

# Stories of oppression will shock, inspire

## THE GOOD WOMEN OF CHINA: HIDDEN VOICES

By Xinran

Vintage Canada

By **TARA MacDONALD**  
Ottawa Sun

*The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*, is a beautiful yet terrifying collection of true stories accumulated by a woman who is as captivating as those she writes about.

Xinran was born in Beijing in 1958. As a radio journalist during the late '80s and '90s, she encountered many stories of people whose lives were devastated by the Cultural Revolution.

In this collection, she shares some of these, chronicling the unbelievable strength and courage of women who persevered in the face of challenges put before them as a punishment of their sex in a traditionally male-dominated society.

The flow of the writing is sometimes strained, which could be a result of cultural expression or the effects of translation. Nevertheless, Xinran is an excellent storyteller. The frank and stirring quality of the stories, intertwined with her own observations and experiences, far outweigh any disjointedness in the telling.

This book will awaken and shock you — leaving you thinking about it long after you've

turned the last page.

In Xinran's journey of awareness, we encounter women married off for the well-being of the Communist Party; gang-raped children and the victims of repeated incestuous sexual abuse; broken families, broken minds and broken loves.

At one point, Xinran tells the story of a university student who asked her three questions: "What philosophy do women have? What is happiness for a woman? And what makes a

good woman?" Although Xinran never fully confronts these questions, she accomplishes her initial purpose: "In *Words on the Night Breeze* (a radio phone-in show she hosted) I was trying to open a little window, a tiny hole, so that people could allow their spirits to cry out and breathe after the gunpow-

der-laden atmosphere of the previous forty years."

Some may describe Xinran as an Far Eastern Ann Landers or an "agony aunt," but she is nothing of the sort. She is not setting out to change the way things are. She doesn't offer salvation for those who have suffered or a prescription to heal their wounds. Neither does she condemn men or those who helped to mould women's oppression in China.

Xinran simply presents a picture of what is. And in doing so, she opens our eyes to the lives of sometimes ordinary, sometimes extraordinary women.

