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From enforcer to rebel: Going against China's forced abortions

**A MOTHER'S ORDEAL:
ONE WOMAN'S FIGHT AGAINST
CHINA'S ONE-CHILD POLICY**

By Steven W. Mosher

Harcourt Brace, \$21.95

335 pages

REVIEWED BY MAGGIE GALLAGHER

In "A Mother's Ordeal," Steven Mosher has created a triumph: a gripping biography of a Chinese woman that has the universal appeal of a novel and the philosophic depths of inquiry into the roots of evil. Think of it as a kind of cross between Ayn Rand's "We the Living" and C.S. Lewis' "The Screwtape Letters."

In penning the life of Chi An, a former nurse and sometime abortionist turned political refugee, Mr. Mosher has created both a moving chronicle of the tyrannies, large and small, that communism has inflicted on the Chinese people and a story of one woman's descent from a person into a bureaucrat, and back.

For Chi An was more than a passive spectator of the atrocities committed by the communists in the name of population control. Trained as a nurse, she became one of the more effective soldiers in the government's unholy war against babies. Later, in the United States and pregnant with an unauthorized child, Chi An and her husband were granted (by Ed Meese in one of his last acts as attorney general) politi-

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cal asylum when Chinese authorities tried to force her to have an abortion.

By turns victim, torturer and helpless bystander, Chi An gives us a glimpse of the full range of horrors possible under communism and in the human heart.

If God is in the details, so, as Mr. Mosher shows, is the devil. In the bizarre landscape of communism, anything is possible: Families survive famine on poplar-leaf pancakes, schoolchildren toss hand grenades and sing "Father is dear, Mother is dear, but nothing is as dear as Chairman Mao," university students interrupt classes to perform the Chairman Mao loyalty dance (raise your arms as if you were washing imaginary windows, shuffle in a circle and intone: "Chairman Mao, oooh, Chairman Mao").

Propaganda, it turns out, works: Mao denounces flowers and grass as



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"bourgeois affectations," and students rush to trample every trace of green. Mao praises steel, and principals decide to turn grade schools into steel factories where all the children shout, "Everybody make steel!"

Chi An had her first doubts about Maoism when she was hospitalized for a stomach ailment. A peasant visiting his sick wife failed slogan-shouting at morning devotion to Mao. "Teach him a lesson," a Dr. Lu ordered, and a pack of hospital workers, doctors, nurses and patients fell viciously upon the man.

"You know I am dying of cancer. Please don't beat my children's father to death," his wife could be heard pleading above the fray.

In revenge, Dr. Lu ordered the nurses to keep away and allowed no pain medication to be given to the "consort of a suspected counterrevolutionary."

"Before," Chi An notes, "when people had been persecuted, I could never be sure that they were not guilty of the charges against them. But I was absolutely certain that Ah Lung was innocent — unless being a slow-witted, unlettered peasant was now a crime."

Still, neither her growing doubts nor even later her own coerced abortion stopped her from helping enforce China's one-child policy on pregnant women.

In their ruthless campaign to keep babies from being born, the authorities invested a peculiar amount of effort in obtaining what Rand would call "the sanction of the victim." Most women eventually capitulated under pressure, but a few had to be dragged to the abortionist's table, begging and pleading for their babies' lives.

"At least where these pleaders were concerned, my sympathy soon gave way to irritation," Chi An notes. "Why couldn't they understand that we clinic workers were not personally responsible for our actions? ... I was only a minor functionary."

"Besides," she says, revealing how very ugly the politics of envy can be when the scarce commodity in question is not tax dollars but birth quotas, "I, too, had been compelled to

BEST SELLERS

■ Publisher's Weekly hardcover best sellers are compiled from data from large-city bookstores, bookstore chains and local best-seller lists across the United States. (The first number in parentheses is the book's previous week's ranking; the second is the number of weeks the book has been on the best-seller list.)

FICTION

1. **THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY.** Robert James Waller. Warner, \$16.95 (2, 55)
2. **WITHOUT REMORSE.** Tom Clancy. Putnam, \$24.95 (1, 3)
3. **LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE.** Laura Esquivel. Doubleday, \$17.50 (4, 22)
4. **VANISHED.** Danielle Steele. Delacorte, \$23.95 (6, 5)
5. **STREETS OF LAREDO.** Larry McMurtry. Simon & Schuster, \$25 (3, 6)
6. **THE CLIENT.** John Grisham. Doubleday, \$23.50 (7, 26)
7. **THE NIGHT MANAGER.** John le Carré. Knopf, \$24 (5, 9)
8. **STRIP TEASE.** Carl Hiaasen. Knopf, \$21 (10, 2)
9. **A CASE OF NEED.** Michael Crichton. Dutton, \$18.95 (9, 8)
10. **PIGS IN HEAVEN.** Barbara Kingsolver. HarperCollins, \$22 (8, 13)
11. **THE SHINING ONES.** David Eddings. Del Rey, \$23 (13, 4)
12. **PLEADING GUILTY.** Scott Turow. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$24 (-, 14)
13. **VIRTUAL LIGHT.** William Gibson. Bantam, \$21.95 (15, 2)
14. **HONOR AMONG THIEVES.** Jeffrey Archer. HarperCollins, \$23 (11, 9)
15. **CRUEL AND UNUSUAL.** Patricia D. Cornwell. Scribners, \$21 (12, 12)

NONFICTION

1. **AGELESS BODY, TIMELESS MIND.** Deepak Chopra, M.D. Harmony, \$22 (1, 7)
2. **MAYBE (MAYBE NOT).** Robert Fulghum. Villard, \$19 (3, 3)
3. **EMBRACED BY THE LIGHT.** Betty J. Eadie. Gold Leaf Press, \$14.95 (4, 16)
4. **EAT MORE, WEIGH LESS.** Dean Ornish. HarperCollins, \$22.50 (2, 11)
5. **WOMEN WHO RUN WITH THE WOLVES.** Clarissa Pinkola Estes. Ballantine, \$20 (6, 54)
6. **MEN ARE FROM MARS, WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS.** John Gray. HarperCollins, \$20 (5, 24)
7. **LISTENING TO PROZAC.** Peter Kramer, M.D. Viking, \$22.50 (7, 8)
8. **SEINLANGUAGE.** Jerry Seinfeld. Bantam, \$19.95 (-, 1)
9. **REENGINEERING THE CORPORATION.** Michael Hammer and James Champy. HarperBusiness, \$25 (8, 16)
10. **THE WAY THINGS OUGHT TO BE.** Rush Limbaugh. Pocket Books, \$22 (10, 51)
11. **THE HIDDEN LIFE OF DOGS.** Elizabeth Marshall Thomas. Houghton Mifflin, \$18.95 (9, 2)
12. **THE FIFTIES.** David Halberstam. Villard, \$27.50 (11, 13)
13. **CARE OF THE SOUL.** Thomas Moore. HarperCollins, \$22.50 (12, 28)
14. **GIRL, INTERRUPTED.** Susanna Kaysen. Turtle Bay, \$17 (13, 8)
15. **A WOMAN'S WORTH.** Marianne Williamson. Random House, \$17 (-, 18)

■ And all this work was subsidized by American tax dollars.

have an abortion. ... Why should anyone be allowed to have more children than I?"

Throughout China, pregnant women became runaways, trying to escape the inevitable, harangued at work, hounded in special assemblies, threatened and bribed to sign "voluntary" one-child and sterilization agreements and, in the end, dragged by force to the abortionist.

And, until 1985, when Congress passed legislation preventing U.S. population-control funds from going to any country that participates in forced abortion or sterilization (funding the Clinton administration threatens to revive), all this work was subsidized by American tax dollars.

What happens in China is only a modest extension of what must happen anywhere when, under the name of population control, abortion rights or euthanasia, people begin to assert (oh so softly, oh so nobly) that other people's lives are not worth living.

Maggie Gallagher is the author of "The Abolition of Marriage," forthcoming from Simon & Schuster.