



Under the Hawthorn Tree

Ai Mi (Author) , Anna Holmwood (Translator)

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Yichang municipality, Hubei province, China, early 1970s. High-school student Jingqiu is one of many educated urban youth sent to the countryside to be "re-educated" under a dictate from Chairman Mao. Jing's father is a political prisoner somewhere in China, and her mother, a former teacher branded as a "capitalist," is now reduced to menial work to support Jing and her two younger siblings.

When Jing arrives with a group at Xiping village in the Yangtze River's Three Gorges region, she meets geology student Jianxin, nicknamed "Old Three," who is the son of a high-ranking military officer, but whose mother committed suicide after being branded a "rightist." Despite their disparate social backgrounds and a political atmosphere that forbids the relationship, Jingqiu and Jianxin fall desperately in love. But their budding romance is cut short by fate...

A sensitive and searing love story, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* is sure to become an instant classic.

Under the Hawthorn Tree Details

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From Reader Review Under the Hawthorn Tree for online ebook

Carbo says

Saw the movie and watched a tv adaptation of it. Both of which I cried at the ending which is rare for me. It takes place in the 70s and due to Cultural Revolution, China has made marked progress in the last 40 years. In the 70s, the conservative views of life was very much behind the rest of the world. What I despise is the belief back then of how a woman who became pregnant out of wedlock basically threw her future away, especially if the father of the child does not take responsibility. The woman was forced to marry someone (not of her choosing), an abusive man because she is now impure and has little choice in choosing a suitable husband. What angers me is the belief that women must marry and have a husband to take care of her or she won't survive on her own. The sad reality is in this present day, there is still a similar belief that a woman if not married cannot be happy in her own right.

Demi says

I have been interested in everything that has got to do with China for the last few years, so this book was a great discovery for me. When I saw the cover and read the text on the back, I knew instantly I was going to like this book and I was right about that. Under the Hawthorn Tree is a beautiful book about love in the 1970s in China, between a poor girl and a wealthy boy. The girl's character is very modest and you like her instantly, the boy is very good to her and together they are adorable. You can only hope the best for them. I can absolutely recommend this book a lot, especially if you love romantic stories.

Dianne Kaucharik says

This novel was frustrating. Although it offered some cultural and historical insight regarding China's Cultural Revolution, the story was so linear from cover to cover with each chapter being "ground hog day". The 2 main characters were portrayed as strong, capable and intelligent yet their relationship was immature and naive...resulting in a sappy romance. The ending was entirely predictable and the writing flip-flopped between first and third person. Not sure if the latter was a translation flaw but this should have been caught in editing.

ApplePie0917 says

As a girl in the modern society, it was very hard to relate to everything, so I took some time to look up details of the Cultural Revolution in China. And during my research, I slowly began to understand the plot and the characters.

Jingqiu was mature and naive at the same time. She knew how to keep her mouth and help her family to survive, but nobody told her what love was. Of course, she figured it out in time...though not as what we imagine nowadays, but still, she did it.

I read the Chinese original AND the English translation (again, after the research). The problem is, that some phrases are just translated different. I am NOT implying that the translation is bad, but you know that translations and originals are just not the same. Take the German word *Habseligkeiten* as an example: it means someones belongings, if literally translated. However, it means actually belongings that have

happy/sad meanings to someone, but are useless to everyone else. So it has other things attached to it.

Well, back to the book...

I think Jingqiu acted shy and unexperienced because she was afraid. As a girl who did not have a decent background (at that time), she was always rejected, and criticised. And *please* understand, at that time, there was no such thing like sexual education. Jingqiu`s mother said nothing about it because firstly, she was not expecting her daughter having anything to do with men before she arranged a marriage for her, and secondly, I doubt she would have told her anything since it was...not "proper" knowledge.

Some passages were - yes, I know - quite primary school-ish. That is because the book is based on a true story, recorded in a diary. The author is retelling the story after editing certain details out and adding information from conversations with her friend. Thus, Ai Mi tried to keep dialogues and such close to the true story.

It is a bit sad that the book itself did not contained a more detailed summary from the Cultural Revolution and its aftereffects (more sad for one star ratings). And then, I cannot expect everyone to do some research for every book, right?

No matter what others say, I really like this book for picturing something that rarely exists now. The ending broke my heart, but it is a good written and realistic end.

Yet more painful is the fact that there would be no happy ending I could think of. A Romeo & Juliet end would be double sad, having them married for a short time would not be a proper solution, as Old Three was running out of time.

Carly says

Under the Hawthorn Tree, by Ai Mi, started off with promise. A young Chinese girl named Jingqui, naive but smart, is sent off into the villages to document life in order to write more accurate history textbooks. Set in China in the 1970's the book is heavily rooted in the cultural revolution. Interest is peaked. A tale is told of a hawthorn tree with flowers dyed red from the blood of soldiers. The backdrop is set with an old folktale of a maiden torn between two loves. I wasn't 100% which way the story would go, but I expected some sort of excitement, really.

The downfall of Under the Hawthorn tree, though, was that it really wasn't all that gripping. Little happens in terms of drama and plot, and though there are moments of great family loyalty, and the love interest, Old Third, is introduced, things move far too slowly for too long to really keep the reader interested.

Furthermore, the naive Jingqiu is neither sweetly innocent, nor undergoes a knowledge revelation, as would warrant character development. Instead, she continually misinterprets signs and things people tell her. This becomes frustrating as she neither seeks to clarify, nor do other characters pick up on her extreme ignorance. While naivety is not a bad quality for a main character, it became increasingly frustrating in this instance as very simple misunderstandings lead to unrealistic conclusions. The novel itself plays on this by seeming to present information in a cryptic way, making the reader assume one thing when the opposite may be true. This tact could class as mystery, but rather comes across as a frustrating repetition of drawn out scenes and little-explained feelings. Is she being coy, or simply unaware of other's affections? Does Old Third lie to her?

What promised itself to be a Romeo and Juliet style romance, fraught with uncertainties and trials, became instead a tale about the mundane life of a young Chinese girl. Though appearances were made by Old Third, and there were glimpses of a budding romance, it came too little too late and Jingqiu's walls came down too unexpectedly for me to invest myself in the romance as much as I would have liked. Jingqiu simply wasn't someone I could connect with. Though her connection with Old Third eventually becomes a sweet one, and there are certainly moments of grand romance, the plodding nature of the novel throughout took away from these moments, and dulled the shine that could have been a sweet young love. The redeeming character was Old Third himself, resolute and kind, but as the story did not focus on him and rather Jingqui, there were

certainly narrative lulls.

While the setting, China during the cultural revolution, was both interesting and less common, it provided both interest and problem to those less familiar with the time. Having studied modern Chinese History, there were elements that struck me, but the oddities present in this time did provide some-what of a struggle in terms of ease of reading. There were moments that wording and phrases seemed out of place for the anti-liberal society, though this may be due to translation.

Overall, the story provides a good account of life in China in the 1970's, and the struggles a young girl has to face in the upside down social structure facing the cultural revolution, but in terms of great romantic stories, I found the novel to have only scratched the surface of what could have been a very moving, deep story of love.

Chels Patterson says

Honestly this novel is just okay. It's not at all descriptive. Very dry. And for a western society it's very very distant. I studied Communist China as part of my undergrad degree in history, and found this story too lacking in reference for those outside of China. The novel the Family, does a better job teaching about this time period.

I found the girl very hard to relate to. Very dim witted, very naive to her own detriment, very very bi-polar in the use of her emotions, but then again she doesn't even know her emotions. I could not relate how she helps writes ppl's love letters, see affairs, romances even pregnancy but is so afraid of everything romantic. I don't get it, girls talk they would learn from each other basic things like in order to get pregnant one does not just share a room.

She was just so worried all the time, and never seem to worry about the right things. It was almost depressing and made me dislike her.

Old third, was a well developed character. But as soon as he cut his hand I knew the ending. That was annoying.

All I remember is wanted to have a visual look of the hawthorn tree, and Old Third, instead I got a visual of factories and dilapidated houses, not the things that matter. I also wanted her to stop being so stupid!!! No one else seemed as stupid as she. Some may say ignorant or naive, but she was stupid, she jumped to conclusions and had no understanding of life, always took the negative, always went against her body and what ppl were telling her to be true.

I actually had to stop reading this novel 3/4 of the way through because she got to my nerves.

I like the ending, very beautiful. But I would have preferred certain things to be left out, because then one just thinks the author is actually telling a true story and then it pisses you off. Because how could a memoir have such a poorly developed self character.

Elle says

I didn't actually finish this book - something that happens very rarely to me. However, I picked it up because I had thought it would be an interesting look at the difficulty of traversing "class" in what was supposed to be a society without class during China's Cultural Revolution. What I ended up reading amounted to a translation of a Christian Harlequin romance. The style was that of the old Jeanette Oke Christian romances with a saccharine sweet, gullible female character.

It was first self-published in Chinese and freely offered on the author's website where it was read by millions. It proves again that just because a book is downloaded by many doesn't mean it's a good book.

Celena says

Under the Hawthorn Tree wasn't a book I had heard of until my mother and I were browsing through the book store and she decided to buy this.

It is a historical fiction romance set during the Cultural Revolution in China. Before reading this book, I knew literally nothing about The Cultural Revolution and to be honest, I didn't learn much about it from the book either. So after I had finished reading the novel, I quickly Googled the Cultural Revolution and have gleaned that basically the country was encouraged to have a Communist way of life because Mao Zedong or Chairman Mao as he is referred to in the novel was afraid of someone else coming in to power.

However, because the novel is from the main character's point of view and since the main character was a teenage girl living in the time period, we didn't really know why their society had very strict rules about love and education and art.

Now that the background information is out of the way, let's discuss plot. The novel is about a young girl, Jingqui, (and other young students) being asked to travel from their homes in the city to the countryside so that they could rewrite the textbook's for their school. Jingqui stays with a family there for a few months and while there falls in love with a friend of the family's; Old Third.

Then Jingqui spends the rest of the book fighting her feelings and hiding her emotions from everyone. Oh and tries to make money because her family is poor.

That's about it.

Jingqui as a character was fairly weak. It starts the book off by leading us to believe she's a strong character. On the second page it says the very sentence: "Jingqui was strong." However she disproves this fairly fast.

You'd expect the romance to be this dramatic, star-crossed sort of deal here. Yeah it isn't. Jingqui is a rule follower through and through. And while this is realistic, it isn't very interesting to read about in novels. "The character is given a lot of obstacles, unfair rules and unjust living conditions...so she sits back and takes it." Yep that's what I like reading in novels.

I also had a few issues with the writing style. I found it drawn out. It was more inner monologue than actual plot advancement; which can work really well in the story if the main character is interesting. Jingqui isn't interesting.

There were also a few issues with the point of view; at times it was in first person and at times it was in third person. I could not tell if this was intentional or not, but all the same I didn't really enjoy that.

One of the last issues I have and this one was a biggie. At the beginning of the book there was a note from the translator. I like reading author's notes because I think it gives you a better understanding of what they went through writing their novel and it gives you a more in depth look at the novel. However, this note was basically telling the reader "this book is popular." Well that's freaking fantastic that MILLIONS of people bought this book. The only reason I can see for you to put that in the translator's notes is if you're trying to sell the book to readers. If I'm reading the translator's notes, chances are I'm going to read the book.

I liked the history in this novel and I appreciate the hardships people went through DURING this time period in history; but that's basically all I liked about the novel itself.

So, I apologize to the millions of people who bought, read and enjoyed this novel. But it really wasn't doing it for me.

Fazi says

The cultural revolution in China, the struggle of a girl and her disgraced mother, and of course the tale of a poignant love story. Under the Hawthorn tree was a very enjoyable read, i was able gain some insight into the cultural and Chinese history. The novel also made me realise the situations to do with class and power. I loved the romance, Ai Mi has a way of writing that causes one to be affected by such words of sincere gratitude, and the ardor that I have for these characters is a thing of utter beauty.

The ending however, did leave me angry and in tears. Old third <3
It did show me how love is such a huge aspect of ones life, and how it can break the boundaries of class.

I absolutely loved the sentences that 'Old third' says in this book.

'I can wait. As long as you want me to wait, as long as it doesn't make you unhappy, I can wait a lifetime.'

'You seem to think you're so insignificant, but the truth is you're so intelligent, beautiful, kind and decent, adorable. I can't be the first person to have fallen in love with you, and i won't be the last. But i do believe i will love you the most'

Yazmin Duran says

Cuando llego este libro a mis manos no tenía una expectativa demasiado alta con respecto a éste, digamos que lo estaba leyendo a ciegas, no leí nada más que la pura sinopsis, así que no tenía una idea muy clara sobre de qué trataba (cuando empiezo a leer un libro primero leo algunas opiniones para ver lo que me espera).

La verdad es que no tengo muy claro que ocurrió realmente durante la Revolución Cultural en China, así que cuando empezaba a leer el libro estuve un poco (muy) perdida con respecto a la Historia. Todo se desarrolla en esa época, y por lo que entendí, la historia del libro se basa en hechos reales. Jing Qiu es una muchacha, hija de padres conservadores, que fue mandada a una comunidad para registrar historias y hechos de los habitantes, y es ahí cuando conoce a Mayor Tercero, un muchacho que piensa muy diferente a la comunidad.

Steven Langdon says

This is a remarkable book for a number of reasons.

First, it was published on a website to begin -- and has apparently reached millions of readers in China. So to read it is to read a very popular saga in China and obtain some insight into the perspectives that contemporary Chinese readers themselves find fascinating. The focus on an ill-fated but very romantic love affair in the context of the Cultural Revolution surely tells us something about China romanticizing its past, and seeing a time when someone very poor could nevertheless find love with someone very secure from a powerful family. Is that a dream of the past that is now seen as gone forever?

Second, the perspective presented on the Cultural Revolution is quite striking -- it is seen less as a senseless and brutal process and more as a genuine effort to connect rural and urban China, even if there were undeserved victims. Those in rural areas, moreover, are seen as at least having access to food -- while the urban poor are much worse off, with unsafe temporary work and food gaps.

Third, there is an almost bizarre naivety to Jingqui, the central women character, when it comes to sexual and emotional knowledge. How can this be believable in a reasonably educated community? The love affair between her and Old Third is quite powerful in driving forward what is a novel with many insights into the social and economic texture of Chinese society -- but Jingqui's staggering innocence of sexual realities provides a jarring note.

Nevertheless, this is a book to read, as much for what it tells us of contemporary China, as for what it says about the past.

Lorina Stephens says

Perhaps one of the most disappointing factors in a reading experience is when you finish a novel that had all the potential for greatness and fell so far short. This is exactly my experience with *Under the Hawthorne Tree* by Ai Mi.

It is difficult to point to just one reason the novel failed. It could have been the English translation that was so very uninspiring, spare, flat. There was not one inspiring passage, one beautifully turned phrase. For me it was like reading a young child's first fiction.

The novel's failure could have been in the utter naivete of the author's story, an unrequited love like unto *Romeo and Juliet*, but so far short of the depth of story required to have significant emotional impact.

It could have been the characterization of the heroine, Jingqui, who swung from sympathetic waif to spoiled and self-centred idiot.

Combined, these flaws create a saccharine romance that should please lovers of *Twilight*, Harlequin Romances, and other novels of similar ilk.

Throughout the narrative, the author attempts to create a romantic tension between the two main protagonists, Jingqui, who is a young female student, and Sun Jianxin (known as Old Third), who is a soldier in the People's Republic of China.

Set in post-revolutionary China, Jingqui meets Old Third while working on a farm as part of her school

curriculum. Jingqui then proceeds to bounce between the extremes of loving and loathing, admiring and mistrusting the handsome soldier, Old Third, who does everything in his power to ensure her happiness and safety, even unto his own destruction.

Her sexual naivete is beyond ridiculous, especially for someone who is allegedly as well-read and intelligent as she, little say someone who works among farm folk. The ridiculousness of her lack of sexual understanding extends to belief that she might become pregnant through a kiss, or sitting on a bed with a man, or even just allowing a touch. For a girl who has watched ducks mating, and likely seen other farm animals mating, this protracted lack of understanding wears thin by the denouement. And given she has knowledgeable female friends who very much indulge in gossip, and have a keen awareness of sexuality, it is only logical that some of the basic, physical facts of sex might have filtered through. Overall, Jingqui's lack of understanding of the sexual act entirely lacks credibility.

And if the author hoped to create a romantic tragedy, she only succeeded in that the character of Jingqui proves to be so selfish and uncaring of Old Third's genuine well-being, that the death-bed scene ends up a melodramatic screech of Jingqui's presence.

Now a major motion picture, I can only hope the screenwriter, Lichuan Yin, used the novel only as inspiration, and created something far more credible and memorable.

Sandra says

I find this book extremely special, heartfelt, realistic under the circumstances, and romantic. It had a little bit of everything - some history, geography, mystery, naivety, realism, sadness and romance. It is not the predictable, sensual book that is so often put out there as a "great romance" where one knows the ending after reading the first page.

I understand that some people might think that Jingqiu was too naive, but one must consider the conditions under which she grew up:

1. She had a very protective mother who said so many things to her to scare her with statements like "you don't want to ruin your reputation" and "look at all the girls who have been ruined", "don't let boys mess with you", etc. without ever explaining to her how that could happen or what she meant.
2. She was living under an educational and government ruling system where children did not question their teachers or superiors, and where obedience was mandatory.
3. She was a hard worker who 'kept her nose to the grindstone' and so didn't discuss things with schoolmates or co-workers and her goal was to excel, not only in academics but in sports.
4. She didn't have the opportunity to see her father and mother in a normal husband/wife daily relationship, and it seems her only brother was 'sent to the country' when she was at a young age so she didn't have the guidance of having him around.
5. Her 'true love' also didn't explain things to her and seldom said what he actually meant. She was always second-guessing him and trying to figure out what he actually thought, based on things she had heard from her mother and others.
6. Adults in her circle of school and work also made comments to heard which were unclear and could be easily misunderstood.

If there was anything I would change about the book, it would have been a better explanation of what the Cultural Revolution was all about, but from Ai Mi's point of view, she wrote it for those who were already

living it.

This book had everything that I love in a book and the translation was also very well done with very few errors. Kudos to Ai Mi and to the translator, Anna Holmwood.
