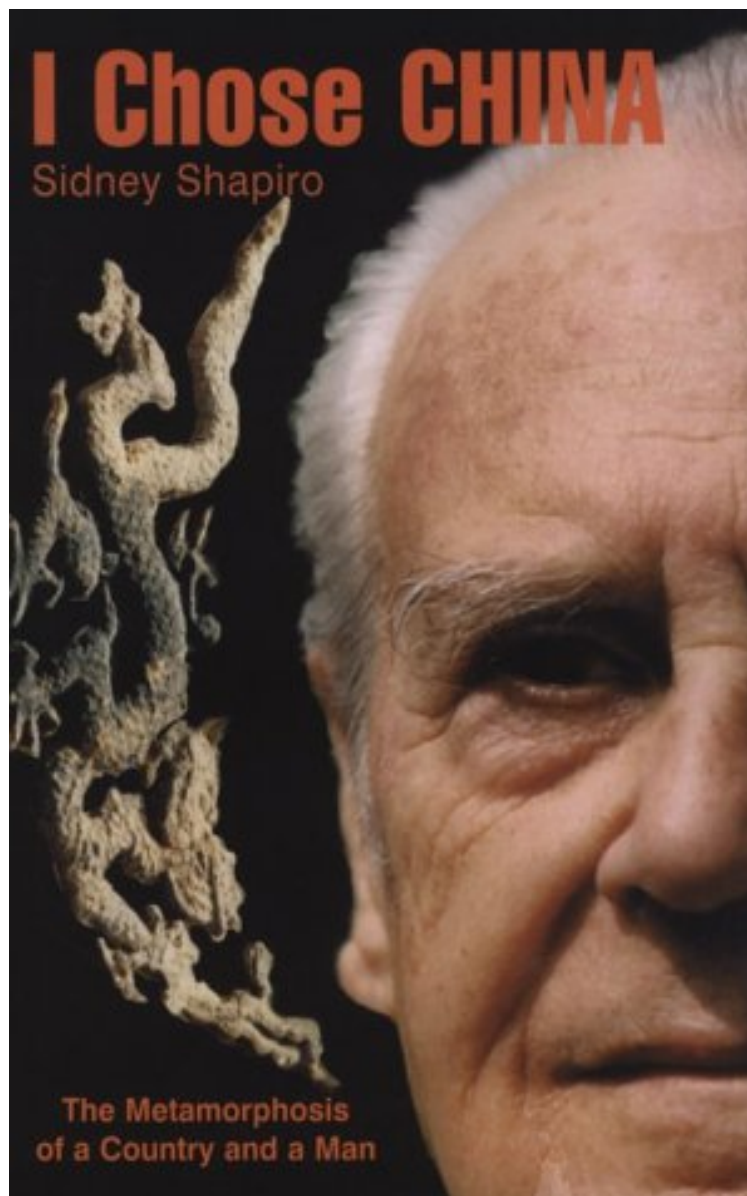


[Mobile book] I Chose China: The Metamorphosis of a Country and a Man

I Chose China: The Metamorphosis of a Country and a Man

Sidney Shapiro

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Sidney Shapiro : I Chose China: The Metamorphosis of a Country and a Man before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised I Chose China: The Metamorphosis of a Country and a Man:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. When revolutionaries live on for a bit too long.....By Leib Gershon MitchellDear Readers, if you ever want to know the fate of a revolutionary that lives on waaaaay past the time of the

revolution, then this is the book that answers those questions. It appears that he is a character right out of Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer*. The early parts of this book show him taken a very well trodden path: 1. A loser is looking around (and failing) for something to occupy his time and life (p. 49: "For one thing, I wanted life to have more meaning.....escape the corrupt environment of the marketplace"); 2. Joining the US Army (this takes in a lot of would be revolutionaries); 3. Leaving the Army and looking for something to direct him. It appears that he found China- a new religion of his ancestors that he never took up (p. 275). He claimed to have no interest in religion, but it doesn't seem that way to this reviewer. About 1/3 of the way through the book (p. 101) the author says that "For the first time in my life, I had a sense of purpose." The way that Shapiro writes gives me the impression of two things: 1. That he was someone who lived to see a revolution through and became disenchanted with the results. (He writes of events something like 4 decades after they actually happened.) 2. He did cut away the revolutionary fervor and revised his viewpoint to be more balanced (pps. 79, 131, he even states as much). There were a number of things that made me wonder if, perhaps, he might have had rose colored glasses on. (The only other possibility is that he was disingenuous.)

1. p. 48. "Absence of racial or religious prejudice is traditional in China." (Sorry, but 95% of schools in China will not hire black teachers.) An "open arms policy toward all races and religions"? (p. 256). Try telling that to Africans from English speaking countries that are trying to be approved for work permits to teach English.
2. p. 61. Price controls led to the quenching of inflation? (Did this work out for Venezuela? Did it even work out for China-- they did issue a new currency.)
3. "Wife beating is rare" (p. 93). (Just, no.)
4. The Great Famine occurs in this book over exactly 14 pages (pps 128-142), and if the reader did not know about the 30+ million people who had starved to death during that period, he would not find out that information from this book. He does concede that "wishful thinking swamped common sense" and that there were many "silly excesses" committed during the period (p. 137).
5. He took constant slaps at the United States. But by the time this book was written, he had been gone for 50 years-- or about 3 generations. How did he know what was going on (p.195)? He was talking about corruption in China (of course nothing as bad as in the United States), but how did he know? Where do Chinese officials flee when they have a lot of money that they can't explain (other than Canada)?
6. Chinese "invented rockets centuries ago." (p. 211). Really? There are a lot of strange/ inconsistent leftovers from his days as a revolutionary:

1. Shapiro refers to lots of people/ things as "imperialist"--frequently. He used that word every 3rd page or so, and by p. 128, it was starting to get annoying. (Yes, that is the exact page when I decided that I'd heard that word just a time too many.)
2. He speaks of the Soviets as "backsliding" into capitalism (p. 77). Does this mean that the reforms that China undertook after 1979 were "backsliding"? 3. At one point, he describes that Khrushchev "showered sticky kisses on the backsides of the US imperialists" (p. 137). But just the same, the Sino-Soviet fissure was not clear (I still don't know what it was about after 3 books in which it was featured, and for that matter I don't think anyone else does. This book didn't clarify it.) Was it an ego trip played over the heads of the common people on both sides?
4. Several times he brings in blasts from the past ("dialectic"). He also flaps on quite a bit about Marx's stages of civilizations without ever considering whether they have any basis in reality. Everything bad in China was left over because of "feudalism" or every other nation was an "imperialist." There were just "contradictions" all over the place (p. 192). "Socialist internationalism" (p. 315). By the last half of the book, it just fell apart:

1. On one hand, he is saying that the birthdate of Chairman Mao was more important than Christmas (p. 333), but just before he had said that in the economic field that Mao was "ignorant, stubborn, and inept." (p. 150)
2. Under feudalism, there were some number of haves and many more have nots. Under the "socialist market system" (whatever that is), there are some number of haves and many more have nots. (p.170). So, what was the point of all that revolution? He also mentions that feudalism as the order of the day in ancient China and that neo-feudalism is the new order of the new day. And that no one can do anything about it. (p. 290)
3. The author was forced to bow before portraits of Mao and Lin Biao (p. 176). And also to clean toilets behind revolutionaries. So, he was not satisfied when he didn't have to do those things in the States (where people were unequal), but satisfied when he had to do it in China? (It has been said that "People who bite the hand that feeds them usually lick the boot that kicks them. " I believe it.)
4. The granddaughter, Stella Guo, felt that her life was in China. But then she married an American and had a child with him-- even though there were tons of Chinese men to choose from.
5. He implies something that I have heard before. FREQUENTLY. ("We had perfect communism, but those guys [the Gang of Four] ruined it.") p.215

What conclusions did I reach?

1. Singapore and Switzerland have the best ideas with respect to foreign affairs. If outright isolation is not the best (Switzerland), then "neutrality and non alignment" (Singapore) are a close second. It appears that people on the ground (Shapiro) and people in the various government organs than concern themselves with such things had totally different perceptions of what was happening. Better to not be bothered with it at all.
2. That foreigner was (as other book reviews have noted) a pampered little prince who didn't live the same struggles as the real life Chinese people.
3. We did get some details of how the One Child Policy works. (p. 230)

Verdict: Recommended, but not at more than the price of \$1.6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A very American Chinese, or a very Chinese American

By Eric Langager
Sidney Shapiro went to China just after World War II. He had studied Chinese before coming, but he did not have a background in China, and had not planned to stay. He met and married a Chinese woman, and ended up staying on after the Communist takeover, working for the Chinese government as a translator. Shapiro is a very lucid writer, and easy to follow, but he seems obliged to

rationalize some things about his adopted country that are hard to defend. For example, he says that Western missionaries left China after the war because they "were not needed anymore." Although I believe that his description of his life in China is an honest portrayal, there is always the feeling that he is sugarcoating policies that were clearly ill-fated. But Shapiro's book is just as noticeable for the things he concedes, such as the lack of press freedom in China. This book would be of special interest to individuals with an American frame of reference, because Shapiro is an American, and he writes in a very American style. Yet, he has lived and worked in China since just after World War II, a period of 50 years at the time the book was written in the mid nineties. Clearly, he has a better perspective on China than any other American born writer. You will not want to miss this book, but I would suggest reading a few of the others first, so that you have a little better framework from which to evaluate this one.⁹ of 19 people found the following review helpful. A sheltered and privileged American in China By Li Guo Qing After reading Mr. Shapiro's "I Choose China", I have had much mixed feelings. In the book, Mr. Shapiro's tone about Mao is almost identical as the "People's Daily" - the official Chinese newspaper of propaganda nature. He is positive about Deng Xiaoping and his successors as well. In reality, Deng abolished Mao's policies and created a capitalistic society in 1979. It makes me wonder why Mr. Shapiro wrote about Mao according to the Chinese official guidelines while most Chinese people know very well that Mao was a man who committed unpardonable crimes to the Chinese people. To many Chinese, Mao was a devil while Deng was a "kind of" saint. How can the devil and the saint be praised in the same time? Mr. Shapiro narrated that his money was tight due to the Chinese currency being low in terms of the exchange rates. The cost of foreign travel was astronomical to the Chinese citizens. Yet he was able to travel to the US and Europe for many times including the pre-Deng years. How were his trips funded? The Chinese government gave him special treatment? I would think so. His grand daughter could even attend an expensive private school in Minnesota. Who paid for it? Alas, politics, connections, privileges etc... Were the readers informed? Nah... To sum up, like they have done to many other westerners who live in China in the past and present, I think the Chinese government for political reasons has used Mr. Shapiro. These westerners were sheltered, were provided comfortable living, and were used for propaganda. While I admire the great classical translation works by Mr. Shapiro (like Shui Hu and Family by Ba Jin), with much regret, I have to say that Sidney Shapiro only painted the bright side of the Chinese society in his book. The many years of darkness were simply buried. To state it unkindly, the author was a product of brainwash, Chinese style.

Book by Sidney Shapiro

From Publishers Weekly "I have tried in these pages to tell something of what it is like to be a particle in the centrifuge that created one of the most momentous changes in Chinese history," writes Shapiro, a Jewish lawyer from New York, and a contemporary of the Westerners such as Edgar Snow (author the classic Red Star Over China) who fell under the Communist country's spell in the 1940s. In 1947, at age 32, Shapiro traveled to China to perfect his Yale University-learned Chinese, and fell in love with Mao's revolution and with Phoenix, a Chinese actress, writer and revolutionary, whom he married in 1948; in 1963, he became a Chinese citizen. While Phoenix traveled with her political work, Shapiro raised their daughter (who now attends college in the U.S.), wrote about Jews in China and witnessed many major events, such as the Cultural Revolution, the purge of the Gang of Four and the Tiananmen Square crackdown on democracy. In sharp contrast to Chinese expatriates who have come to the U.S. bearing stories of oppression, this expatriate American (who has visited the U.S. six times since his initial departure) retains the idealistic fervor that gripped many Western radicals in the 1960s: "Certainly the influence of the Chinese revolution on China and the world is beyond question. It has brought a better life for the Chinese people, a better chance of peace and prosperity for people of other lands." Even though Phoenix died in 1996, Shapiro plans, at age 84, to remain there. This rare firsthand account by an American of China's transformation in the last 50 years will fascinate anyone interested in this great unfolding story. (Jan.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Shapiro, a Brooklyn-born lawyer with a modicum of wartime Chinese language training, arrived in China in 1947 at the beginning of the Cold War. Enchanted with the Communist revolution, he married a Chinese woman and settled in Beijing, where he led a privileged life while working for the Foreign Language Press. His loosely structured memoir weaves his own interesting story with a party-line history of the People's Republic that glosses over such horrors as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Although a prolific and talented literary translator, Shapiro here employs the ugly vocabulary of Maoist propaganda when inveighing against China's real or imagined enemies. It is hard to tell whether he remains a true believer in "the magnificent experiment" of the Communist revolution or is merely a skillful trimmer. Either way, if you are going to read only one book about China this year, don't make it this one. Recommended only for larger libraries with collections on Asia. -Steven I. Levine, Univ. of Montana, Missoula Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. "Phoenix was more than a wife to me. She was an integral part of China, a continual stream that flowed between China and me, the essence of a people, a culture, a society. It was thanks to her that I was able to adapt and live contentedly in a China which became my China. To love Phoenix was to love a Dragon. Understanding and loving the Chinese Dragon made me love and appreciate my Chinese Phoenix all the more . . . I have tried in these pages to tell something of what it

was like to be a particle in the centrifuge that created one of the most momentous changes in Chinese history. Can my miniscule presence have had even a shade of impact? I would like to think it has. Certainly the influence of the Chinese revolution on China and the world is beyond question . . . I hope, in the time that remains, to continue doing my bit. I consider myself lucky to have the opportunity."