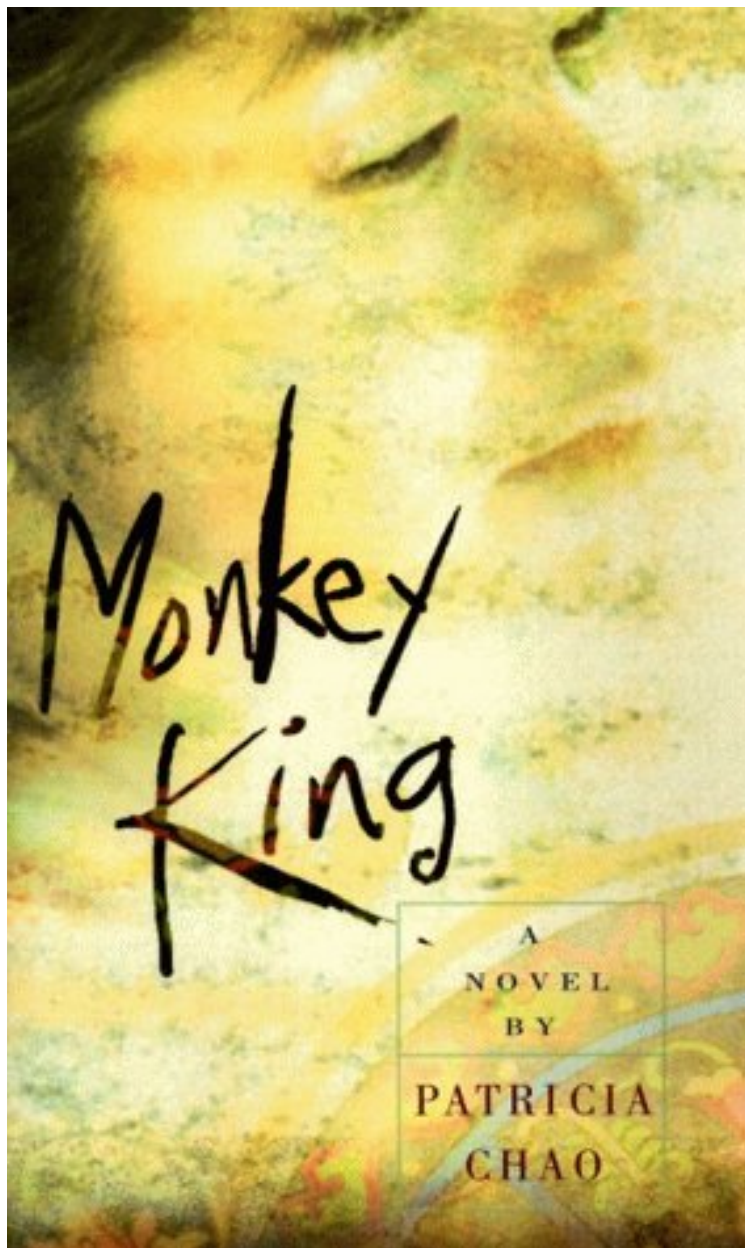


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## Monkey King

*Patricia Chao*

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#3596453 in Books 1997-02 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.75 x 5.75 x 1.25l, #File Name: 006018681X320 pages | File size: 61.Mb

**Patricia Chao : Monkey King** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Monkey King:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. artist, interruptedBy E.M. BristolAt the start of "Monkey King,"

twentysomething graphic artist Sally Wang is sent to a psychiatric facility, after an aborted suicide attempt. Once there, she will continue the work begun in therapy: facing the incest that destroyed her youth and confronting her mother and sister about their denial, as her father has since passed on. Sally takes the reader back to her experience as a Chinese American daughter of immigrant parents, both of whom suffered culture shock on their arrival to the U.S. Helped by a sympathetic therapist, other family members and friends, Sally slowly puts her life back together. The author brings alive what it is like to be a young Chinese American girl whose parents are struggling to assimilate. She also handles the topic of incest with tact and sensitivity. However, one thing that bothered me was the amount of compliments and praise showered on the heroine. The sister, who witnesses the abuse and feels overshadowed by Sally, complains about this, and I started to think she had a point. Given such abundance of love, Sally did begin to seem a bit self pitying after awhile. Also, the portrayal of being a mental patient seemed more like what would happen in the sixties than in today's insurance-conscious world. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Really LikedBy KarlyloI really liked this novel. Chao goes in deep as how it feels to be depressed. To someone familiar with depression, she very much captured those feelings and conveyed them to the reader. Her characters are well developed and the story is well written, but as another reviewer put it, the story left me feeling like something was missing. I can't put my finger on exactly what that is, however the book kept me interested from beginning to end. I would recommend this book and being Chao's first novel, she can only get better and better so I look forward to reading some of her others. 2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A magnificent book, one of the best debut novels I've seen. By MS Moore47@aol.com This is one of the two most powerful "first novels" I've ever read (the other one being David Leavitt's "Family Dancing"), by an author amazingly wise and insightful for her years. This is, in my perception, a fictionalized account of Ms. Chao's own life. That was my sense, in any case. As painful as the material is, I found her approach to be incredibly non-self-pitying, and amazingly non-melodramatic. The power of the experiences in this novel are woven brilliantly with language that has exceptional clarity. This incredibly gifted author spins word images so well and so effortlessly that I hardly noticed I was reading. It was as if I were watching the story unfold before my eyes. There is not one character in this novel who is not fully developed; I felt I knew each one intimately. I am aware of how maudlin this type of book could potentially be, but Chao never, not once, lets herself slip into that. I admire the fact that Chao lets the ambiguity of where, precisely, Sally's life will go after the book ends, exist....she doesn't need to have a tidy "happy ending." And in life, how many of us do have a neatly-wrapped happy ending? Most of us are a work in progress, just as Chao so brilliantly portrays Sally. Rarely has a book had so much impact for me. I was entranced and hook on the first sentence.

Monkey King tells the story of a young Chinese-American woman whose mental breakdown and sojourn in a hospital for rehabilitation sets her firmly on the path of memory. For 28-year-old Sally Wang has come to a dead stop in her life, and it is through her recollections of her childhood -- and the stories of her extended Chinese family -- that she manages to find the strength to pull herself back to the land of the living. As we enter Sally's world, we meet a colorful array of characters: her grandmother Nai Nai, the aristocratic matriarch of the family; her parents, who are both marked by their immigrant experience; auntie Mabel and Uncle Richard, who love her like the daughter they never had; and Marty, Sally's beautiful sister, whose tough facade belies the frightened woman inside. Sally's recovery takes place against a rich tapestry of culture and personality that unfolds before our eyes under the ghostly shadow of the Monkey King. For Sally has been living with a terrible family secret, and it is this burden that shattered her life. How she comes to terms with this betrayal and integrates her Chinese and American parts into a coherent personality are recounted with an honesty that is at once wry and refreshing. Monkey King is a stunning and memorable debut from a beautiful new writer.

.com Recent novels by Chinese American authors often describe a world where private life is far messier than the public face families put on it. To an extent, Patricia Chao's debut novel, *Monkey King* follows this pattern: heroine Sally Wang's "perfect" life obscures a childhood riven by sexual abuse and secrecy. After attempting suicide, Sally must confront the past and lay her demons to rest. What separates *Monkey King* from other novels of its kind are the surprisingly sympathetic renderings of Sally's parents, the evocative portrayal of immigrants' sense of dislocation and loss, and the fine writing with which Patricia Chao brings Sally's world to life. From Publishers Weekly Childhood memories pervade this impressive, multilayered debut novel, which chronicles a woman's struggle to define herself through her relationships with those around her. Sally Wang is a smart, successful, divorced New York art director who, at age 27, inexplicably tries to kill herself. Her subsequent stay in a mental hospital is narrated in sharp, ironic prose that slowly reveals an intensely disturbing secret in Sally's past. Although the Chinese folktale of a god called the "monkey king" who is supposed to guard the queen's garden but instead "ends up gobbling all the peaches himself" is integral to the plot, there are no weary, pseudo-symbolic passages here. Instead, the Asian-American experience is integrated within the character of a strong woman confronted with unspeakable memories that transcend all cultural differences. The ways her family deals with her revelations illustrate the complex relationships and hidden emotions that contribute to her state of mind. Chao's subtle, lyrical style coherently frames the puzzle of Sally's past and present

lives. While she smoothly draws us onto the path of Sally's recovery, however, Chao stirs anticipation for a climax that never really happens. A seemingly unrelated catalyst moves the story to a swift conclusion that offers the tepid implication that serenity can be found in the mere act of survival. On the whole, however, Chao's vivid, intelligent voice and masterful detailing contribute to an engrossing work. \$20,000 ad/promo; author tour; rights: ICM..

Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From School Library Journal YA. Chao's novel is a disturbing first-person account of 28-year-old Sally Wang's emergence from a suicidal depression as she comes to terms with the ghosts from her past. Self-mutilation was one of the ways she coped with her father's sexual abuse when she was only eight years old; silence was her family's method. Sally and her younger sister struggled to fit in with the expectations and demands of their Chinese immigrant parents, both from vastly different backgrounds themselves, while they tried to become the women they were inside. Sally's life as a graphic designer living in New York is disrupted when she experiences a nervous breakdown, renews her self-destructive tendencies, attempts suicide, and must be hospitalized; she is divorced, unemployed, and sees herself as a failure. Eventually, she is able to put the pain behind her and begin to move on with her life. Other patients at the hospital as well as family members are vividly portrayed and help Sally to heal. Chao provides plenty of material to think about and discuss. The story moves quickly; one is concerned about Sally's well being and is pulled forward wanting to know what happened in her past to bring her to this dismal present. A powerful debut that is sure to have an impact on anyone who reads it. Dottie Kraft, formerly at Fairfax County Public Schools, VA Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.