



Socialism is Great!

A Worker's Memoir of the New China

by Lijia Zhang

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Lijia is attending the Melbourne Writers' Festival

“A beautiful memoir of this important 1980’s period, when China began to recover from its political traumas and open to the outside world. Our current China literature is heavy with victim memoirs, but this is a true tale of aspiration: a young woman coming of age in a nation desperately trying to do the same” - Peter Hessler, author of Oracle Bones

Lijia Zhang worked as a teenager in a factory producing missiles designed to reach North America, queuing every month to give evidence to the “period police” that she wasn’t pregnant. In the oppressive routine of guarded factory compound and political meetings, Zhang’s disillusionment with “The Glorious Cause” drove her to study English, which strengthened her intellectual independence – from wearing bright, western style clothes to organizing the largest demonstration by Nanjing workers in support of Tiananmen Square Protest in 1989. By narrating the changes in her own life, Zhang chronicles the momentous shift in China’s economic policy: Her factory, still a ballistic missile manufacturer in the early 1980’s won the bid to cast a giant bronze Buddha as the country went crazy for profit. *Socialism Is Great!* is a testament to Zhang’s personal triumphs over the controlled existence that was supposed to be her destiny.

Biography

Lijia Zhang was born in 1964 and raised on the banks of Yangtze River near Nanjing. At 16, she was pulled out of school and began her decade-long job at a factory. To escape boredom and oppressive routine, she sought enlightenment in literature and taught herself English. In 1990, at 26, Lijia went to England where she pursued her childhood dream of studying journalism. On her return to China, she started her career by assisting foreign journalists before becoming a freelance journalist herself. Her articles, often about the plight of China's 'little people', have been published in *South China Morning Post*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Japan Times*, *The Independent*, *The Observer*, *The Guardian* and *Newsweek*. In 1999, she co-authored *China Remembers*, a well-acclaimed oral history of contemporary China for *Oxford University Press*. In 2004, she received a MA in Creative and Life Writing from *Goldsmiths, University of London*. Her second book and first novel *Lotus*, about prostitution in modern China is to be released in 2009. Lijia lives in Beijing with her two daughters.



* I N T E R V I E W S * E X T R A C T * I M A G E S *
Contact Benython Oldfield, Zeitgeist Media Group on behalf of UWA Press
02 9797 9977(w) 0410 355 790(m) benython@zeitgeistmediagroup.com