang's wife, the beautiful Lin Hong. But Li has ulterior motives, a hidden agenda for doing so. He seduces Lin Hong and they made love as Lin's husband, and his very own brother, Gang struggles to hold on for dear life. Li later on realizes that his huge appetite for sexual is the reason for his depression.

The two brothers represent China's meaningless present and its forgotten but happier past. The book marries two schools of thoughts: Mao's Cultural Revolution and the China capitalist system. It also depicts two eras: past and present-time China. "Brothers" is largely a social novel that tackles the 20th century China. It showcases Yu's attempt to create an epic befitting the generation in the Cultural Revolution and the current, Consumer Revolution

which puts great emphasis on the current capitalist market state of China. All of us are very aware of this recent development in that part of the World.

The cultural and economic revolution in China now have headlined various newspapers worldwide. The sentimental story wherein we find brothers Song Gang and Baldy Li orphaned at the start becomes a parody of contemporary China in the succeeding chapters. Baldy Li's pursuit of wealth and his transformation due to acquisition of wealth become the dominating theme in the remaining chapters. "Brothers" extols the virtues and pitfalls that befall China's as it comes of age in the 1980s. The sudden economic shift, in the end, made the Chinese both winners at the same time losers in their endless quest for wealth as embodied by Baldy Li.

This irony in China becomes apparent towards the end of the story when Li sponsors a beauty pageant for virgins. Around three thousand women show up to compete for the said pageant, with one major flaw – none of them is a virgin. Wandering Zhou offers a temporary solution to the contestants by selling artificial hymen both the cheap local models and "imported Joan of Arc ones." The runner-up uses the Joan of Arcs to bed Baldy Li and all the judges. The winner has a 2-year-old but thinks "spiritually, she would always be a virgin." Verbal as well as physical hostilities seem apparent in every page of the book.

For the uninitiated, this could cause a minor culture shock as curses, black eyes, beatings seem to be the norm. Yu Hua however has the ability to capture this hostilities in a detached manner without flinching and becoming too emotional about it. There are also graphic depictions of the violence

during the Cultural Revolution, such as a man who committed suicide by driving a nail into his head. Amazingly, brutalities like this managed to escape Chinese censorship. Yu's depiction of his characters can sometimes be downright boring except for its protagonist Li.

Li's co-workers were blandly depicted as "two cripples, three idiots, four blind men, and five deaf men." However when these men met the captivating Lin Hong, they transformed, but still described flatly in the book, as "the love-crazed idiot" and "the two non-infatuated idiot minions." Yu's language is hardly emotional. He does not wax eloquent on the drama-filled life of his characters. One have this feeling of detachment to the characters' plight because of Yu's unemotional depiction of them. The metaphors he used lack sophistication and hardly lend life to his story-telling.

Like, he says "they couldn't help laughing, happier than a pair of toads feasting on the succulent flesh of a swan." However, perhaps one of the book's redeeming qualities is that it is consistently funny. Yu's comic relief and ability to infuse absurdity that saves the book from being too instructional or even informative. "Brothers" on the surface appear to be a light-hearted comedy based on the farce of current Chinese life but it is actually a disturbing satire of the realities faced by China. It serves as a painful reminder of the moral and ethical downfall many have to cope in the ongoing Consumer Revolution in China.

The shock value in the story. "Brothers" is intended to capture people's attention. Hua's work certainly didn't give people much choice. Critics and fans alike concur that this book's popularity hinges on its ability to depict

extremes. English readers may think " Brothers" as hard to digest book because crude humor or crass remarks littered the book. Also, non-Chinese readers have little background on the historical underpinnings of the book. Readers, however, who choose to read on despite the seeming confusion will be rewarded with comprehension on the realities that confront the modern-man China.

Reference

[https://www. amazon. com/Brothers-Novel-Yu-Hua/dp/0375424997](https://www.amazon.com/Brothers-Novel-Yu-Hua/dp/0375424997)