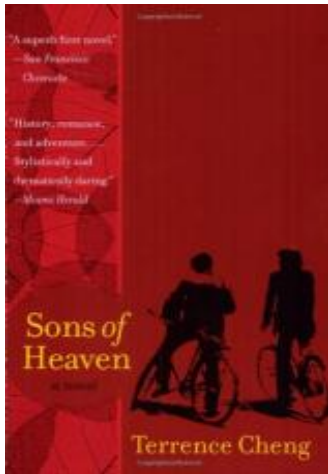


Sons of Heaven: A Novel

by Terrence Cheng



About the Book

Sons of Heaven is an epic novel set against the backdrop of one of modern history's most haunting events: the Tiananmen Square Massacre. In June of 1989, the world watched in horror as China's military was mobilized to suppress a student movement that stood for peaceful democracy. Hundreds were killed; others say into the thousands. No one knows for sure.

But the image that remains most powerful is that of a lone young man, looking confused yet terribly brave, as he held his ground before a rolling line of tanks. Who was he, and why did he do what he did? No one has ever been able to determine his identity or fate. Within the pages of **Sons of Heaven**, in a stunning blend of history and fiction, Terrence Cheng has vividly created for this young hero a life, and given him a voice.

Cheng constructs the young man's life as he goes away to America to complete his education. He falls in love with a beautiful young American girl who opens to him a free life filled with opportunity. When he returns to China he becomes embittered and disillusioned; only the potential for political change seems to revive him. Also portrayed is the story of the young man's older brother, an ardent member of the Red Army, who is ordered to capture his sibling. In the end, their political differences turn deadly. On one level this is a novel of history as played out in modern China, but first and foremost, it is about the universal ties of family and the difficult process of boys learning to become men.

Cheng also scrutinizes the life and history of Deng Xiaoping, China's leader who is suspected of giving the final order to turn the People's Army against its own people. What historical and political factors affected his decisions that fateful summer? Was Deng the monster that the world made him out to be?

An unsettling and powerfully lacerating story of family, faith, and courage, **Sons of Heaven** weaves the lives of peasants and soldiers, politicians and gods, into a timeless snapshot of one of history's most memorable and heartrending events. With this unforgettable, psychologically acute novel, Terrence Cheng confirms that he is a daring and important new

voice in fiction.

Discussion Guide

1. The image of the young man standing before the tanks figures prominently in most people's imaginations. Discuss where you were and what went through your mind when you first saw that footage.
2. Above all else, **Sons of Heaven** is a family saga, pivoting around two brothers who have very different views of China. Does their strife as brothers come to represent a larger national strife in your eyes?
3. The three voices in this novel -- Xiao-Di, Lu, and Deng Xiaoping -- fold into each other at the same time that they remain distinct. What do you think of this technique of blending and balancing viewpoints in the novel? Which voice did you find most compelling and why?
4. After reading **Sons of Heaven**, did you learn anything new about China's politics or history? Did any of your existing views (about Deng Xiaoping, the students and the Democracy Movement protests, or China in general) change?
5. Discuss how the fictional elements of the story maintain suspense throughout the novel, in spite of the fact that readers know the student protests ended in a massacre. What was the most compelling aspect of the fictional plot?
6. Xiao-Di's experiences in America undoubtedly had an affect on his participation in the Democracy Movement. Do you believe he would have partaken in these events if not for Wong's influence? What if he had never experienced life in America, or had a relationship with Elsie?
7. Do you think Xiao-Di was really in love with Elsie? Or do you think he was more infatuated with the idea of being with an American girl and that whole experience?
8. What do you think are some of the reasons behind Lu's violent tendencies? Do you think it is more due to his personal nature, his accident and experiences as a boy, or his training in the army?
9. Deng Xiaoping's entire life was lived during modern China's tumultuous development. Taking into consideration both his personal and political experiences, did you sympathize with his decisions and feelings regarding Tiananmen Square?
10. Do you believe Deng felt remorse for what happened at Tiananmen Square? Were there any other alternatives?
11. Compare the strife and turmoil experienced by Deng's family, to Lu and Xiao-Di's family. Can any parallels be drawn? Which family has suffered more and with which family do you empathize more?
12. The ending of the novel is very vague. What do you think happens to Lu and Xiao-Di?

Author Bio

Terrence Cheng's grandmother was a senator in the Chinese Nationalist Party, and his grandfather was a prisoner-of-war

captured by the Japanese during World War II. Both survived and moved their family to Taiwan after the Communists came to power in 1949. Cheng was born in Taipei, Taiwan in 1972, and immigrated to the United States with his parents in 1973. He earned his MFA in Fiction at the University of Miami, FL, where he was a James Michener Fellow. Director of Corporate Website Marketing for Random House Inc., he also teaches fiction at Lehman College-CUNY. He has lived most of his life in New York.

Critical Praise

"A ripping good story about a headline event of great power and resonance."

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