

Wild swans three daughters of china history essay



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Part I

Chapter 14 is titled “ Father is Close, Mother is Close, but Neither Is as Close as Chairman Mao”- The Cult of Mao (1964-1965). In this chapter, the year is 1964 and Er-Hong is feeling that Chairman Mao and his teachings are having a huge impact on her life. Mao at this time is making a comeback after the famine and has told the young to learn from Lei Feng, a soldier who did good deeds. Following Mao, Er-Hong became obsessed with following this practice. But really the essence of following Lei Feng was to love Mao as Lei did and submit yourself, totally to Chairman Mao. It was part of the education system to recall the miseries of pre-Communist China, so that children would hate the enemy and love Mao. Mao at this time, made himself, God like, few people ever got to see him. China became a power to be reckoned with and this gave the Chinese the pride they so badly needed. Because of their isolation from the outside, most wouldn't know of any of Mao's failures. The cult of Mao encouraged children to love Mao before their parents. People did not have freedom of thought. Mao also now thought his own political circle were liberalizing the economy and the society so in 1964, Mao stopped public dances and films from Hong Kong and defeminised women. At this time, schools were devoted to Mao's teachings. Because Er-Hong's name had the same pronunciation of the Sichuan expression “ faded red” she immediately asked her father to change her name. It was changed to Jung, which meant martial affairs. The ways of the army also entered the school curriculum which included learning to throw grenades. This was seen as a way to prepare for an American invasion. Mao ordered that people tear up gardens and lawns as he felt this was a habit of the bourgeois. When Jung

felt feelings of regret for doing this, she would feel guilty and self criticize and self accuse, this was a feature of Mao's China. He didn't want people to have thoughts of their own. By 1965, people felt that Mao had had many successes, China had recovered from the famine, they exploded their first atomic bomb, a demonstration of the country's scientific achievement, and they had been given ambassadorial status by France, all victories over the United States. Jung found herself constantly pledging her loyalty to Mao. The purpose of her life was to see Chairman Mao.

Chapter 15, " Destroy Firs, and Construction Will Look After Itself"- the Cultural Revolution Begins (1965-1966) uncovers the beginning of a time where plays, films, novels, and operas are emerging. The themes did not come out and directly attack the Party directly and were mostly using historical themes. Mao's wife felt these works were used to deliver messages against the regime through insinuation. Mao drew up lists to denounce artists and many were persecuted. Mao was now looking out for himself, he set up his own personal chain of command. In 1966, the People's Daily started a campaign to establish Mao's absolute authority. Teachers were denounced as subversives. Students even turned on teachers. In one case, at the school where Jung's mother was the leader of the work team, the students rounded up teachers and imprisoned them in a classroom they called the demon's class. Jung's mother, told the students they should respect their teachers and demanded they let them go. This was a brave thing for DeHong to do. It was a confusing period. In August 1966, millions of Red Guards emerged.

“ Soar to Heaven, and Pierce the Earth”- Mao’s Red Guards (June -August 1966” is the title of chapter 16. At this time, teenagers of high officials started the Red Guards it spread quickly across China. Mao wanted them to be his shock troops. He wanted them to terrorize and he knew they were easy to manipulate. They were to launch a war against anyone who dared to oppose Mao. They burned books, they beat up teachers and committed murders. They closed down teahouses, ransacked homes and tortured children. During this period, Jung feared what was happening and at first avoided political meetings. While off, a Red Guard group was formed at her school. Because of her background, she felt she must join. The others felt she was too soft and inactive to be accepted unless she toughened up. At this time, the Red Guard divided pupils into three categories, reds, blacks and greys, reds being from worker, peasant families, or revolutionary officials, blacks were from families of landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements and rightists and greys were from families of shop assistants or clerks. The black and grey students were subject to surveillance, and hard tasks like cleaning toilets, they had to bow their heads all the time. This affected Jung, she felt sad for her fellow pupils. One of her friends who had been very active in the Communist Youth League and now been branded a black. This drove the young girl to attempt suicide. Jung saw her suicide attempt which greatly affected her and caused her to take a sick leave from school.

“ Do You Want Our Children to Become Blacks” -My Parents Dilemma (August - October 1966) is the title of chapter 17. In this chapter, Jung’s father states he doesn’t understand the Cultural Revolution and doesn’t

agree with the Red Guards. He wants to write a letter to Mao to present his feelings but his wife, DeHong is afraid this would cause her to be destroyed and it would brand the children as “ blacks”. He feels as a Communist he must look after the needs of not only his children but all children and so he must write the letter to Mao. Soon, Yu-Fang would be set up to fall, he was asked to attend a meeting for the students of Sichuan University where they turned on him and he was labelled by the students as a capitalist-roader and diehard who opposed the Cultural Revolution. He was ordered to stay in his apartment for his own safety but he knew he had been set up and now was under house arrest. This confirmed that he would write and send the letter to Mao. Before he could do this, he was taken into custody by the Party. No one was to know where he would be taken. He went without protest as it was the decision of the Party and he would obey that decision. After he was taken, Jung’s mother DeHong took the family to Peking to deliver her husband’s letter and demand his release. Eventually he is released and he is sent to Peking to take DeHong back home. All this doesn’t stop Jung from joining the Red Guard, she still feels that this is the best way to serve Mao. Soon though she feels that the Red Guard is not all it says it is but a way for people to get revenge and for boys to meet girls.

Part Two

The following paragraphs will take a look at how Wild Swans shows the totalitarian nature of Mao’s China. The features of totalitarianism that will be discussed are the “ all powerful leader” and the “ use of terror”. In the late 1950’s Mao wanted to be the supreme leader. “ He had to scheme hard to preserve his power. In this he was a supreme master. His favourite reading,

which he recommended to other Party leaders, was a classic multi-volume collection about court power and intrigues. In fact, Mao's rule was best understood in terms of a medieval court, in which he exercised spellbinding power over his courtiers and subjects"

In 1964, the cult of Mao was growing. Mao made sure students were devoted to him and his works. He asked students to follow the way of Lei Feng who was a devoted soldier that " had boundless love and devotion to Chairman Mao."

Students vowed to follow the ways of Lei Feng and in turn Mao, " we vowed to follow Lei Feng and be ready ' to go up mountains of knives and down seas of flames,' to have our bodies smashed to powder and our bones crushed to smithereens,' to ' submit ourselves unquestionably to the control of the Great Leader, Mao'

Chairman Mao wanted his people to believe that he was the answer to their well-being; he wanted to make them fearful of another way of life. Schools would have older people come to the schools and tell the students how terrible life was before Mao. " They told us how boundlessly grateful they were to Chairman Mao for saving their lives and giving them food and clothing." This worked as students would fill the halls to listen and would leave in tears. " I came out of these sessions feeling devastated at what the Kuomintang had done, and passionately devoted to Mao."

To be the all supreme leader, Mao would deify himself. " Mao was sowing the seeds for his own deification, and my contemporaries and I were immersed in his crude yet effective indoctrination. It worked partly because Mao

adroitly occupied the moral high ground: just as harshness to class enemies was presented as loyalty to the people, so total submission to him was cloaked in a deceptive appeal to be selfless.”

The Chinese didn't have a religious or spiritual figure to worship so these religious feelings were directed to the emperor in years before and Mao during his time in power. He very rarely was seen in public which made him more mysterious. “ Mao, the emperor, fitted one of the patterns of Chinese history: the leader of a nationwide peasant uprising who swept away a rotten dynasty and became a wise new emperor exercising absolute authority.”

To be the all powerful leader, Mao ruled by keeping people fearful. People were afraid to have their own thoughts. “ Fear was never absent in the building of Mao's cult. Many people were reduced to a state where they did not dare even to think, in case their thoughts came out involuntarily.”

Children were taught to put Mao before their parents or grandparents. In Wild Swans, Jung recalls that her New Year resolution was she would obey her grandmother but her father corrects her. “ You should not say that. You should only say ‘ I obey Chairman Mao.”

In 1964, Mao was not happy with a passive type of progress, he felt his Party was becoming too tolerant and that his opponents were making him seem incompetent. He needed to make change to insure he kept his absolute power. He exercised his power and teachings by taking away dances, Hong Kong films and made women dress in dull colors and insisted they cut their hair. He instilled fear in the people by telling them that the Americans were planning to invade and that youth must begin learning from the army. “

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Hand grenade throwing was also regarded as very important for obvious reasons. I felt that my classmates were questioning my resolve to fight the U. S. imperialists.”

Mao, at this time also insisted that all grass from lawns be removed, flowerbeds removed and no one was to have pets as all this was considered to be bourgeois. People obeyed this all powerful leader. Jung expressed her feelings on this, “ I was extremely sad to see the lovely plants go. But I did not resent Mao. On the contrary, I hated myself for feeling miserable. By then I had grown into the habit of self-criticism and automatically blamed myself for any instincts against Mao’s instruction.”

Mao, like other all powerful Totalitarian leaders when they felt threatened found ways to increase their power over the population. Mao set up his own personal chain of command, appointed people to control media sources with his messaging. “ Starting in June 1966, the People’s Daily, showered the country with one strident editorial after another calling for ‘ establishing Chairman Mao’s absolute authority.”

There was also the creation of the ‘ Little Red Book’, a book of quotations by Chairman Mao that was given to everyone to read from and cherish.

At this time, Mao also instilled fear as he started to denounce teachers, and had work teams out them to students as ‘ capitalist roaders.”

The Cultural Revolution brought with it, Mao’s Red Guard, using students to be his shock troops. Once again, he wanted to make sure he had absolute

power. " To achieve this he needed terror - an intense terror that would block all other considerations and crush all other fears."

The Red Guard was ready to take on this work for Mao. Their slogan reflected this, " We vow to launch a bloody war against anyone who dares to resist the Cultural Revolution, who dares to oppose Chairman Mao!" Here once again the use of terror to bring the Totalitarian leader his absolute power. The Red Guard's primary victims were teachers who they beat, tortured and sometimes murdered. Then the range of victims increased to include writers, artists, scholars who were condemned as " reactionary bourgeois authorities"

The rule of terror saw people being murdered, sent to labour camps or spied upon. The labelling of the population into the reds, the blacks and the grays also instilled fear. Things deteriorated, rebels evolved and people lived in fear. In Wild Swans, Jung's father states, " Maybe Chairman Mao feels he could not achieve his goal without turning the whole place upside down. He has always been thorough- and he has never been fainthearted about casualties."

Mao's was truly a totalitarian leader, his leadership covered the eight features of totalitarianism studied - especially his need to be an all powerful leader and to accomplish this he would rule in terror. In Wild Swans, Jung's father says in the midst of the reign of terror, " This cannot be a revolution in any sense of the term. To secure personal power at such cost to the country and the people has to be wrong. In fact, I think it is criminal."