

"SOCIALISM IS GREAT!"

A Worker's Memoir of the New China

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Composed in beautiful English, this remarkable memoir by a former Chinese factory worker delineates her efforts to buck the strictures of socialism and broaden her life's experience.

Western readers accustomed to self-determination will be shocked to read how little control the average Chinese person has over his or her life.

In 1980, Zhang was a promising student hoping to become a journalist when her mother announced that the 16-year-old would be replacing her as a worker at the Liming Machinery Factory. Having labored at the missile factory her entire life, supporting her three children mostly on her own while her husband worked in another city, Ma was taking advantage of dingzhi, a policy put in effect after the collapse of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 that aimed to alleviate soaring unemployment by allowing children to take over their retiring parents' jobs. Zhang didn't want to be a worker, but because her father had "political problems," her chances of access to a university education or any other means of bettering her lot were slim. Forced to quit school and become a gauge reader at the detested factory, she was apprenticed to several "masters" who taught her how to wile away the empty work hours, spy on others and trick the system. Zhang effectively conveys the emotional life of her younger self as she squelched her resentment and even made friends among the other workers, while never ceasing to read voraciously and to look for an opportunity for escape. Her

braininess allowed her to study mechanical engineering at the Jiangsu TV University (a "new type of college . . . designed to popularize learning"); her various love affairs enlightened her; learning English became her Marxist "tool of struggle." The democratic movement of 1989, treated somewhat hastily here, brought her both exhilaration and chastisement.

A notable historical document and a vivid, affecting portrait of a young woman's resolve.