China in ten words

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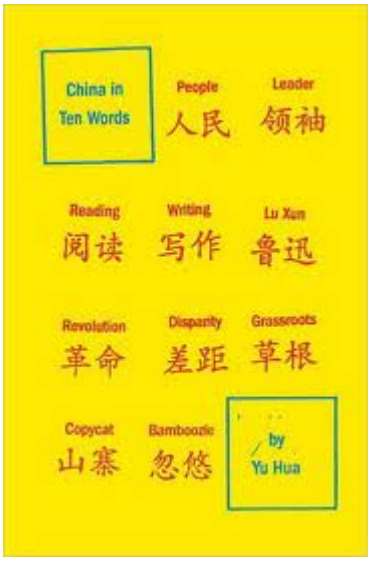

Although I've spent some time in Asia, I never visited China, so when I came across this personal narrative that combines essays on life in modern China with growing up during the Cultural Revolution, I couldn't resist. Through the focus of ten simple words, contemporary novelist Yu Hua presents a vivid picture of how Chinese life has changed in many ways, yet in others remained the same for over fifty years. With humor and an incisive take on his own culture, Hua shows how conformity vies with individuality in his country and how conformity often wins.

The chapter titled "Leader" focuses on the era of Mao Zedong. Although Yu was only a boy when Mao was Chairman, Yu entered the spirit of things by writing big-character posters. These were signs that were put up in all public place: movie theaters, schools, stores, and outside people's houses. In these anonymous signs, people criticized their neighbors for being landlords or for not following the precepts of the little red book. Yu Hua himself wrote many about his teachers and parents. In fact, he traces his love of writing from this childhood activity. **Read more »**
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