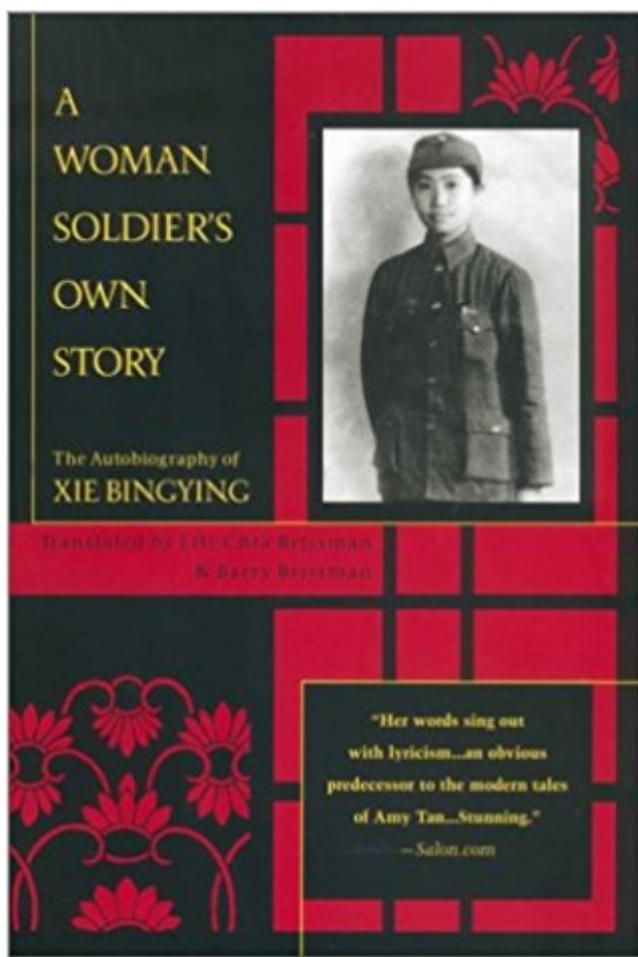


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# A Woman Soldier's Own Story: The Autobiography Of Xie Bingying



## Synopsis

This first English translation of Xie Bingying's entire autobiography (1906-2000) is the story of a rebellious child who became a soldier, a lover, a teacher-and a writer whose bravery and determination have inspired generations of readers. It provides a fascinating portrayal of a woman fighting to free herself from the constraints of ancient Chinese tradition amid the dramatic changes that shook China during the 1920s, '30s, and '40s.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In lyrical, flowing prose, this absorbing autobiography interweaves politics, family relations and romance as it chronicles an extraordinary woman's struggle to free herself from traditional Chinese society. Born into a conventional family, Xie Bingying (1906-2000) was expected to be an obedient daughter and, later, daughter-in-law. A girl's education was largely restricted to learning how to spin cotton and embroider. Xie's reading was limited to such books as *Teach Your Daughter Traditional Rules*. Her fate was to be determined by her parents and a matchmaker. From an early age, Xie rebelled against these circumstances. Despite her mother's scolding, she dared to venture outside to play with the boys, and she fought fiercely against having her feet bound. In this chronicle of the first 32 years of her life, gracefully translated by her daughter and son-in-law, Xie recounts her efforts to secure an education, escape from an arranged marriage, raise an infant while a single mother and, chiefly, forge political change in China as a soldier in the National Revolutionary Army fighting the warlords who dominated much of China in the 1920s, and against the Japanese in the 1930s. Drawn to the bohemian life, Xie scoffed at financial and physical security, and gloried in her

image as a "warrior who opposes all feudal rule," even when her choices summoned hunger, loneliness and imprisonment. The happiest day of her early life, she recalls, was the day in 1928 when her War Diary was published. She went on to become a noted author of novels, other autobiographical works and essays. This story of a Chinese feminist makes social and political issues of 20th-century China dramatically accessible to the lay reader. 12 photos, 3 maps.

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The efforts of women to emancipate themselves from restrictive social and family bonds is one of the central themes of modern Chinese history. A high degree of grit, intelligence, perseverance, and luck was required to succeed, particularly in the early decades of the 20th century. Xie Bingying had all those qualities in spades. Like a rocket escaping the pull of gravity, she hurtled from the remote village in central China where she was born in 1906 to a bohemian existence in urban China and eventually to a successful career as a teacher, essayist, novelist, and social activist. In 1927, she became a soldier in the Nationalist Army during its famous Northern Expedition. Her vivid and emotionally charged memoir, covering the first third of her life, was first published in China 60 years ago and is translated here by her daughter and son-in-law. An exemplar of the "new woman," Xie was an idealist and a romantic given to florid writing that matches the impressive melodrama of her life. For larger public and academic libraries. [Although sympathizing with the ideals of the Communist party, Xie Bingying was not a Communist and moved to Taiwan in 1948, becoming an ardent opponent of Mao. Ed.] Steven I. Levine, Univ. of Montana, Missoul.- Steven I. Levine, Univ. of Montana, Missoula Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is one of the most inspiring books I've read. Not only is Xie Bingying inspiring, but also the many selfless people whom she met and worked with. I enjoyed her descriptions of people and places. I compliment her family on their translation of her account; the book makes me feel as though I know Xie. It has also given me a much better feel for the Chinese people. Her account describes the magnitude and pain of the people's struggle against oppressive traditions, and mixed into this simultaneously are the fights against invaders and the infighting of the Chinese revolutionary and political movements. The period seems almost to have been all the world's history wrapped up into a single generation in China.

Excellent biography!

Good textbook

Had to read it for Asian Civilization class. Not a bad read.

Few people in the West realize how extraordinary this book is and how much it has influenced generations of young Chinese. I used to own the original (Chinese) version of this book while growing up as a boy in South America in the 60s. I used to read it for guidance and strength in the darkest days of my youth. I must have read and reread it a dozen times before I had to reluctantly part ways with it. This is a true modern classic that is often ignored by contemporary historians of Chinese literature, who prefer the shallowness of the likes of Sanmo. The War Diaries, which were praised by none other than Lin Yutang, are also worth reading; the translators should make them the subject of their next project. Fine as the edition is, I wish the cover had been different. I have never seen a likeness of Xie xiansheng before and almost overlook the book because I was misled by the photograph of the woman in uniform to think it was a book about the Cultural Revolution. But I am glad the editors have included the photographs contained in the insert. I have always matched the feistiness of the woman soldier with a rather robust physique: I am surprised how fragile and delicate Xie xiansheng actually was. This book is correctly listed as an autobiography but it reads like a fine novel, with memorable scenes and episodes. Without opening this translation and reading a single line, I can name a half dozen right off the top of my head: the foot-binding, the escapes, the dying brother, the impoverished former army girlfriend, the love triangle, etc. This book is to the Chinese literature what the Ann Frank diaries are to the European; it definitely should not be missed.

It is a great book! this book portrayed how women were mistreated in the early 20th century in China. In that old days, girls were not allowed to be educated. They only learned how to spin cotton and embroider,, how to be an obedient daughter, and later a dutiful daughter-in-law. The reading materials for them were highly restricted to certain books such as Teach Your Daughter Traditional Rules. The worst thing was that girls had bound feet! However, there were still a few "lucky one" be able to escape from these old customs. Of course, it wasn't easy. This autobiography described an extraordinary woman, Xie Bingying who struggled to free herself from the traditional Chinese society--received education, freed from an arranged marriage, became a soldier in the National

Revolutionary Army, etc. Her experience was extraordinary!! I like this book because it is not only a truth story, it also pertains very rich information about the old Chinese customs.

Xie Bingying was many things. Unfortunately, her autobiography does not convey this well, reading like a nationalist propaganda piece. She also did not write much about the political context of the times in which she lived, although I suspect that was deliberate. Her story is still fascinating, however, because of how she navigated the shifting social intersections of China in the turmoil of the early twentieth century. To understand what women went through during this period, this is a valuable resource. I wouldn't recommend it for casual reading though.

I have just read this book for a Chinese Women's history class, and I have found that it is nothing more than a hagiography that oversimplifies many complicated facets of Chinese culture. These days, it seems to be the vogue in literature to publish books by Asian women portraying them as hobbling, footbound victims of patriarchy and oppression. While it is true that Asian culture is definitely patriarchal and something that needs to be reformed, this book is another hackneyed account of a young woman trying to escape "feudal" social structures. I have no love for this book or any book like it because its message has been written and rewritten in various books by authors such as Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston. The translators say in the introduction that Xie is the symbol of transition from "old" to "new" China. By not clearly defining what these interpretations are, they leave it to their audience to define what "old" and "new" are based on individual interpretation. Moreover, Xie Bingying's black-and-white, old-and-new, feudal-and progressive viewpoint oversimplifies many complexities that face women in confronting modern gender ideals. If you have read Amy Tan or any other hackneyed works, I recommend skipping this book because it is another example of the oversimplification of cultural identity today.

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