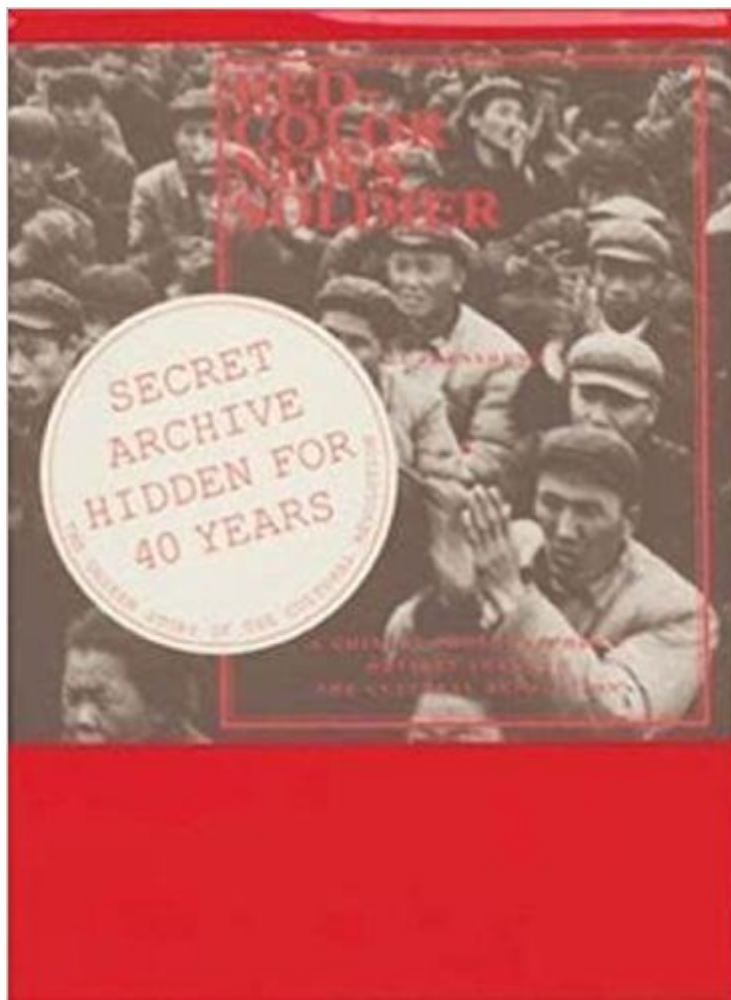


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# Red-Color News Soldier



## Synopsis

The Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) remains one of the most catastrophic and complicated political movements of the twentieth century. Almost no visual documentation of the period exists and that which does is biased due to government control over media, arts and cultural institutions. *Red-Color News Soldier* is a controversial visual record of an infamous, misunderstood period of modern history that has been largely hidden from the public eye, both within China and abroad. Li Zhensheng (b.1940) - a photo journalist living in the northern Chinese province of Heilongjiang - managed, at great personal risk, to hide and preserve for decades over 20,000 stills. As a party-approved photographer for *The Heilongjiang Daily*, he had been granted unusual access to capture events during the Cultural Revolution. This account has remained unseen until now, except for some eight photographs that were released for publication in 1987. *Red-Color News Soldier* includes over 400 photographs and a running diary of Li's experience. The images are powerful representations of the turbulent period, including photographs of unruly Red Guard rallies and relentless public denunciations and Mao's rural re-education centres, as well as portraits prominent participants in the Cultural Revolution. Jonathan Spence, Yale Professor and pre-eminent historian of modern China, presents a rigorous introduction. In it, he states: 'Li was tracking human tragedies and personal foibles with a precision that was to create an enduring legacy not only for his contemporaries but for the generations of his countrymen then unborn. As Westerners confront the multiplicity of his images, they too can come to understand something of the agonizing paradoxes that lay at the centre of this protracted human disaster.' This book excels as a volume of both compelling photography and riveting historical record. It is truly unique - in terms of both its artefactual value and its deconstruction - and indispensable for anyone interested in modern Chinese history or the powerful cultural role of photojournalism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'This collection of photos, taken by Li in the north-eastern province of Heilongjiang, where he worked for the official Communist party newspaper, is unique for a simple reason. Although the post-Mao Chinese government has labelled the cultural revolution "10 years of chaos", it still tries to suppress any real inquiry into the countless human tragedies it caused ... This remarkable book, which still cannot be published on the mainland, is a salutary reminder that, in the Chinese phrase, accounts have yet to be settled with the past.' (Guardian) 'An illuminating and unique photographic collection.' (Times Higher Education Supplement) 'Fascinating ... An excellent book.' (Amateur Photographer) 'Every shot is a harrowing legacy of the brutality, cruelty, and naivety of those times, when Mao and his followers sought to destroy all traces of the past.' (The Glasgow Herald) '...An extraordinary picture of one of the most bizarre, complex and catastrophic episodes in China's history.' (New Statesman) 'Li's photographs are remarkable for their dramatic impact, but are also composed with utmost precision.' (Financial Times) 'The interweaving of autobiography, images with a strong narrative structure and an illuminating tranche of contextual writing is what makes this book so revealing and so engaging.' (Morning Star) 'What distinguishes Mr. Li's collection of 30,000 negatives is that it shows in shocking detail what was happening at a grass-roots level in a remote Chinese province far from western eyes. His work also reflects the instincts of a journalist and the eye of an artist.' (The New York Times) 'The collection offers an astonishing and invaluable record of a decade of political zealotry that veered out of control and resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands.' (Publishers Weekly) 'Mr. Li's photos graphically capture the emotional pain of the humiliation inflicted by young punks on powerful men, governors and Communist Party first secretaries... Each photo is captioned with a description, and the collection is accompanied with Mr. Li's readable text describing the impact of the Cultural Revolution on his life.' (The Washington Times) 'The first complete photo history to present China's dark Cultural Revolution (1966-76) in all its inhumanity.' (Entertainment Weekly) 'This is a startling and unique perspective.' (The Christian Science Monitor) 'These images are rare and powerful reminders of events that might otherwise have been forgotten ... By capturing that decade of shame and destruction, and preserving it forever on paper, Li has challenged the world never to forget.' (Reader's Digest) 'A minutely documented

(the 285 prints were gleaned from the tens of thousands of negatives Li hid under his floorboards), scrupulously honest (the book orders all the prints strictly chronologically, and all are uncropped) record of the revolution.' (The Atlantic Monthly) 'With Red-Color News Soldier...Li, now 63, has brought forth an unprecedented vision of this dark chapter in Chinese history.' (US News & World Report) 'Taken at enormous personal risk, the photographs collected here depict extraordinary events...It's their unadorned straightforwardness that makes Red Color News Soldier such a profoundly disturbing document.' (Photo District News) '[A] groundbreaking book.' (Newsweek International) 'A straightforward and open account of that era giving valuable insight into a tormented period of history.' (The Asian Review of Books on the Web) 'One of the great events of the 20th Century at last is found to have received coherent visual expression. Moreover, it's the only complete record of the Cultural Revolution known to exist. It is impossible to overrate the historical value of this densely packed volume.' (The Chicago Tribune) 'Li Zhensheng's disturbing photographs of the rise and fall of Mao's Cultural Revolution are a truly stunning achievement...A brilliant book!' (Worldview) '...[O]ne of the most important photo books in recent memory.' (American Photo) 'Red-Color News Soldier documents the spectacular nitty-gritty of everyday totalitarian fanaticism, with pictures culled from the thousands taken by photojournalist Li Zhensheng in the mid 1960s...The trove of negatives hidden for two decades below the floorboards of his house constitute the single most extensive record of the Cultural Revolution.' (The Village Voice) 'One of the most unforgettable books of the past year...It is utterly engrossing, even when you can barely look at it.' (Slate)

Li Zhensheng was born in Dalian, China, in 1940. After studying film, he joined The Heilongjiang Daily as a photojournalist in 1963 and documented the Chinese Cultural Revolution in its entirety. In 1987, a collection of 20 of his photos were released, bearing the title Let History Tell the Future, and won the Grand Prize at China's National Press Association Photo Competition. Since 1996 he has been a visiting scholar, lecturing on the Cultural Revolution at the universities of Harvard and Princeton. His work has appeared in major magazines worldwide including Time, The New York Times Magazine, Der Spiegel, and Le Nouvel Observateur. Jonathan Spence is Sterling Professor of History at Yale University. He is the author of a distinguished body of work on the history of modern China, including the seminal book, The Search for Modern China (1990). His book The Gate of Heavenly Peace The Chinese and Their Revolution 1895-1980 (1981) was awarded the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for History. Spence was named a MacArthur Fellow in 1988 and is established as one of the foremost experts on the history and culture of modern China.

The collection of photos in this book is simply amazing. Although the internet has made many hard-to-find photos of the Cultural Revolution more common, it is still a challenge to find them. With Li Zhensheng's "Red-Color News Soldier," we have 300 photos taken from the same region, Heilongjiang. They show mass rallies, executions, the Down to the Countryside movement, Red Guards, struggle sessions, and other facets of the Cultural Revolution. These are Li's photographs when he was a photographer working for a state newspaper, where Li participated in the Cultural Revolution. Despite taking part in struggle sessions, he was eventually denounced himself, although he did not receive the harshest of punishments. We learn of this from the narrated text that introduces different sections of the book. In addition, there are very meticulous captions to help the reader make sense of what is happening. Unfortunately, the book is very awkwardly designed. The written narrations go right up to the edge of the page, making them difficult to read. The cover is an awkward vinyl. Such rare and interesting material deserves better treatment.

I first learned of this book through an online Smithsonian Magazine article about Kang Wengjie's performance of the Loyalty Dance. When I bought the book, I thought it would have some really damning photos of some world-famous event, like Peng Dehuai's public criticism or something. That expectation was my fault -- this book covers "only" the events that Li Zhensheng witnessed in Heilongjiang Province. That said, Li's photos are compelling and shocking in their own right. The Cultural Revolution is a period that many in China's current leadership would prefer to simply forget, without any retrospective analysis of Mao's role in the mania of the time. "Madness" would be an appropriate description, a term deficient only in its mildness. In addition to the pictures, Li provides an autobiography, giving a personal depth to the experience that -- to me -- was just as affecting as the pictures he took. His stories of loss and pain underscore the humanity of what he saw, and prevent readers from distancing themselves from the subjects. One thing I would like to see is a clearer rendering of the hanja in the title -- as a student of Chinese, I'd have liked to learn more about the language from the pictures. Then again, I suppose that's not the book's true purpose anyway.

For anyone interested in learning more about the Cultural Revolution and Mao's China, this book contains rare photographic documentation of the times, done by a young photojournalist working for regional newspaper in a norther province. His personal recollections, in written passages, give the reader an authentic and unblinking look at the political turmoil and mass hysteria that characterized

much of the revolution.

Amazing work of documentary journalism. Sadly, China has been extremely successful in deleting many records from this time in its history. Thankfully Mr. Li protected his work and preserved it for future generations.

This is a great book for anyone who is interested in the CR as well as the history surrounding Harbin. I purchased it for an older relative who lived through these times as a young man and even though he cannot read English he was very happy to receive the book.

For those readers whose knowledge of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution is limited to film, here is a document that shows that most, if not all, of those scenes were not exaggerated. These photographs do more than document. There is something uncanny about them, as though the events depicted happened only yesterday, or as though they happened to YOU. The text that accompanies the photographs follows the story of the photographer and his work through the years. It is mesmerizing. The horrors of totalitarianism are well known, but this book communicates something original about the human condition that I believe is priceless and rare. If you can't afford this book, you should seek it out at a bookstore or library and read it.

great pics and fundamental documentation on what happened in 1966-76

Great book! Thanks Li Zhensheng!

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