



Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress

How Ya' Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm?



**THE HIGHLAND BOOKIES WILL REVIEW
BALZAC AND THE LITTLE CHINESE
SEAMSTRESS**

BY DAI SIJIE





**MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2004
10:30 A.M.**

**AT EL DORADO
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**THE HOME OF JUDY BUSH
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Highland Bookies Report Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress .

February 23, 2004
by Dai Sijie

Name	Grade	Comments
Judy Bush 	A	This was a good read. It was so interesting about re-education during the Cultural Revolution in China. The characters were well developed & so sympathetic. Although I didn't like the ending originally, it has grown on me & I can see the symbolism in it.
Nora Ruppert 	A	I liked the spirit in this novel - the way these people can overcome the brutality of their everyday life in "re-education" and still aspire to a life of the imagination & intellect.
Sheryl Davidson 	A	This was such a delightful novel. I am hoping to have the opportunity to see the film. I am definitely going to read BALZAC!! grateful for all the beautiful literature such as this, we can enjoy!
Alana Davis 	B	What an eye opener! It was interesting to learn about China during this time period. I need to find out about this "Balzac" guy

Hosted by Judy Bush

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Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse Chinoise (China/France)

By Kirk Honeycutt

A poignant lyricism runs through "Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress" that transforms this story about love and culture into a cinematic poem. Returning to his native China, Dai Sijie, who has lived in France for more than 15 years, takes a semi autobiographical look at his years spent in a Maoist re-education camp as the son of "bourgeois reactionary" parents. One senses his tenderness for this material, a nostalgia for his youth and a time when life was unfolding in mysterious, unlikely ways.

Because the film is based on Dai Sijie's best-selling novel, which has been translated into 25 languages - interestingly none are Chinese - this film has a head start in international distribution, which its Cannes exposure can only help.

The only book two best friends, Ma (Liu Ye) and Luo (Chen Kun), bring to a rugged mountain re-education camp is a cookbook that is confiscated and burned by the illiterate village chief. But he does let Ma keep his violin, which he is allowed to play when he convinces the chief a Mozart lieder is actually a paean to Mao.

The manual labor takes its physical toll on them, but music and storytelling are their means of escape. That is, until the two teenagers fall in love with the seamstress granddaughter (Zhou Xun) of a local tailor.

Seizing on their intellect and education, the village chief sends the two to a nearby village to watch propaganda films from several communist nations, whose stories they must then retell to the villagers.

When they discover a fellow student has a stash of forbidden European literature, the boys get the seamstress and her girlfriends to distract him while they steal the books. These they read to the ignorant girl, who is fascinated by the stories, especially those of Balzac.

She becomes infatuated with Luo, to Ma's distress, but eventually will leave them both to venture into the world outside her village because of the profound impact on her of the ideas and experiences in these books.

This is a simple story that overflows with the director's feeling for a time when censored literature meant so much to people, even peasants, and when many were transformed by intellectual stimulation.

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The film is virtually apolitical, with the Cultural Revolution treated as a mere backdrop, sometimes even a comical one. The movie also, for Western viewers, opens up a side of China seldom if ever seen on film - Chinese looking beyond their own borders for inspiration and understanding.

Thanks to Jean Marie Dreujou's exquisite cinematography and a soundtrack ranging from Mozart and Beethoven to Chinese classical music, "Balzac" makes an elegant opening-night film for Un Certain Regard.

BALZAC AND THE LITTLE CHINESE SEAMSTRESS

Productions Internationales "Le Film"

Credits:

Director: Dai Sijie

Screenwriters: Dai Sijie, Nadine Perront

Based on the novel by: Dai Sijie

Producer: Lise Fayolle

Director of photography: Jean Marie Dreujou

Production designer: Cao Jumping

Music: Wang Pujian

Costume designer: Tong Huamiao

Editors: Julia Gregory, Luc Barnier

Cast:

Little Chinese Seamstress

Zhou Xun

Luo: Chen Kun

Ma: Liu Ye

Head of village: Wang Shuangbao

Old Tailor: Chung Zhijun

Four Eyes: Wang Hongwei.

Running time -- 111 minutes

No MPAA rating



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