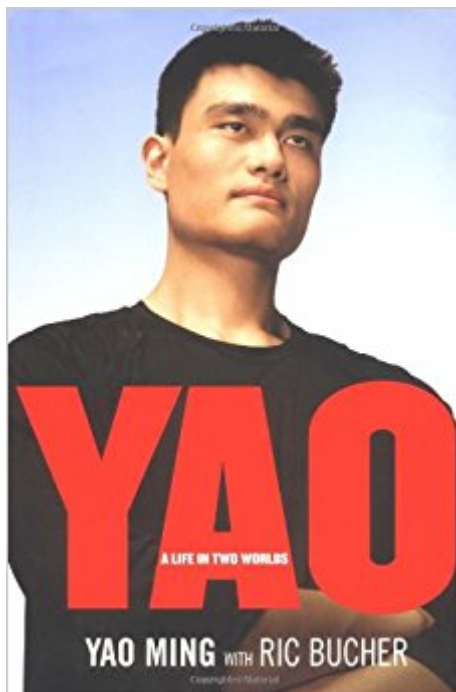


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# YAO: A Life In Two Worlds



## Synopsis

Since Yao Ming's electrifying NBA debut with the Houston Rockets in 2002, the 7-foot-5 Chinese center has appeared in numerous TV commercials, on magazine covers, and in countless basketball-highlights reels. And yet, despite Yao's status as one of the country's most recognizable sports stars, the remarkable story of how a shy, gangly kid from Shanghai went on to become the NBA's first foreign-born and developed #1 draft pick has remained, until now, largely unknown. With this memoir, Yao reveals himself as a thoughtful, opinionated young man whose insights extend far beyond the basketball court. He paints a compelling portrait of how his parents, both former Chinese basketball stars and fully aware of the bleak outlook for ex-players, resisted the Chinese government's interest in steering their son into the sport as a child. But the love of the game took hold of Yao as a teenager, and he began to sense both his own potential and the restraints he would face from the bureaucrats who ran the sport. As Yao's success in China grew, it became clear that his future would be with the NBA. But nothing came easily. With riveting detail, Yao recounts the white-knuckle gamesmanship required to win the approval of Chinese officials for his leap to America. Yao: A Life in Two Worlds vividly chronicles Yao's move from Shanghai to Houston: The sudden millionaire has to learn to drive his newly acquired car; the young man who has only ever had one girlfriend tries to make sense of pro-basketball's hard-partying life off-court; the supremely dominant player in China is transformed into a NBA rookie unnerved at the prospect of facing Shaquille O'Neal. But soon enough, aided by his easygoing manner and sense of humor that has proved so appealing to fans, Yao finds his moorings and flourishes as a major NBA star with a worldwide following. Sports writer Ric Bucher spent hundreds of hours in conversation with Yao in the U.S. and China, closely tracking the player's feelings and observations during that historic first season with the Rockets. Yao: A Life in Two Worlds is an inspiring account of how one man's faith in himself, hard work, and drive have taken him from national success story to international icon and helped build a bridge between two countries.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: Miramax (September 22, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1401352146

ISBN-13: 978-1401352141

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 11 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,080,506 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #20 in [Books > Sports & Outdoors > Basketball > Professional](#) #407 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Chinese](#) #455 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Sports & Outdoors > Basketball](#)

## Customer Reviews

Yao, the 7'5" Chinese NBA center, charms readers with the same grace and humility that have made him one of basketball's most mediagenic personalities. Coauthored by Bucher, an ESPN the Magazine writer, the book includes short sections by Yao's Houston Rockets teammates and managers, but its driving voice is 23-year-old Yao's. The language is simple, sincere and often funny as Yao jokes about Wilt Chamberlain's reputation as a ladies' man and presents a view of himself as a blue-collar worker ("I sweat for my paycheck"). The book follows Yao's career in China, the bureaucratic struggles involved in getting him to the U.S., and his experiences on the court, including what it was like to play against Shaq. Though there's lots of basketball talk, the book's most compelling sections address the clash of cultures, such as the time when Yao's former team, the Shanghai Sharks, banned one of Yao's representatives from negotiating because he was white. Yao clearly loves his native country and says his greatest dream is to lead China's national team to an Olympic gold medal. But with millions in endorsement deals, the adoration of fans across the globe and this earnest book, it's clear he's living out the American dream, too. Photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The seven-foot-four-inch Yao, all-star center with the Houston Rockets, is the best basketball player ever to come out of China. This as-told-to autobiography covers the usual ground: Yao's youth as the son of two outstanding Chinese basketball players; his enrollment in the Chinese basketball pipeline and subsequent international success; and his decision to try the NBA. What sets the book apart from similar sports bios is Yao's comparison of Chinese culture with the one to which he's adapting in the U.S. For example, he contrasts the freewheeling NBA sexual lifestyle versus his own chaste courtship of a player on the Chinese women's national team. He also displays a sly sense of humor, digging playfully at NBA broadcaster Bill Walton by noting that Yao's translator has no idea what Walton is talking about. Coauthor Bucher, a first-generation American whose initial language was German, adds context to Yao's story with his own experience assimilating a new culture. This will be a very pleasant surprise for readers expecting the usual and-then-we-played memoir

manufactured to capitalize on the popularity of a young superstar. Wes Lukowsky Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Yao Ming is truly one of the great ambassadors of basketball. I remember watching him grow up and seeing how cool it was to see a Chinese athlete play basketball. He is a great gentleman of the NBA and quite the great guy. Even though he didn't play for any of my 3 favorite teams growing up. He broke down barriers and made the game fun again.

I wasn't sure how I felt about paying for a biography for someone who had only been in the NBA for 2 seasons, but I'm so glad that I did. This book is wonderful in the way that Yao lets us catch a glimpse of the giant heart that beats within him. It is very real, very open- and I feel that I understand him so much better now. Definitely worth picking up a copy if you're a Yao fan, or even just want a perspective of China from the eyes of probably the most famous Chinese person of them all!

The Houston Rockets spent the 2001 season's number one draft pick on Yao, a seven-foot, five-inch center from Shanghai, China. Yao's journey to the NBA has been chronicled in his autobiography, "Yao Ming: A Life In Two Worlds". He has proven to be a marketing goldmine for the profit-driven NBA. Yao appeared in a nationally televised Apple Macintosh Computer commercial (alongside the ubiquitous Verne Troyer, "Mini-Me" from Austin Powers) and being billed alternatively as the "Ming Dynasty" or the "Ming Emperor." Ticket sales and merchandising increase dramatically for Houston, trends that began before Yao had ever played a minute in the NBA. On the court, as well, he has made a huge contribution to his franchise. Ed Derse in a January 16, 2003 radio broadcast for American public media stated that "The Rockets, who finished in 2001 near the bottom of the Western Conference standings, now contend for a playoff spot in the ultra-competitive west." Yao's commercial success and basketball skills signal the dawn of a new era in the NBA game. While the league has historically had some international flavor (Nigerian Hakeem Olajuwon, Lithuanian Arvydas Sabonis, and Sudanese Manute Bol being members of the old guard of international competitors in the NBA), the American game is now reaching new heights of global exposure and global presence. Truly, these trends are complimentary in nature. As the NBA acquires more international talent, global citizens from regions that nurtured this new NBA talent become ardent fans and supporters of a specific NBA franchise or simply of the NBA in general. Jon L. Wertheim wrote in a piece for "Sports Illustrated" that these fans buy merchandise, tickets, and a portion of American culture all at the same time." They often go to great lengths to show support for

their hometown heroes. The NBA reaches new heights in the era of radio, television, and Internet exposure. "Yao Ming: A Life In Two Worlds" is a first hand account of the ongoing globalization of the NBA.

Yao Ming comes across in this book as a refreshingly well-balanced young man who has his size 18 shoes squarely on the ground, despite the fact that his head is almost (literally) in the clouds. Anyone who thinks that Yao has had it easy, will soon discover that he has worked very hard for everything he has and that his 7'6" frame has sometimes been as much a liability as it has been an asset. Yao describes a bit about his growing-up years and shows how his parents, although basketball players themselves, wanted something more for their son. They encouraged him to pursue a college degree, but when he opted for life as a professional athlete, they supported him in his decision. Although very committed to China and to playing for its national team, Yao shows a surprisingly independent spirit and has definite opinions which he shares in the book. Things bog down a bit during the chapters on the negotiations which brought him to the Houston Rockets and the NBA, and the multiple voices which tell the story are rather distracting and confusing at times. Yao is at his best when he uses his humor to contrast life styles between China and the U.S. Although he sometimes pokes fun at both cultures, he manages to show respect to the individuals he writes about. With his work ethic, competitiveness, and balanced outlook on life, Yao is sure to be a success in anything he attempts in life.

A good biography teaches you something not just about the subject of the book but about life itself. Yao Ming's book not only fails to do this but its narrative style is such that the reader is concurrently bored and frustrated whilst trying to reach the end of this rather dull tale. Yao wrote his autobiography at too early a stage in his career. True character is forged through adversity and at twenty five years of age, Yao simply hasn't had any opportunity to undergo the proverbial trial by fire. Yao omits to mention or only tangentially scratches upon many of the issues that I would consider interesting. How does he deal with the sudden influx of new "friends"? What discrimination, blatant or otherwise, does a 7"5' Chinese man face when stepping out from mainland China into one of the hubs of the Anglosphere? How does his relationship change with his childhood friends and the people that he has grown up with? Although it may appeal to avid basketball fans, my appraisal of the content of the book is that it lacks anything of real substance. Sadly the structure and narrative of the book fare no better. The book was co-authored with Ric Bucher, who endeavours to maintain as much of the authentic "Yao flavour" as possible. He succeeds in this

venture too well and much of the books is written in simple, boring and pedestrian English presumably because this is the way that Yao himself speaks. The book is laced with commentary from key members of Team Yao and this is confusing because the reader has to constantly refer to the "Cast of Characters" in order to place a context around what is being said. I cannot recommend this book to anyone other than the most devoted Yao Ming acolyte and even then the reading would be for duty rather than for pleasure.

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