



Eat A Bowl Of Tea

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A compelling story of life in the Chinese-American community of New York City. The pages of this novel come alive with the maneuvers of the Tong leaders, the colorful visitors to the Money Come mah-jongg clubhouse, and the complex gossip of closely knit Chinatown.

Only a Chinese American could have written a novel of such vigor and authenticity. In 1989 it was made into a feature film by the highly respected director Wayne Wang.

Eat A Bowl Of Tea Details

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Author : Louis Chu

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From Reader Review Eat A Bowl Of Tea for online ebook

Jazmyne says

It was incredibly odd. The way sex entered the novel was more like someone examining its importance and purpose rather than any type of allurement from it. I found Moi Oi to be really disgusting for such a 'beautiful woman'. I found Ben Loy incredibly amazing as a husband, for the most, despite how he used to sleep with prostitutes. I was happy for Ben Loy. I hated his wife. But, if Ben Loy's happy, I'm happy.

Diane says

An interesting book about Chinese-American men living in NYC. More on
<http://bookwinked.wordpress.com>

Cheri says

This book is hilarious and very enjoyable - and not just because of old Chinese men telling each other your mom all the time. Exact words, though, are "wow your mother". Wacky!

It's a quick read - I read it in one night - and well worth it.

I never thought I'd be on the edge of my seat, turning page after page to find out if a character ever achieves an erection again. That's writing skill.

Note: It is out of print, but used copies can be found.

Jennifer says

I really enjoyed this book. I guess it's your basic, first generation vs. second generation, moving to America, cultural mix story, but I think this is one of the best.

Oliver Hazan says

An excellent look into the lives of Chinese immigrants in the 1950s. Well written, diverting, and true-to-life.

Rachel says

Taking place in New York's Chinatown in the late 1940s, *Eat a Bowl of Tea* is the story of the marriage of Ben Loy and Mei Oi, arranged by their respective fathers, Wah Gay and Lee Gong, who are two of the many "bachelor husbands" of Chinatown, married men whose wives were left behind in China when they came to America to work. Initially, Ben Loy is reluctant to travel to China to marry, as he has been enjoying a dissolute social life patronizing prostitutes. Yet after meeting Mei Oi, he quickly falls in love and is eager to bring her back to New York and start a family. For her part, Mei Oi had always hoped to marry a gimshunhock (someone who has emigrated to the U.S.) primarily to avoid becoming a farmer's wife in her village of Sunwei, but after meeting Ben Loy, she quickly falls in love as well.

After a blissful first few weeks of marriage in Sunwei, the couple returns to New York, where Ben Loy is suddenly impotent. He assumes the cause is both psychological, the result of trying to sleep with his wife in the same bed where he employed prostitutes, and physical, owing to his many previously treated bouts of VD. Mei Oi alternates between being understanding and nagging, but mostly she feels rejected and unloved. Ben Loy sees both a medical doctor and an herbalist, neither of whom seem able to cure him.

Into this situation comes Ah Song, the seducer. Hearing rumors of Ben Loy's impotence, he contrives to be alone with Mei Oi in her apartment one day and they begin an affair. Mei Oi is initially unwilling (extremely so in that their first time doesn't seem particularly consensual on her part), but soon comes to depend on Ah Song's attention, despite not really liking him all that much.

In short order, Mei Oi becomes pregnant. Although it's assumed by all that Ben Loy is the father (even, oddly enough, by Ben Loy), it's also common knowledge in Chinatown that Mei Oi and Ah Song are having an affair. Ben Loy is strangely passive about the whole thing, but when his father decides to take action, all of their lives are changed.

The novel is satirical, but the comedy is dark. Although the target of the satire is the degree to which reputation and fear of what other people will say guide the actions of these characters, it's also what makes you want to clonk their heads together and tell them to stop ruining their lives. So I found the story more frustrating than anything else. Also, although this is a relatively short book (250 pages) it's broken up into 57 chapters, which gives it a disjointed feel. I think I might have liked it better if I had read it in one or two long stretches, rather than over several days, because the plot sets up early and the second half of the book is just aftermath. I've been hearing about this book for years, so maybe my expectations were too high; I thought it was good, but not great.

CARP Reading Project says

Not a great book, but one that improves the further you read. For much of the read, I had feelings of apprehension; sort of like, "I'm not sure that I'm comfortable with what's going on." Those feelings had more to do with how the story was told. The story itself is a snapshot of New York's Chinatown in the late 1940s. There were some touching moments towards the end, and it was nice to see the main relationship mature and develop, almost making the final problem to be solved mute. The fact that the lack of an erection is what needs to be solved is kinds of amusing, but in an unintentional way. The final page roughly reads that Ben manages to get and keep an erection, and then he and his wife have sex. PROBLEM SOLVED!!!

???? says

?????????Ben Loy?????????????????

Julia Pillard says

I read this particular book for class. It's not a book I would have sought out on my own, but it was an enjoyable read and provides interesting historical insight into Chinese immigrants to America during the twentieth century.

Meredith Links says

I had to read this book for my Asian Pacific American Literature class. I liked this book. A lot of the Chinese culture reference, I did not initially get, but once I was told in class, the irony was very prevalent. The story shows the dynamics between the older the generation and the younger generation and how they have either adapted their beliefs or maintained them. One of my favorite parts of the books was when the men would get together in the clubhouse and say their own version of a "your mom" joke by saying, "wow your mother."

Nancy says

The story of a marriage (and impotence and infidelity) in Chinatown. Very interesting look at that segment of society. Not sure when it was set, but post-WWII.

Kristin Lyon says

The book kind of rattled on for me, a lot of unnecessary characters and drama, but maybe I missed the point. Anyway, I liked the end and I liked their journey.

Kim says

Chinese-American....1940s NY Chinatown....newlyweds, adultery, Chinese mob.

Bree says

I have to say it:

For a book about sex, it's a bit of a snooze fest.

I know the sex isn't the point, and the book is extremely well-written. It's hard to read because it's hard to follow. Perhaps that is the point, but it certainly wasn't my cup of tea.

Cory Blystone says

While the writing is simple in Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, the humor surrounding marital infidelity and sexual inadequacy in Chinese-American culture is spectacular. I can't remember the last time I laughed so hard reading a book that I had to set it down to catch my breath, but this book delivers those moments with abandon. Of course, knowing a little about Chinese culture, as well as Google searches for phrases and references for the unfamiliar ones, helps the reader understand the multi-level complexity to this very simple story of a young man's past catching up with his present and the gossip that ensues in his community and family.

I highly recommend this book for its historical, cultural, and humorous portrayal of life during the Chinese Exclusion Act.
