

Interpretation of Mao's China to the Western World

— Han Suyin and Jung Chang —

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Introduction

'You have brought humanity and understanding to the Chinese scene through your books.'¹ Thus did André Malraux, Minister of Culture in de Gaulle's government, commend Han Suyin at their meeting in Paris in 1966, on the eve of the Great Cultural Revolution. Already celebrated as a writer in 1966, Han Suyin went on to London to see Bertrand Russell, and then to India where she called on Indira Ghandi to discuss various Chinese matters from disarmament to the frontier problems between China and India.² Besides being completely bilingual in Chinese and English, and having the rare privilege of being allowed frequent visits to Mao's China, Han Suyin was destined to provide the West with an "insider's" view and interpretation of China. (In a literal sense she was not an insider as she had not made China her home since 1942.) The best-selling author of *A Many-Splendoured Thing*, *Crippled Tree*, *A Mortal Flower*, and other works was also recognized as an expert on China and life in the communes. As such, she was expected to keep outsiders informed of the impact of Mao's thoughts on China and its people. The nation of 1 billion was one of the world's great powers, and it was imperative that the West understand what its people were thinking, doing and planning. Thus Han Suyin, wittingly or unwittingly, started to play the role of an interpreter answering concerned and sympathetic inquiries from the West.³

Han Suyin was not the first exponent of China to the Western world in modern Chinese history. Before her there was Lin Yutang, a brilliant scholar/writer who in 1939 authored a best-selling novel, *Moment in Peking*,⁴ in English. The book moved the Western world to tears over the tragic destiny of the Tao family, and its depiction of the brutality of the

Japanese military angered Western readers. The novel was voluminous - over 800 pages - and encompassed the most turbulent period in modern Chinese history, starting from the Boxer Uprising in the summer of 1900, then moving on through Sun Yatsen's Republic Revolution in 1911, the May Fourth Movement in 1919, the Mukden Incident in 1931, and the 8 years of Sino-Japanese War. The characters Lin Yutang depicted overturned the then-prevailing assumptions about the Chinese: that they were effeminate, cowardly, superstitious, corrupt, and untrustworthy. Lin alleged that he was determined to make readers aware that in their sorrow, hatred, bitterness, love, and hope the Chinese were not different to any other people in the world.⁵ The Chinese in real life, as Lin Yutang would say. Yet the story's protagonists were two beautiful and intelligent sisters from a wealthy family in Peking, and the resulting saga unfolded with the sense of unrolling a dazzling picture scroll, satisfying the Western readers' craving for Chinese exoticism. Luce Lin, the author's son and a witness to the process of creation, later wrote that the book opened China's door to foreigners and invited them to the living room, so that they could live together, play together and laugh together with the Chinese.⁶ The book was a manifest success in terms of interpreting and publicizing China to the Western world.

The magnitude of Han Suyin's activities surpassed that of Lin Yutang. Besides authoring numerous books, she advocated the Cultural Revolution, wrote Mao's biography⁷ and lectured around the world on Chinese issues, twice in the U. S., once in Japan⁸ and many times in Europe. Unlike *Moment in Peking*, Han Suyin's books on China were autobiographies. Her own experience, grand and diverse, gave formidable power to her works. Her audience dwindled, however, when she declared her support for Hua Guofeng who arrested the Gang of Four, and she was ridiculed as a Chinese chameleon.⁹ Her time seemed past.

Recently, the appearance of another Chinese bilingual writer, Jung Chang, has brought Han Suyin to mind again. Jung Chang made her

acclaimed debut as a writer in England, winning the 1992 NCR Book Award with *Wild Swans*.¹⁰ More importantly, she reminded us of the continuing role that Chinese bilingual writers have in interpreting Chinese history, culture and society to the Western world. As part of this continuing tradition, Han Suyin is still an important writer, and a close study of her life and works may give us insight into contemporary Chinese incidents. A comparative study of Han Suyin and Jung Chang, women from different generations with different upbringings yet similar in that they depict indigenous Chinese matters with sensitivity to the curious eyes of Western outsiders helps us understand the gigantic changes which have swept over China during the past decades.

1. Han Suyin - Her Emergence as a Writer

'That today I am a writer is fortuitous, an accident determined by my return to China in 1938, my marriage with Pao, and the anguished clash of our lives,'¹¹ wrote Han Suyin in 1968 in her ninth book, more than 25 years after her first one, *Destination Chungking*.¹² The fortuity occurred when Pao, an elite Chiang Kaishek army officer, was away in the northwest in 1939, and Han Suyin knocked on the door of an American missionary doctor, Marian Manly, seeking to train as a midwife. To a medical student who had not yet completed her studies, this had seemed the only way she could make herself useful to her country and get some peace of mind. Marian devoted her spare time to writing stories on China; some of them were published in American magazines such as *Woman's Home Companion*. Knowing that Marian wanted to write a 'real good story' about China to attract the American public's attention to the war-stricken country, Han Suyin volunteered to show Marian her notes and some ideas for a new story. Han Suyin had jotted down some notes on her return from Europe, on the fall of Wuhan, and also during her journey from Wuhan to Chungking. Marian became excited as she read them and came up with an idea: "...with your notes, and with my writing, we could

make a book.”¹³ Han Suyin, however, was not excited; she was frightened. Remembering the day when the partnership started, she wrote in 1953, ‘...My English learnt in Peking when I was only ten years old, mostly acquired through reading, not through conversation, would never be sufficient to write a book.’¹⁴ Her anxiety was not without good reason. Han Suyin had been a bright child, but her education had been scattered. With a Chinese father and a Belgian mother, her life had been bicultural from the start. Even meals were bicultural, and the day’s fare could consist of a European breakfast, a Chinese lunch and a European supper. Schools were just like the meals, she wrote: Chinese school in the morning, French convent in the afternoon.¹⁵ She learned Chinese in the morning and attended catechism class in the afternoon. Once she was thrown out of school for kicking the Mother Superior in a European convent. After two weeks she was readmitted, and this time she was enrolled in an English language class.¹⁶ This was the start of her English education. Han Suyin’s mother, who prided herself on her good instinct, foresaw that knowledge of English would be a prerequisite for getting a good job. On her brother’s advice Han Suyin was sent to Tientsin Grammar School when she was 12 years old, in order to get a better English education. Her brother had been educated in England, and he laughed at her English, “You speak very badly. You don’t know how to speak.”¹⁷ Han Suyin’s English didn’t come naturally. She wrote later that it was Marian’s enthusiasm which carried them through the writing of *Destination Chungking*.¹⁸

Destination Chungking was published in early 1942 in the United States and later that year in England. It never sold well and went out of print in the United States. The consequences for Han Suyin were not favorable either. At the time, 1943, Han Suyin and her husband Pao, then military attache at the Chinese Embassy, were residing in London. Despite the praise of Chiang Kaishek and his wife, and despite the book’s idealized depiction of a brave, young Chinese couple, struggling to serve their country, the keen-eyed Chinese embassy staff hinted to Pao that the book

was communist propaganda. This induced yet another scene of wife-battering by Pao. In addition, *Destination Chungking* convinced Han Suyin, not that she could write but rather that she could not. She developed an inferiority complex and did not write for the next ten years.¹⁹ Fortunately, her genius would eventually overcome her lack of confidence. In time she produced compelling, dynamic stories of the time, and with enthralling literary power created her own style.

2. Han Suyin - Background

In 1949 Han Suyin was back in Hong Kong from London, where she had finished her medical studies and qualified with honors at London University.²⁰ She began her practice at the Queen Mary Hospital.²¹ In Mainland China the victory of the Chinese Communists seemed inevitable, although Chiang Kaishek had sworn that he would win the ultimate war.

The move to Hong Kong represented Han Suyin's second attempt to return to China, the first having occurred in 1938 when she came to the realization, as a young student in Belgium, that her duty called her back to China.²² This time, she moved more cautiously, yet she could not stay in England. She had to go, to stand, at least, on the threshold.²³ Malcolm MacDonald,²⁴ analyzing her state of mind at the time, said that parts of her felt a compelling urge to return to China, to help her people in their struggle, but other parts bid her stay away, sympathetic yet aloof in Hong Kong, watching events as from a semidetached observation tower.²⁵ Years later in 1980 she wrote about her dilemma. 'In 1938 I had not hesitated to plunge into the maelstrom of war; but then it was different. No one asked me my political inclinations, and at the time I did not have Yunmei.'²⁶

Gordon King, Director of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Hong Kong, spoke about the Chinese intellectuals that yearned toward China, but were hindered from returning by their fears of communism and what it might do to them.²⁷ Most of them would come to Hong Kong to

breathe the dust, smell the air wafted over from China.²⁸ Han Suyin's reactions to the events in China at the time were apparently typical of those of countless educated Chinese, both inside and outside the country. Yet she would never be identified with them. First of all, her family background was extraordinary: a compound of East and West, love and hatred, fantasies and despair. As a child she had had to suffer prejudice and humiliation. Being a Eurasian in China was a handicap to begin with, and having a European mother and a Chinese father had made her life harder.²⁹ Joseph Hers, who gave Han Suyin a scholarship to study in Belgium funded by the Boxer's indemnity, left a memorandum about Han Suyin's parents. According to his memo, her father had studied in Belgium from 1904 to 1913 and married a Belgian woman, Marguerite, then returned to China with his wife and worked on the railway.³⁰ They had their first son, George, whose Chinese name was Son of Spring, when still in Belgium. The father's family in Sichuan sent presents of silks and brocades for their son's clothes, gifts which seemed beautiful and exotic to Marguerite, and confirmed her belief that she had married an aristocrat.³¹ This, however, was a fantasy. On their way to China Marguerite imagined, "...when we reach your province I shall wear Chinese dress, and do everything like a Chinese woman."³² However, once in China not only was she only the wife of a Chinese and therefore rejected by her own people, but to Chinese she remained a European.³³ It didn't take long for prejudice, discrimination, and constant financial worries to change the vivacious Marguerite into a bitter and stinging woman. It is this bitter mother that Han Suyin remembers. In addition, Han Suyin was wounded by her mother's evident love for her beautiful younger sister, Tisa. 'My mother loves her, she doesn't love me,'³⁴ she felt, a heart-wrenching secret that always troubled her. Han Suyin was seemingly provided with two identities through two names, Rosalie and Chou Guanghu. She was heir to two cultures, two races, but she had to fight not to have her own identity torn apart. It was China and her zeal for study that kept her from the point of collapse, unlike the

tragic case of her brother George.³⁵

Han Suyin's marriage to Pao gave her a temporary sense of wholeness. To her, Pao was an archetypical Chinese. Married to him, she imagined, she was at last accepted by China. This, however, was her grand illusion. The relationship brought her more unhappiness than she could ever have imagined. We find her emotional stress during those years with Pao all through *Birdless Summer*, which was published in 1968, 20 years after his death. Pao was a Nationalist Army general, a blueshirt, and a loyal Chiang Kaishek follower, as were many of the graduates of Huangpo Military Academy. Yet in later years Han Suyin was to speak for Mao's China and the Cultural Revolution. Somehow she managed to transcend the strange inconsistencies. In fact, it was those inconsistencies, along with her Eurasian background, that attracted Westerners' curiosity and gave her the image of a mysterious and tragic woman, an image much like that of the heroine in the Hollywood movie, *A Many-Splendoured Thing*. That movie along with the best-selling novel opened the door to the global stage for Han Suyin, giving her access to a greater audience outside China.

3. Jung Chang - Background

Wild Swans is Jung Chang's second book. Her first was *Mme Sun Yatsen*³⁷ written in 1986, some years after she had received a Ph.D. in linguistics from York University, and was co-authored with Jon Halliday. Jon Halliday had already authored many books on Asia,³⁸ and it was he who helped Jung Chang create *Wild Swans*. The book met with tremendous acclaim³⁹ and Jung Chang's talent in writing was also highly praised.⁴⁰

Unlike Han Suyin, Jung Chang was an ordinary Chinese girl born to Communist cadre parents in Sichuan Province. Her father's high position did give her advantages, however, and it ensured a comfortable upbringing, in contrast with tens of millions of other children of her generation whose parents had no rank. Unlike Han Suyin, Jung Chang had a tranquil and loving family, which consisted of her parents, maternal grandmother, a

sister, and three brothers. The family lived in a privileged cocoon: 'A special compound, which was the center of government for the province. It enclosed several streets, with blocks of apartments and offices and a number of mansions; a high wall blocked it off from the outside world.'⁴¹ This impeccable concrete-block flat was provided for officials of Jung Chang's father's rank. Her father, Shou-yi, a native of Sichuan was an old and honorable member of the Communist Party who at that time had become deputy head of the Public Affairs Department. He joined the Communist Party in 1938 and walked the Long March to Yen'an in 1940. Jung Chang's mother, De-hong was originally from Manchuria, where she was a member of the Communist underground. De-hong met Shou-yi after his Communist guerilla unit helped capture her hometown in Manchuria in 1948. They were married the following year. Jung Chang's maternal grandmother was a concubine of a warlord in Manchuria. She came to Sichuan later to live with the Changs. Although the subtitle of *Wild Swans* is 'Three Daughters of China', the father, the mother, and the grandmother are the three most vivid figures in the book. Most memorable of the three is the father, a quixotic and incorruptible figure. His ideological purity was absolute, and he firmly resisted any temptation toward nepotism. On the way from Manchuria to Sichuan, Shou-yi and the pregnant De-hong had to cross mountains and deep, fast-flowing rivers. De-hong was sick and exhausted, carrying her bedroll, sweating, vomiting the whole time. Shou-yi was driven along in a jeep, as his rank entitled him to transportation, but he never gave De-hong a lift. De-hong had a miscarriage.⁴² Another time when De-hong was pregnant and had TB, Shou-yi vetoed a plan to move her to a better hospital.⁴³ When Jung Chang asked her father to put in a word with his friends on the enrollment committee to help her get into Sichuan University, he refused. He said, "It would not be fair to people with no power. What would our country become if things had to be done this way?"⁴⁴ He was an idealist who was to be tragically betrayed by his ideal. Fortunately, Jung Chang's mother De-hong was more realistic and

pragmatic. She worked in the bureaucracy pulling strings with unflagging energy on behalf of her children and of anyone who appealed for her help. Jung Chang was admitted to Sichuan University majoring in English. 'How lucky I was to have my resourceful mother!' she wrote.⁴⁵ De-hong's courage and fortitude to survive all the odds, physical harrassment, and humiliation during the Cultural Revolution, was prodigious. She was always sensible. The grandmother Yu-fang was absolutely devoted to her daughter and her grandchildren. When Jung Chang's parents fell from grace and were sent to penal camps during the Cultural Revolution, it was Yu-fang who became the family bastion, doing household chores in her bound feet, giving children hugs whenever they were near her, and cooking them goodies. Until her death in 1970 she gave the family her undying devotion. Jung Chang had to go through hardships as did many people during the Cultural Revolution, but she was always enveloped in the richness of family love. She was not crushed down by adversity. Her love of study and her desire to study in the West kept her going.⁴⁶

4. The Cultural Revolution from the Inside and the Outside

(1) *China in the year 2001* - Han Suyin

Seventeen years after Mao's death, it was accepted outside China that the total destruction wreaked on China and its people during the Cultural Revolution was all in the name of the man who would be god. It was no longer controversial to remark that Mao's Cultural Revolution was not a revolution at all, but an old-fashioned power struggle in the upper echelons. People felt safe in concluding that the Red Guards were Mao's pawns in his struggle to absolute power. The world was hearing appalling 'survivors' tales⁴⁷ of mental as well as physical tortures, brutal interrogations, and terrifying persecutions, and it shuddered at the horrors propagated by unchecked political power. The expatriates who escaped Mao's China felt compelled to speak out and let those living in freedom outside of China know what their life was like under Mao's rule. Han Suyin also felt com-

pelled to speak out, but she did so in defense of Mao's China. In 1966, after her second visit to China, she wrote *China in the Year 2001*,⁴⁸ in which she interpreted the thought of Mao Tsetung and the Cultural Revolution. Han Suyin visited China in 1956 for the first time after the victory of the Chinese Communists.⁴⁹ From that time until 1966 she travelled to China more than ten times.⁵⁰ During those years she witnessed two big movements, the Hundred Flowers and the Great Leap Forward with its aftermath, the years of want. She also witnessed Chinese people's struggle to survive. 'All I could do was trust. Trust the Chinese people,' she wrote. On her return to Hong Kong from a China devastated by the Leap Forward, she told the press, "I am convinced that China will overcome her difficulties," and "China will solve her own problems... we lack nothing... we shall not beg."⁵¹ For Han Suyin, to denounce the Chinese Government for its failings and errors was to betray the Chinese people. She could not tolerate the arrogance of a West that was smug in its triumphant conviction that China was, after all, a weak country with many shortcomings and failings. The tone throughout *China in the Year 2001* was provocative enough to make Western readers feel uncomfortable. At the time, China was surrounded by political environments that were hostile to her. The ousted Chiang Kaishek government still held a seat in the United Nations, while Mainland China was barred from it. Han Suyin did not conceal her anger at the USA's outspoken policy of Chinese containment. 'No self-respecting nation could accept this treatment as "normal." Yet China is expected to accept it, and her protests are regarded as "arrogant." The USA does its best to isolate China, and then maintains that China "is isolated." It is hard to visualize any government so unfairly treated not voicing its sense of injustice,'⁵² contended Han Suyin. She reminded the West, which was so immensely concerned with freedom and liberties, that until recently, China had been but their semi-colony. The first chapter of *China in the Year 2001*, therefore, was concerned with history. Han Suyin challenged the myths of a world long dominated by a superior Western civilization and the notions

of Asian inferiority and servility inculcated by the technical achievements of the West. The history of Asia must be reappraised and events reinterpreted by Asians themselves within the context of their own independence movements, Han Suyin asserted.⁵³ Mao was China's mentor, and it was Han Suyin's belief that the study of history under Mao's guidance would be a force in the shaping of China's future, helping people to free themselves from mental enslavement and emancipate their minds. 'The East Wind vanquishes the West Wind' and 'Imperialism is a paper tiger,' Mao's famous phrases, fortified Han Suyin and gave her the strength to speak out for China.

Han Suyin devoted herself to the study of the new China's agricultural and industrial accomplishments. Her book introduced the establishment of land reform and the people's communes. Figures quoted in the book appeared promising. The point Han Suyin emphasized, however, was that a large-scale socialist education movement, i.e. the Cultural Revolution, was necessary even after the success of land reform. Security for the peasants had traditionally meant owning land, and thus there was always a tendency for spontaneous return to capitalism. Hence, the development of new socialist men and women, whose ideas of self and property were thoroughly different, demanded ongoing revolution. New China would always have to be on her guard until capitalist tendencies were eradicated completely.⁵⁴ Collectivization must also be mandatory, as it would be the only way for China, an agricultural country, to produce the conditions under which the feudal peasant could become an educated, literate, scientifically minded person, the counterpart of an educated, literate, technical factory worker.⁵⁵ Thus explained Han Suyin.

Han Suyin also tackled the issue of China's industrialization. Since its victory in 1949, the Communist government had been driven by the desire to develop China into a major industrial power. What kind of an industrial power was China aiming to be? Han Suyin's interpretation was that it would be a socialist industrial power, with emphasis on the word *socialist*.

This used to mean following the Russian model, but such was no longer the case. China was building her own socialist model and had been building it more clearly in her own way since 1956. The crucial point was that this model depended in great measure on ideological considerations or, as the Chinese said, the socialist world-view.⁵⁶ While there was no doubt that China, with her vast area, material resources, and population, had the potential to become a major modern power, the Chinese model often appeared insane to people outside China. Han Suyin excused the backyard steel furnace episode⁵⁷ as an exaggerated instance of the new stress that was being placed on Chinese self-reliance, and on going her own way without imitating Russia. Yet the overreaction to these directives often looked terrifying in its literal-mindedness to outsiders. The cutting of some girls' hair by Red Guards, explained Han Suyin, was prompted by the association of long hair with romance and therefore with revisionist selfishness.⁵⁸ In fact, innumerable cases of mass hysteria came to light after the Cultural Revolution was over. Many outsiders also discussed the low level at which decision-making and planning took place for factory management and the purchase of equipment and machines. They were confounded at the lengthy and tedious meetings with total participation by the workers or peasants. Han Suyin, however, explained that this was the policy of the socialist government, that action must follow the "mass line," and that mass democracy was the goal, not bureaucratic tyranny or technical dictatorship.⁵⁹

In 1966 the Communist Party envisaged threats from both the inside and the outside. That from the inside was called revisionism, and it only confirmed Mao in his tenacious belief in self-reliance, making him decide to press on even faster to the goal: a communist society in China. To Mao, the Soviet-fostered illusion that cooperation with the West - 'imperialist exploitation' - could result in a better, happier, more prosperous world was sheer nonsense, Han Suyin wrote. The enemy within China, and especially within the Chinese Communist Party was also dangerous.⁶⁰ For

Chinese people, therefore, the Cultural Revolution was essential, Han Suyin told her readers, because it would secure the stupendous achievements accomplished by Mao, the man who had analyzed, fought for, theorized about, led, and organized the largest nation of people in the world. Through the Cultural Revolution China would be changed from a world of paupers into a world of men.⁶¹ China could not squander the hard-won gains of the people in one short decade. Han Suyin asserted at the time that the upheaval would be Mao's last and possibly greatest campaign, his final contribution to make China safe for socialism.⁶² She profoudly supported Mao's "mass line" mobilization, averring that it was necessary to assault the old, feudal, capitalist, reactionary, revisionist ideas which would endanger China by instigating a return to the past. This was, she wrote, the first time in history that a Communist party leadership had aroused the revolutionary masses against itself.⁶³ The battle was being fought especially for the minds of the young generation, the worthy successors of the Revolution. As for the sudden emergence of the Red Guards that astonished the world, Han Suyin's explanation in the early years of the Cultural Revolution was convincing. She explained, quoting from Mao: '...true to Mao Thinking, the battle must not be fought on the young generation's behalf or they would never know about it. They must be totally involved. "Let the young themselves revolt! Let them do their own clean-ups! Let the masses educate themselves through their own mass movement! On no account must anything be done for them, they must find answers themselves."⁶⁴ She saw the decision to involve the young in struggle as neither astonishing nor unwise. On the contrary, it was far-sighted, a masterly handling of an enormous problem: the problem of passing on the revolutionary aims and spirit to posterity. Han Suyin's zealous support for Mao's cause and the Cultural Revolution was evident throughout the book. Her faith in Mao's leadership and in his grand design for the future of China as well as the world drew the attention of outsiders. She not only wrote but travelled all over the world giving lectures on China. Later, Han Suyin

would write that she had given so many lectures during those years of the Cultural Revolution that she could talk without any preparation.⁶⁵

Han Suyin visited China many times during the Cultural Revolution, but she never made China her home. She lived outside China, in Malaysia and Europe. Soong Chingling, Sun Yatsen's widow, once asked Han Suyin why she still had not returned to live in China. "I think I can be of service even abroad," she replied.⁶⁶ Abroad, in Hong Kong and elsewhere, she accused China watchers of hatred for Mao and China's socialist system, and defended China and the Maoist cause. Her faith in the ultimate goal designed by Mao seemed unshaken. Her ideal China, one which served the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people and the whole world, could only come into being under Mao's leadership and guidance. She envisioned a China served by proletarian revolutionaries, modest and prudent, on guard against arrogance and impetuosity, imbued with the spirit of self-criticism and with the courage to correct their own mistakes and shortcomings. Jung Chang's father was just such an ideal revolutionary, the type of man that Han Suyin would have admired. He was possessed of absolute ideological purity, a Maoist revolutionary incarnate. Yet this man was victimized during the Cultural Revolution, and his end was tragic.

(2) *Wild Swans* - Jung Chang

Nearly half of Jung Chang's book is dedicated to a description of the Cultural Revolution, from beginning to end. Jung Chang's version of this event told readers how Mao's thinking, which Han Suyin had supported with ardor, affected people's lives. Chinese people participated in denunciation meetings, chanted slogans, and danced 'loyalty dances,' but they still had families to feed and chores to do. Most devastating was the process of losing the sense of normal life described in *Wild Swans*. Neither feudalism nor Japanese occupation nor the corruption and chaos under Chiang Kaishek were as dehumanizing as the Orwellian lunacy of Maoism.⁶⁷

In 1966 when the Cultural Revolution started, Jung Chang was 14 years

old, a junior high school student. In the beginning of June classes stopped completely. The students were directed to study *People's Daily* editorials which were also being blasted over the loudspeakers. Then they had to memorize and recite pieces from *The Quotations of Chairman Mao*, a collection of Mao's sayings bound together in a pocket-sized book with a red plastic cover, known as 'The Little Red Book.' The work team stationed at her school organized students and teachers who had not been accused to write denunciation posters and slogans. Jung Chang analyzed why the teachers became active in denouncing colleagues. The reasons were varied, she wrote: some acted out of conformity and loyalty to the Party order, some out of envy of the prestige and privilege of others, and some out of fear.⁶⁸ In the early days of the Cultural Revolution the Red Guards enjoyed the immense prestige of being Mao's favored youths. Jung Chang was also attracted by this aura of elitism and immediately submitted her application to join to the Red Guard leader in her form. In the beginning, the Red Guards were mostly the children of high officials, so Jung Chang with her high-ranking father must have fit right in. She left home to live at school, and went around the town trying to give the streets more revolutionary names. Yet she was never comfortable with such Red Guard acts as stopping passersby and cutting their long hair, narrow trouser legs, or skirts, or breaking their semi-high-heeled shoes. She tried hard to avoid these militant acts.⁶⁹ In hindsight she deduced that Mao had wanted the Red Guards to be his shock troops, since the people had not responded to his repeated calls to attack capitalist-roaders. Jung Chang wrote, 'If he was to get the population to act, Mao would have to remove authority from the Party and establish absolute loyalty and obedience to himself alone. To achieve this he needed terror - an intense terror that would block all other considerations and crush all other fears. He saw boys and girls in their teens and early twenties as his ideal agents. They had been brought up in the fanatical personality cult of Mao and the militant doctrine of "class struggle." They were endowed with the quality of youth - they were rebellious,

fearless, eager to fight for a "just cause," thirsty for adventure and action. They were also irresponsible, ignorant, and easy to manipulate and prone to violence. Only they could give Mao the immense force that he needed to terrorize the whole society, and to create a chaos that would shake and then shatter, the foundation of the Party.'⁷⁰

In August 1966 millions of Red Guards suddenly emerged, like a storm sweeping across China.⁷¹ The desire for indulgence latent in the youngsters' immature minds was also suddenly unleashed. All of the Chang children except the youngest son joined the Red Guard organizations. One of Jung Chang's younger brothers, Xiao-hei, was only 12 years old when he became a Red Guard, and he twice took part in the beating of teachers. Jung Chang told her readers that the nature of the Red Guard phenomena was simple: being in the Red Guard meant the freedom to live away from home, stay up all night, and have power over adults. Jung Chang's sister Xiao-heng and brother Jing-ming set out on a long tour around the country with their friends. They were away from home for months.⁷²

The Red Guards' violent power was first displayed on the night of August 20. A storm of destruction swept over Wang Fu Jing, the busy shopping area in Peking, and chaos broke out on the roads of the capital. The world received the news with astonishment.⁷³

Red Guards were encouraged to make a pilgrimage to Peking. Food, accommodation, and transport were all free. Jung Chang also left home for Peking with her friends.⁷⁴ Sensible readers would be shocked by the life Jung Chang depicted the Red Guards leading in the capital. But she was serious as all the Red Guards were, copying posters on the Qinghua University campus, drilling in the open in freezing temperatures without an overcoat, washing the underpants of the soldiers who were in charge of her group to show her willingness to serve, and thanking Mao for having given her a small blanket which she shared with two people. Staying on the campus was intensely uncomfortable, however. Urine and loosened excrement from the toilets flooded the tiled floor, and the place was filled with the

smell of latrines. Some children from the countryside had fleas and lice. Jung Chang developed an unbearable itchiness. Yet no matter how uncomfortable, the journey had not been frightening in comparison with her experience just prior, of having witnessed her father taken away to "protective" custody. Living in close contact with thousands and thousands of Red Guards for well over a month, she never saw any violence, or felt terror. The gigantic crowds were fervent but also well disciplined and peaceful. People she met were friendly. The thought of home, however, was tinged with apprehension. Jung Chang's parents were being criticized as capitalist roaders that year. Eventually, on November 25th, she had the chance to see Mao at Tiananmen Square. But for all her hysterical excitement, all she could see was the very end of the motorcade.⁷⁵

After her return from Peking life was boring. There was no school. No school meant no control. 'What could we do with our freedom?' Jung Chang wrote. There was nothing to keep the youngsters occupied. No books, no music, no films, no theatre, no museum, no teahouses. Jung Chang told her readers that the Red Guards were attracted to Mao's call, not out of revolutionary fervor but out of boredom. Unlike other revolutions, during Mao's Cultural Revolution there was nothing to do. "Red Guardship," therefore, became many youngsters' full-time occupation. The only ways they could release their energy and frustration were in violent denunciations and physical and verbal battles with each other.⁷⁶

The situation was so complex and confusing that even for Jung Chang's father, a long-time Communist cadre, found it difficult to grasp and impossible to explain to his children. Nobody in the family was prepared for the Cultural Revolution; they had only a sense of impending catastrophe.⁷⁷ Jung Chang later learned that her father had told her mother that he had a duty to stop the disaster. He didn't understand the Cultural Revolution fully, but he was certain that what was happening was terribly wrong. In China, appealing to the leaders was the only way to voice grievances. Only Mao could change the situation, so the only thing Jung

Chang's father could do was to write to Mao.⁷⁸ This act, however, proved fatal to his career. Moreover, he became mentally deranged from the torments visited on him by his colleagues, mostly out of personal animosity over promotions, etc.⁷⁹ During his years in penal camp he suffered brutal beatings followed by hard physical labor under atrocious conditions, and his health deteriorated under the combination of intolerable mental and physical pressure. By the time he was 50 years old he looked to be 70.⁸⁰ He died in 1975, a year before the end of the Cultural Revolution. Jung Chang wrote, lamenting over her father's death, 'I thought of my father's life, his wasted dedication and crushed dreams. He need not have died. Yet his death seemed so inevitable. There was no place for him in Mao's China, because he had tried to be an honest man. He had been betrayed by something to which he had given his whole life, and the betrayal had destroyed him.'⁸¹

Conclusion

Throughout *China in the Year 2001* Han Suyin expressed her belief in Mao's assertion that the prevention of revisionism was vitally important to the continuation of the revolution. She was also firmly convinced that what China would be like in 2001 depended entirely on the Red Guards and the Cultural Revolution.⁸²

Jun Chang was 14 years old when the Cultural Revolution started and 24 when it ended in 1976. She spent three years of those ten in the Sichuan wilderness at the edge of the Himalayas. So did all of her family except the youngest brother. They were among the millions of urban dwellers who were exiled to the countryside. At the peasant commune she met "class enemies," the targets of attack in Mao's China. They were not evil as she had imagined they would be. To the young girl's eyes they were only sad people, unfairly treated, yet placid and resigned.⁸³ Even if we accept as correct the principle of the Cultural Revolution, which Han Suyin believed indispensable to the achievement of socialism in China, Jung Chang told us

that its enforcement was far from just and straightforward. Before the real-life fables provided by Jung Chang, Han Suyin's assertions ring hollow. Han Suyin's conviction was that the Cultural Revolution was China's way, however bewildering it might appear.⁸⁴ Only this massive experiment could let China prepare herself for the future. However, the people directly involved in the upheaval had to suffer the effects of every error and extremity of the leadership. Why was a person like Han Suyin, passionate and energetic yet very sensitive and vulnerable, so absorbed in supporting and defending the Cultural Revolution? Again, for Han Suyin it was a question of East versus West. She lived outside but clung to her privilege of being allowed to cross the border between Hong Kong and China. From the outside she saw how China was being isolated and contained. In its assiduous condemnation of China's alleged scheme to conquer the world, the West had lost sight of her position as a sovereign state. Han Suyin was determined to do justice by China. She devoted herself to speaking out in defense of Mao's grand experiment of remaking people, relieving them from fear and servility, letting them put their personal or national considerations aside and work for the good of the whole. During the whole process of the Cultural Revolution Han Suyin always stood on China's side knowing that the Chinese people and the government would make mistakes, but trusting them to detect those mistakes and work out their own solutions. Han Suyin did not separate the people from the government. To her what mattered was China in its entirety. 14 years later she contemplated her deeds questioning herself, 'to trust the Chinese people...or to run to denounce the failings and errors, the tyrannies and flaws?' Run to whom? To the West? The West which had contributed to China's downfall and misery in the past and difficulties in the present.⁸⁵ Han Suyin had stood firm and never deviated from her principles. However, according to Jung Chang's account, the one thing that had most characterized life under Mao was fear.⁸⁶ The difference between the two views, one from the inside, the other from the outside, seems irreconcilable. It is the difference between seeing

the individual and seeing a faceless mass.

Both bilingual writers, however, have told family sagas that share the same historical background, from feudalism to Communism. Their narrative styles are different: Jung Chang's is rather prosaic while Han Suyin's is brilliant. Yet they both introduce us to a world of Chinese familial love. The closeness they felt toward their fathers is surprisingly similar. Their self-sacrificing and loving uncles and aunts are interchangeable. Though their stories are extraordinary and the settings are exotic, the people are never strange. This is due in large part to their ability with the English language. Their narratives are free of the constraints of the translation. Howard Goldblatt and Elly Yeoung have written about the problems that translators of Chinese novels must overcome: the difficulty of faithfully rendering the writer's unique style, the difficulty of unclear passages or local expression, and the problems in deciphering noninflected language, which does not vary from general to specific, or from tense to tense.⁸⁷ Western readers do not always share the sensation of euphoria that the original Chinese version may give to Chinese readers. However, both Han Suyin and Jung Chang have been able to reach vast numbers of the Western readers directly. That is where their strength lies. We are now in an era of "World Fiction."⁸⁸ English literature is seeing a wave of writing by people whose language historically was not English. Authors with non-English names such as Han Suyin and Jung Chang are no longer anomalies. 'In place of the generic account of divorce in Hamstead or Connecticut, the international writers offered magically new kinds of subject matter and electric ways of expressing it.'⁸⁹ Jung Chang's 1991 bestseller, *Wild Swans* fits well into this trend. Han Suyin, a writer many years ahead of the trend, may eventually find her place there too, in the new genre of "international writing."

Notes

1. Han, Suyin, *Phoenix Harvest* (London : Triad Grafton, 1982), p. 14.
2. Ibid., p. 15.
3. Han, Suyin, *China in the Year 2001* (New York : Basic Books Inc., 1967), p. 2.
4. Lin, Yutang, *Moment in Peking* (New York : The John Day Company, 1939)
5. Lin, Yutang, *Peking Haori*, trans. Ryoichi Sato (Tokyo : Fuyo Shobo, 1972), p. 6.
6. Ibid., pp. 9 - 6
7. Han, Suyin, *The Morning Deluge : Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Revolution* (Boston : Little Brown and Company, 1972).
8. *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo), February 26, 1989, p. 5.
9. Loc. cit.
10. Chang, Jung, *Wild Swans* (London : Flamingo, Special overseas edition, 1992).
11. Han, Suyin, *Birdless Summer* (London : Panther Books Ltd., 1972), First published in 1968 in London.
12. Han, Suyin, *Destination Chunking* (St. Albans : Panther Books Ltd., 1976). First published in Great Britain, and U.S.A. in 1942.
13. Han, Suyin, *Birdless Summer*, op. cit., pp. 140 - 148.
14. Han, Suyin, *Destinaion Chunking*, op. cit., p. 7.
15. Han, Suyin, *The Crippled Tree* (St. Albans : Panther Books, Ltd., 1973) pp. 352 - 354. First published in Great Britain by Jonathan Cape Limited in 1965.
16. Ibid., p. 413.
17. Han, Suyin, *A Mortal Flower* (St. Albans : Panther Books Ltd., 1975). p. 29. First published in Great Britain by Jonathan Cape Limited in 1966.
18. Han, Suyin, *Destination Chungking*, op. cit., p. 8.
19. Han, Suyin, *Birdless Summer*, op. cit., pp. 152 - 154.
20. Han, Suyin, *A Many - Splendoured Thing* (St. Albans : Panther Books Ltd., 1975), p. 7. First published in Great Britain by Jonathan Cape Limited in 1952.
21. Han, Suyin, *My House Has Two Doors* (London : Triad Grafton, 1982), p. 16.
22. Han, Suyin, *Birdless Summer*, op. cit. pp. 14 - 15.
23. Han, Suyin, *My House Has Two Doors*, op. cit., p. 9.
24. Ibid., p. 86. The first edition of *A Many-Splendoured Thing* did not receive good reviews in *The Time* and *Observer*. It was the idea of Leonard, Han Suyin's second husband, to ask Malcolm MacDonald, High Commissioner for Southeast Asia at the time, to write a foreword.
25. Han, Suyin, *A Many-Splendoured Thing*, op. cit., p. 9.

26. Han, Suyin, *My House Has Two Doors*, op. cit. p. 22 and *Birdless Summer*, op. cit., pp. 232-233. Han Suyin bought her daughter Yunmei from a Sichuan woman. The price was one thousand dollars. Yunmei was a year-and-a-half old. Callous as it may seem, Han Suyin's act allowed the baby to live rather than die of starvation. In her later works we find Han Suyin being a devoted and loving mother.
27. Han, Suyin, *My House Has Two Doors*, op. cit., p. 11.
28. Cheng, Nien, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (London : Grafton, 1987), p. 153.
Nien Cheng, Han Suyin's classmate at Yanching University, was in Hong Kong in 1949. She went back to China with her daughter Meiping in response to her husband's request, a decision which she bitterly regretted later as it was, she wrote, the direct cause of her daughter's tragic death. Meiping was beaten by the Red Guards and died in a pool of blood.
29. Han, Suyin, *A Mortal Flower*, op. cit., p. 254 and *The Crippled Tree*, op. cit., p. 208 and pp. 362 - 363. Han Suyin wrote about the 'agony of shame' she had experienced when her mother did one wrong thing after another at a dinner party held at Pao's father's palace : dropping pieces of food back into the main dish, refusing wine, eating too much of the first course. (Pao later became her first husband.) Yet it was not so much what her mother did as that every gesture, every move, every word was wrong, excruciatingly wrong. Her mother's Chinese sounded very bad. She got the tones all wrong and so ended up saying something quite different from what she meant. Han Suyin's father worked on the Lunghai Railway under Belgian engineers. As he was a Chinese he was never promoted to the high positions that Europeans, sometimes far less competent than himself, could hold. His salary could never be that of a European but at most a quarter, or a third. As for Marguerite, she was the wife of a Chinese, and the wives of the Belgian engineers looked down on her and would not receive her. Marguerite constantly spoke of leaving China, of going back, but she never did until a final cataclysm made the choice for her.
30. Han, Suyin, *Birdless Summer*, op. cit., p. 14.
31. Han, Suyin, *The Crippled Tree*, op. cit., p. 205.
32. Ibid., p. 269.
33. Ibid., p. 270.
34. Ibid., p. 320.
35. Ibid., p. 15.
36. Han, Suyin, *Birdless Summer*, op. cit., p. 25.
37. Chang, Jung with Jon Halliday, *Mme Sun Yatsen* (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books Ltd., 1986).
38. *A Political History of Japanese Capitalism, Japanese Imperialism Today, Sirk on Sirk*, and others.

39. *TIME*, October 28, 1991, p. 55, *New Yorker*, February 10, 1992, pp. 95 - 98, *Newsweek*, December 14, 1991, p. 54. Excerpts from 16 newspapers which praised *Wild Swans* and Jung Chang's talent as a writer are printed on the inside and outside of the book covers.
40. *New Yorker*, op. cit., p. 96. Naomi Bliven wrote that 'Ms. Chang is a good describer of landscapes and cityscapes as well as of people, and the impression I get from travelling with her and her relatives across the century and the nation is that China isn't a poor country but, rather a rich country pauperized by hundreds of years of misgovernment.'
41. Chang, Jung, *Wild Swans*, op. cit., p. 292.
42. Ibid., pp. 190 - 192.
43. Ibid., pp. 233 - 234.
44. Ibid., pp. 608 - 609.
45. Ibid., p. 609 and p. 611.
46. Ibid., pp. 664 - 668.
47. Nien Cheng, the author of *Life and Death in Shanghai* is one of those survivors.
48. Han, Suyin, *China in the Year 2001*, op. cit.
49. Han, Suyin, *My House Has Two Doors*, op. cit., p. 139.
50. Han, Suyin, *China in the Year 2001*, op. cit., v.
51. Han, Suyin, *My House Has Two Doors*, op. cit., pp. 401 - 402.
52. Han, Suyin, *China in the Year 2001*, op. cit., p. 3.
53. Ibid., pp. 1 - 33.
54. Ibid., p. 40.
55. Ibid., p. 41.
56. Ibid., p. 66.
57. Chang, Jung, *Wild Swans*, op. cit., pp. 291 - 293. Jung Chang wrote about her childhood experience of screwing up her eyes to search every inch of ground for broken nails, rusty cogs, and any other metal objects to feed into furnaces to produce steel. Unfortunately, the effort produced only useless scraps.
58. Han, Suyin, *China in the Year 2001*. op. cit., pp. 77 - 78.
59. Ibid., p. 74.
60. Ibid., pp. 168 - 169.
61. Ibid., p. 170.
62. Ibid., p. 172.
63. Ibid., p. 181. "We must arm ourselves against ourselves." Mme. Soong Chingling told Han Suyin in an interview in 1966.
64. Ibid., pp. 187 - 188.
65. Han, Suyin, *Phoenix Harvest*, op. cit., p. 208.
66. Ibid., p. 55.

67. *Newsweek*, op. cit., p. 54.
68. Chang, Jung, *Wild Swans*, pp. 368 - 370.
69. Ibid., pp. 381 - 383.
70. Ibid., p. 375.
71. *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo), August 22, 1966, p. 1.
72. Chang, Jung, *Wild Swans*, op. cit., pp. 412 - 413.
73. *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo), August 23, 1966, p. 1.
74. Chang, Jung, *Wild Swans*, op. cit., p. 414.
75. Ibid., pp. 416 - 418.
76. Ibid., p. 482.
77. Ibid., p. 373.
78. Ibid., p. 395.
79. Ibid., pp. 431 - 432.
80. Ibid., pp. 589 - 590.
81. Ibid., p. 637.
82. Han, Suyin, *China in the Year 2001*, op. cit., p. 191.
83. Chang, Jung, *Wild Swans*, op. cit., pp. 561 - 562.
84. Han, Suyin, op. cit., p. 204.
85. Han, Suyin, *My House Has Two Doors*, op. cit., p. 401.
86. Chang, Jung, op. cit., p. 675.
87. Hsiao, Hung, *The Field of Life and Death, and Tales of Hulan River*, trans. Howard Goldblatt and Ellen Yeoung (Indiana University Press, 1979), xi.
88. "The Empire Writes Back." *TIME*, February 8, 1993, pp. 40 - 45.
89. Ibid., p. 43.