

# Cultural revolution in wild swans: three daughters of china

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China is a memoir of three generations of Chinese women from Imperial China through and beyond the Cultural Revolution. Chang's grandmother was a warlord's concubine. Her gently raised mother struggled with hardships in the early days of Mao's revolution and rose, like her husband, to a prominent position in the Communist Party before being denounced during the Cultural Revolution. Chang herself marched, worked, and breathed for Mao until doubt crept in over the excesses of his policies and purges.

Born just a few decades apart, their lives overlap with the end of the warlords' regime and overthrow of the Japanese occupation, violent struggles between the Kuomintang and the Communists to carve up China, and, most poignant for the author, the vicious cycle of purges orchestrated by Chairman Mao that discredited and crushed millions of people, including her parents. Jung Chang has said that her intention in writing Wild Swans was to show how the Chinese people, and in particular the women in her family, " fought tenaciously and courageously against impossible odds.

The book is, indeed, a testimony to the strength and determination of herself, her mother and her grandmother and their resourcefulness in recreating themselves time and again in the face of suffering, humiliation and disillusionment. Personal and historical stories interweave and the stories of these women and their families act as a lens through which we gain further insight into the turbulent history of twentieth century China. One such insight involves the treatment of women in Chinese society through the

years. There are no stunning revelations here but there are many horrific reminders.

The grandmother's early life reveals a litany of horrors, such as the torture which was the custom of foot binding and the slavery and hardship that was the lot of the concubine. Chang's mother endures a different kind of hardship, one born of her husband's unbending principles and her own loyalty to a warped ideology. At eighteen, and despite the fact that she is pregnant, she is forced to walk a journey of one thousand miles through five mountain passes, while her husband, a senior officer in the communist guerrilla army, rides in a jeep.

He insists that she must walk lest he be accused of favouritism. The miscarriage that results does not, however, diminish the fanaticism which induced it, and it is not until his idealism has been totally shattered that he begins to realise the pain endured for its sake. This tragedy of collapsed idealism and disillusionment lies at the heart of *Wild Swans*. Chang's parents' dogged loyalty is rewarded by punishment and humiliation when the fear, through which control was maintained, infects the movement itself in the form of paranoia and suspicion.

Jung Chang herself moves through the stages of allegiance, confusion and eventual disillusionment as the true nature of Maoism begins to reveal itself. Her father, now a victim of his own inflexibility, dies tormented, while Jung Chang and her mother find ways of using their experience to forge new lives for themselves. In fiction, such victory over evil might be considered

improbable. In reality, it is nothing short of a miracle. The genre of this novel is autobiography, which is realistically and vividly told.

There are some very vivid and warm insights given of human relationships and love. The need for security and family is vividly evoked and subtly rendered. It forms a very faithful record and history of some of the worst atrocities in China, a regime that showed itself to be totally self-destructive at the end. The narrative is brisk and fluid. At times the narrative verges on something similar to a journalist's report. The conclusion however is optimistic.

Some of the values, which are portrayed in this book, are love, family life, loyalty, courage and a belief in the essential dignity of the human being. This novel written by Jung Chang traces the life of three generations of her family. Set in China it gives us an insight into almost eighty years of the cultural history of that country, beginning in the year 1909 and moving up to the present day. The author a native Chinese now living in London builds the narrative around her own experiences and her family all of whose lives pass through different cultural periods in China's history.

The 'Three Daughters' of the title are Chang herself, her mother and her maternal grandmother and the novel chronicles the events of their lives spanning a century of China's stormy history. Chang begins the story by recounting her grandmother's experiences, in the 1920s, as concubine to a powerful warlord and her eventual escape from his household. She continues with the story of her mother's involvement, during the 1940s, 50s and 60s,

with the communist movement under Mao Tse Tung and her parents' fall from power and subsequent imprisonment under the same regime.

She goes on to recall her own experiences with the brutal Red Guards, her "re-education" as a farm and factory worker and her eventual departure from China to Great Britain in 1978. **Women's Place in Chinese Culture** The early part of the novel shows the position of the woman in this culture. Women had no position or point of view on things; they were used as objects, treated as concubines and treated with disdain by society. The development of Communism is treated with realism and evokes the most gruesome aspects of Mao's regime of dictatorship.

The reiterated use of physical violence becomes almost excessive at times. The destruction of Chinese culture, its seats of learning, books and artistic treasures are not only mindless but also shown to be satanic at times. The death of Mao frees the country somewhat from this state of oppression. Universities are free to function, intellectuals come to the fore again and people are free to articulate their opposition to the regime. Violence The novel reflects the depths of cruelty and unnatural behaviour, which the human being can descend to. Communism

All the horrors of life under Mao's regime are depicted in graphic detail, and the underlying corruption, which sparked off the Cultural Revolution, is vividly recorded. As the novel unfolds the profoundly sadistic features of Communism and especially the Cultural Revolution are exposed. Family life is slowly but systematically destroyed by suspicion and lies. Distrust and

Deceit are rampant in this society and everyone is used to undermine their neighbour. It is an oppressive and stifling atmosphere sustained by brutal torture and violence, where betrayal and slander are rife.