

Banned in China! screams the blurb for Serve the People, but to western readers this wry little novel will seem pretty innocuous. Wu Dawang, exemplary soldier in the People’s Liberation Army in the middle of Mao’s Cultural Revolution, lands the plum job of Division Commander’s orderly and ends up in bed with his young wife. He is adept at spouting the rhetoric, winning commendations and pleasing his superiors, but confronted with silk underwear and unbridled passion he is less assured. There is gentle satire, but also considerable pathos, in this story of the confused and blunted lives of Dawang and his compatriots in those dark and difficult times.