

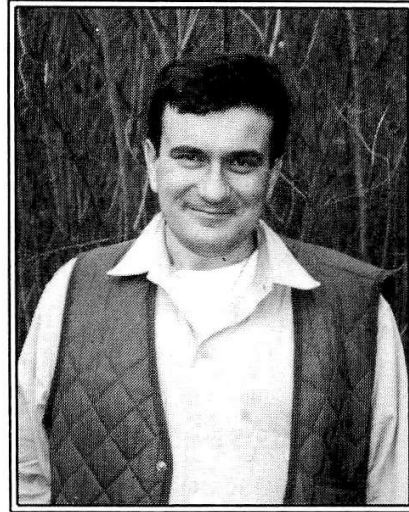
The Cultural Revolution

Women Tell Their Stories

By Gianni Criveller

1. A singular literary international phenomenon

In 1986, Nian Cheng's *Life and Death in Shanghai*, the gripping account of her six and one-half years of imprisonment during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), received an enthusiastic reception worldwide. She certainly did not know she was initiating a successful new literary trend. A stream of memoirs by other women survivors of the Cultural Revolution (officially the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution) who defected to the West followed, and in the last few years reached to more than a dozen. Some of them are of exceptional literary quality and some are popular successes. The most widely acclaimed is one of the earliest works of this genre, *Wild Swans Three Daughters of China*, by Jung Chang (1992). This monumental saga of three generations of women is a rare international success. It has been translated into 30 languages (including Chinese, although the book is banned in China) and over eight millions copies have been sold. *Red Azalea* (1995) by Anchee Min has also received critical acclaim and is considered a masterpiece by many commentators. This sensual memoir has been translated into more than a dozen languages.



These successful books play a pivotal role in creating a certain image of China and its political system in international public opinion. Many readers will associate the depravities of the Cultural Revolution with the unforgotten television sequences of the Tiananmen massacre. At the same time however, the admiration for the courageous struggle and resistance of the remarkable protagonists certainly invite people to learn more about the Chinese people and their

culture, since in the West China remains a rather mysterious and fascinating country.

This new literary phenomenon attracted not only the attention of a large readership, enthusiastic reviewers and some publishing houses with monetary interests, but it also attracted some literary critics who thought the new trend tiresome, redundant, or even partly unreliable. Some in the People's Republic of China do not consider these memoirs at all special; they have lived through similar experiences alongside millions of their compatriots. Others suspect that some authors are capitalizing on a lucrative opportunity, after the impressive success of the first autobiographies.

In the present article I will delineate some characteristics of these books, elaborate on the significance and consequences of the phenomenon, and evaluate the objections of the critics. At the end, I will briefly review each of the books, hoping to attract some new readers to this literature and stimulate critical comments.

2. What is special about these new memoirs?

The most common characteristics of these books are:

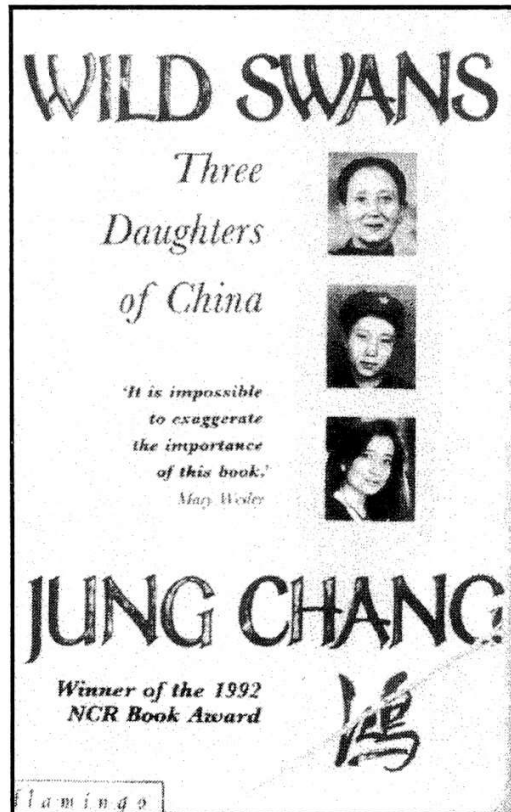
- They are almost exclusively written by women.
- These memories are centered on personal sufferings during the Cultural Revolution.
- The authors have left China, live in the West and wrote their memoirs almost exclusively in English.
- Most of the writers are urban women, generally from Shanghai or Beijing.
- They had access to higher education.
- At the end of their ordeals, they became quite successful in their professional life, although in a foreign country.

The books *Life and Death in Shanghai*, *Red Azalea*, *Morning Breeze* (1989) by Lo Fulang, *No Tears for Mao: Growing Up in the Cultural Revolution* by Niu-Niu, published in France in 1989 and then translated into English in 1994, *A Generation Lost* (1990) by Luo Ziping, *Red Flower of China* (1992) by Zhai Zhenhua, *The White-Haired Girl* (1996) by Sun Jaia, *Red Scarf Girl* (1997) by Jiang Jili and *Spider Eaters* (1997) by Rae Yang certainly embody the above mentioned characteristics.

Several other memoirs that have large and central sections dedicated to the Cultural Revolution, also tell of the lives of the

authors and their families before and after the Cultural Revolution. The list includes the above mentioned *Wild Swans*; *A Leaf in a Bitter Wind* (1997) by Ye Ting-xing; *Come Watch the Sun Go Home* (1998) by Chen Chen (the only book I have not read, since it is not yet available in Hong Kong); *Red China Blues* (1996) by Jan Wong (the story of a true believer in Mao, a Canadian-born Chinese young lady who goes to Beijing to join the Cultural Revolution).

A few other books, whose contents are centered on the Cultural Revolution should also be briefly mentioned in this article, since the authors are women. *In the Eye of the Typhoon, An American Woman in China during the Cultural Revolution*, by Ruth Earnshaw Lo, published in 1980, is probably the first autobiographical account of the Cultural Revolution by a woman. Ruth Lo was married to a Chinese Professor and spent 40 years in China. In 1984 Yue Daiyun, a teacher of Modern Chinese Literature at Beijing University, together with Carolyn Wakeman published *To the Storm: The Odyssey of a Revolutionary Chinese Woman*. As an intellectual, she was accused of being a rightist and suffered continuously from 1958 until 1978 when she was finally restored to the Communist Party and to her teaching post at Beijing University. *Caught in a Tornado: A Chinese American Woman Survives the Cultural Revolution* is the experience of Wen Zengde as told to James R. Ross (1994). *The Dragon Pearl, Growing up among China's Elite* (1994) by Sirin Phathanothai tells the unusual story of a Thai girl raised in Beijing under the direct care of Zhou Enlai. In 1996 American-based Shanghai-born writer Wang Pin wrote *Foreign Devil*, a sometime-autobiographical and critically appreciated novel on the Cultural Revolution. In 1997 He Dong, a Beijing born poet and writer living in Norway, published *Ask the Sun: Stories of Childhood in the Cultural Revolution*. In these six tender and chilling tales, He Dong describes a childhood in desperate times,



a generation that grew up during the Cultural Revolution, under the rule of their "sun," Chairman Mao. The children in these stories are both innocents and accomplices.

3. Why is this genre of memoirs written almost exclusively by women?

To my knowledge there are only a few English accounts of the Cultural Revolution written by men writers who have moved to the West. The first, which appeared in 1983, is *Son of the Revolution*, written by Liang Heng (together with Judith Shapiro). In 1987 Gao Yuan followed suit with *Born Red: A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution*. This book received little critical acclaim. In 1997 Zhang Songnan published *Cowboys on the Steppes*, a book for children, which illustrates his brother's journal written in the steppes of Inner Mongolia during the Cultural Revolution. The last to appear is Zhu Xiaodi's *Thirty Years in a Red House* (1998). I have excluded here the works of noted dissidents like Wei Jingshen, whose letters are collected in the volume *The Courage to Stand Alone* (1997) and Harry Wu, who has three books on the English market: *Laogai—The China Gulag*, *Bitter Winds* and *Troublemaker* (1997).

Why then were these personal memoirs written almost exclusively by women? I do not have a clear explanation. Perhaps this phenomenon has something to do with the deeply intimate and emotional content of these memoirs. Maybe Chinese women are more inclined than their male counterparts to share their inner wounds and their feelings. Perhaps they are sufficiently humble to expose their weaknesses. The history of literature, in both the East and West, reveals that women were never encouraged to indulge in literary pursuits, but when they did write, they often chose the autobiographical form. The fact that the writers come from the major cities is not surprising since that is where educational opportunities are more available. Rural women from remote villages would probably offer very different but certainly no less interesting accounts of the Cultural Revolution. But we still do not have such a literature. In the meantime it is fortunate that we have many works of this genre, previously quite rare on public market, both in and outside of China.

4. Memoirs from the exiles

The writers of these memoirs are all currently living in the West. Some of them are in a self-imposed exile. The problematic

background of the large community of overseas Chinese is also an important factor in analyzing these personal accounts. For overseas Chinese, shared experiences are probably meant to give meaning to their past, and add comfort to a life of isolation and recrimination.

Being away from home may offer more freedom of expression and evaluation than publishing in China. For some, their writings may be the source of further estrangement from China (as for example, may be the case with *Red China Blues* and *A Leaf in a Bitter Wind*). In fact these books are not published nor sold in China, although some of the authors continue to return home for a visit.

The Cultural Revolution has been labeled as a ‘national tragedy’ by the same Chinese government. In some Chinese media the words Cultural Revolution are put in quotation marks, “Cultural Revolution”. This is, like saying that the 10 years of ‘internal turmoil’ do not deserve to be called a cultural revolution. Therefore most of these memoirs are not politically incorrect and they may well obtain the permission to be distributed in the People’s Republic of China.

5. The literature of the wound in China

What relationship is there between Chinese literature in Mainland China and this new genre of autobiography? During the Maoist period literature and politics were at odds. At the end of the seventies and early eighties, after the fall of the Gang of the Four, Chinese literature resumed its journey. The new Chinese writers expressed their painful experiences during the Cultural Revolution, when being an artist and an intellectual was considered nothing less than a crime. This form of writing was called the *Literature of the Wound*, from the title of the first and most important of these novels, *The Wounded*, by Lu Xinhua. A collection of 8 stories by 7 authors (all male) of this new genre was translated into English and published in Hong Kong as early as 1979. Ma Bo (a pseudonym) wrote the powerful and unconstrained memoir of the Cultural Revolution, *Blood Red Sunset*, which was a best seller in China (more than 400,000 copies were sold). The English translation (by Howard Goldblatt) was published in 1995. Another powerful novel on the Cultural Revolution is *Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom* (English translation published in 1996) by Feng Jicai. The same Feng Jicai is

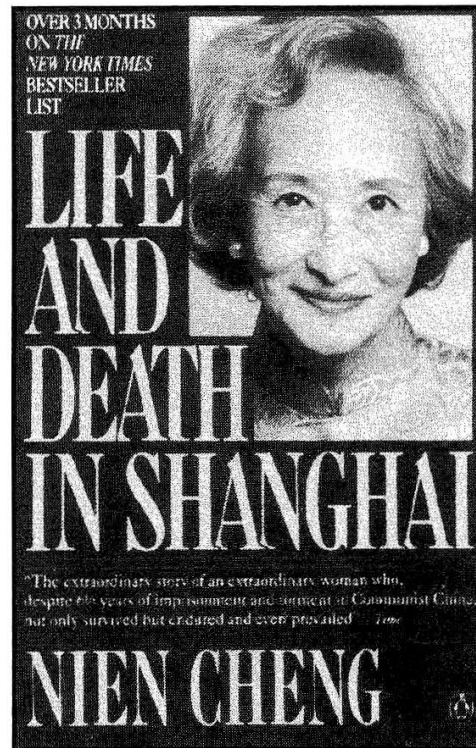
the author of *Ten Years of Madness: Oral Histories of China's Cultural Revolution*. The English translation appeared in 1996.

In the 1980s the Chinese 'new realism' gave birth to new forms of literature: the Literature of the Lost Generation (or Sent Down Youth, which is the generation destroyed by the Cultural Revolution); the Searching for Roots Literature, the Literature of the Factory, of the Reportage, of the Avant-garde. Some of these writings are available to English readers. The Beijing based Chinese Literature Press publishes the English translation of the most acclaimed

Chinese works in the Panda Books series. The same Institute publishes the magazine *Chinese Literature* (Fiction, Poetry, Art) whose purpose is to present Chinese contemporary literature to the Western readers. In Hong Kong the magazine *Renditions* translates and publishes Chinese writings. The 1987 issue, dedicated to contemporary women writers, was a collection of eighteen works, the majority of which are from the Mainland. The University of Hawaii Press (Honolulu) published the series *Fiction from Modern China*, that includes the novel *Chaos and All That* by Liu Sola and *The Remote Country of Women*, by Bai Hua (a male writer). In 1995 Wen Chihua, a female freelance writer, published *The Red Mirror, Children of the Cultural Revolution*. This interesting collection of interviews includes 14 stories (the one by Wen Chihua is told in the *Introduction*) of children of intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution. These children are still living in China.

6. Women writers in Mainland China

The first Chinese woman writer to bring to public attention the horrors of the Cultural Revolution was Chen Ruoxi, from Taiwan (an English translation of her-collection of short stories appeared in 1992). In the Mainland the first women to write stories about the suf-



ferings of the Cultural Revolution were Zhang Jie (the author of *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, a widely read and controversial novel whose English translation appeared in 1995) and Shen Rong, author of *At Middle Age*. In the early 1980s several other women writers followed suit. The above mentioned Liu Sola is an enigmatic artist and author of the 'irreverent novel' *Chaos and All That*, originally written in Chinese, and published in Hong Kong but not in Mainland China. Wang Anyi writes on socially controversial themes. Leung Laifong characterizes post-Mao women as more powerful, sensitive to social reality, and rebellious than their male counterparts. Her female characters frequently encounter difficulty in regaining their feminine self due to their experience of the Cultural revolution. Zhang Xinxin's work *Dreams of Our Generation* appeared in English translation in 1993. Can Xue is considered the most radical non-representational and 'post-modern' among China's contemporary women writers: *The Embroidered Shoes*, a translated-collection of her stories, was published in 1997. Other women writers are Chen Naishan, Ding Ling, Zhu Liu, Dai Qing, et al.

These mainland women writers include themes dealing with the Cultural Revolution in their novels, but their artistic horizons extend far beyond that. As pioneers working in a difficult artistic environment they are keen to experiment with new ideas and literary forms. One of the main characteristics of their works is the diversity in interest, style and basic outlook (see *Renditions*, numbers 27&28, p. 9).

7. The Lost Generation

As we saw above, one of the English-written memoirs is entitled *A Generation Lost*. Most of the protagonists of the memoirs are part of the Lost Generation: they were 'sent down' to the countryside to spend many precious years of their youth on communal farms, devoid of any human warmth or compassion. They all express a tremendous frustration and deep sense of being cheated of their youth, a huge waste of human lives, idealistic energy and intellectual resources. Their lives were filled with long, tedious hours of back breaking labor and endless and senseless political sessions. They were supposed to learn from the peasants, only to find out that, most of the time, they were not welcomed. The peasants considered the inexperienced and unmotivated city youth a burden, with whom they

had to share the little available food. Wen Chihua describes in the following desolate words the wounds of a lost generation of city-born-and-raised youth (*The Red Mirror*, p. 28): “Many of these unfortunates wound up staying in the countryside for more than ten years before they finally managed to get back to the city. Many more were unable to become urban citizens again even after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Some lost hope of returning to their urban lives and stayed, marrying peasants to survive the hardship and trying to make a life for themselves in the remote areas. Other youths died in the countryside, lost their parents, becoming lonely rural ghosts. The 1970s quietly watched countless families become empty nests, their foundations crumbling. ... During the Cultural Revolution so many were killed, so many were wounded, and far more were distorted under the same ideological slogans. The Revolution was a giant burning furnace that fired our souls and our dreams but left only dust when the fires burned down.”

A direct and in-depth comparison between Chinese women writers on the Cultural Revolution in and outside China, although highly interesting, goes beyond the scope of this paper. I will just mention here that there are obvious common characteristics between the Chinese ‘new realism’ of the Literature of the Wound and of the Lost Generation and the memoirs written in English that are the object of this study. These personal memoirs may well be considered a new wave of the ‘literature of the wound,’ since they witness to the healing process of a generation of overseas Chinese dealing with the consequences of the tragic epic of their lost youth.

8. Honest autobiographies?

‘How can I remember every sentence we ever spoke ten years ago?’ Nien Cheng asked her interrogator (in *Life and Death in Shanghai*). The same question was turned against her, when some expressed doubts about the authentic-



ity of parts of accounts that took place 20 or 30 years before and now recounted in a long, detailed form, as if the author possesses a transcription of the same. It should not be forgotten, however, that the report of long backdated conversations in personal memoirs, including that of the Soviet Gulag, enjoys a long tradition

Others have asked if the authors give a sincere account of every side of the story, since some characters seem recurrent: evil officials, dominant parental figures, unjustified persecutions and the betrayal of friends. After reading these books, I have to say that I do not agree with these criticisms. Most of the time the authors describe themselves with palpable objectivity, recording also their own weaknesses, false denunciations, betrayals and crimes. The historical background in which the autobiographies are set is accurate and reliable. Of course, we were not there to see what happened, but through their stories the authors instill into the soul of the reader an undeniable sense of truthfulness and honesty. I found these memories very well written, comprehensive, moving and inspiring. As a reader I could not help but feel a great respect and admiration for the struggle and endurance of the authors.

9. Stories of ordinary and extraordinary madness

Some people, as mentioned above, accuse these memoirs of becoming a fashionable trend, with little novelty, "If you have read one, you have read them all." I do not agree with this. Although I know the chronicle of the Cultural Revolution down to minute details, I never found these stories repetitive. Each one brings a new small or bright light that helps deepen our understanding of people and events. In *Life and Death in Shanghai*, Nien Cheng powerfully describes the dynamics and the tortures practiced in an ideological detention. *Red China Blues* offers a unique experience of a Chinese woman educated in both a Western capitalist and Chinese communist environment. In the same excellent memoir, one can analyze how both the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen massacre are two sides of the same coin: the ideology of one-party leadership, the absolute power of the Emperor in charge. *Wild Swans* and *The Dragon's Pearl* stop short of denouncing the evil of the 1989 massacre. Jan Wong of *Red China Blues* provides a deeply emotional account of her personal witness of the 1989 tragic killings and the brutal repression that followed. It is also a candid witness to human psy-

chology: everyone who has gone through ideological changes will see themselves through Jan Wong's writings.

The Dragon's Pearl offers a special portrait of Zhou Enlai, entrusted to care for and protect a Thai child offered to the Chinese leadership as a goodwill gesture by a leading Thai politician. Even the same Premier Zhou could not spare his beloved Thai guest, whom he considered as a daughter, from the cruel attacks of the Red Guards. *Red Azalea's* protagonist Anchee Min is (unwillingly) involved with the faction of the universally despised Jiang Qing. Anchee Min somehow managed to present a less inhumane portrait of Mao's wife. Rae Yang (*Spider Eaters*) narrates that she, at the head of a Guangzhou Red Guard group, criticized the then First Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang to his face for his tolerance of capitalism.

The case of a foreigner long settled in the Chinese milieu (Ruth Earnshaw spent 40 years in China, mainly as Language Teacher in Zhongshan University, Guangzhou) and tormented during the Cultural Revolution is described in *In the Eye of the Typhoon*. The sad story of Wen Zengde (1900-1988) is told by James R. Ross in *Caught in a Tornado*. She was a Chinese American woman who returned to China in 1956 to teach English in Shanghai. Like Nien Cheng of *Life and Death in Shanghai*, Wen refused to confess to charges of espionage, and, in spite of her old age, she endured years of imprisonment, forced labor, interrogations and beatings by the

Red Guards.

Some of the stories are from women with the right *red* roots: *Wild Swans*, *Red Flower of China*, *Spider Eaters*. Their parents, and later they themselves were devoted communists, but they were not spared from persecution. Another group of memoirs is from the five *black* categories (landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements and rightists): *Red Scarf Girl* (a book meant for children), *A Leaf in the Bitter Wind*, *The White-Haired Girl*. Those who belonged to this group had to



struggle against the absurd assumption that every member of a black family automatically harbors the same anti-revolutionary attitudes and are all equally guilty.

10. Forces of the good, forces of the evil

These stories prove that the power of the human spirit is much stronger than the dark forces of evil, hate and oppression. Our admiration is captured by the strong attachment of the protagonists to family bonds, to the value of friendship, to a basically honest and decent outlook of human cohabitation, to life and hope. This is especially apparent in *Life and Death in Shanghai*, *Red Scarf Girl*, *The White-Haired Girl*, *Spider Eater* and *A Leaf in the Bitter Wind*.

The memoirs reveal also how complex and contradictory are both history and the human spirit. If they are victims, the authors are also persecutors: in *Red China Blues* (e.g., the protagonist denounces a classmate), in *Spider Eaters*, *Morning Breeze* and especially *Red Flower of China* we see them siding with those who cause humiliation, suffering, desperation and death.

Zhai Zhenhua, the protagonist of *Red Flower of China*, tells about her role as leader of one of the Red Guards' gangs who raided Beijing homes during the so-called Red Terror Period (end of August to the end September 1966). During that single month of horror 1700 people were killed in Beijing alone, 33,600 family homes were raided and 84,000 people driven out of town. Being part of those activities, Zhai, then 15 years old, was directly responsible for the brutal beatings of dozens of people and the death of at least one person.

11. Who is responsible for the Cultural Revolution?

But how much were these teenagers really responsible for their actions? Were not their childish ingenuity and naïve enthusiasm simply manipulated by those who sparked the Cultural Revolution for own political gains? Besides, these young persecutors were soon to become victims themselves, sent to the countryside to live a life of forced labor, deprivation, constant harassment and frequent despair. It is clear that the Red Guards were not the ones responsible for the insanity of the Cultural Revolution. Was it the Gang of Four, as the official party line repeats? Was it Jiang Qing, as Sirin Phathanothai affirms in *The Dragon Pearl*, reporting her dramatic conversation with Zhou Enlai in 1969? Or Mao Zedong himself, as suggested by

Jung Chang in *Wild Swans*, reporting the wide-spread opinion that the Gang of Four was in reality the Gang of Five, and Mao himself was the fifth member? After reading a dozen of these books the reader may still be perplexed. Of course each one of these groups or individuals bears a great responsibility. But none of the explanations offers a completely satisfying answer.

The Red Guards were daily given orders about whom to attack by the 'authorities'; the Gang of Four and the same Jiang Qing had little power without Mao's consent and protection; Mao himself had to send hundreds of thousands of Red Guards and other radical groups to the countryside in order to limit their revolutionary furor and bring back order in the cities. It seems to have been a sort of vicious circle, where no one individual, nor faction, could control and manipulate the situation completely. The Cultural Revolution seems to defy any rational explanation or interpretation. It rather appears as an aberration, mysterious and rare, although not a totally isolated, human phenomenon wherein a large number of people step out of the boundaries of humanity. Minds stop functioning, deep-seated inner evils spring up and the most radical behaviors emerge. Those of the readers who find this description excessive or somewhat apocalyptic are invited to go back and read some of these memoirs, or talk directly with anyone entangled in the chaos of the Cultural Revolution.

12. The Cultural Revolution and the Holocaust: a common theological reflection?

Life and Death in Shanghai is the only memoir where a religious faith, in this case Christianity, plays a significant role in the author's resistance to her persecutors. Although not religiously inspired, these stories speak about suffering. And suffering is something that has to do with the ultimate meaning and direction of human life. The question of suffering always strongly evokes a question about God. Is it therefore possible to make theological reflections on the basis of these painful witnesses? We have already asked the seemingly unanswerable question: Who was responsible for such enormous stupidity, unspeakable violence and generalized lies? It strikes me that many European intellectuals and theologians asked the very same question about the tragedy of World War II and in particular of the Holocaust. It seems impossible to attribute such an immense tragedy only to the responsibility of an evil man, or an evil

party, or an evil ideology. There is something more, something humanly inexplicable. How is it possible that so many people acted like that? And where was God during the Holocaust? How can one still believe in God after Auschwitz? Many believers (especially Jews) think that there are no answers, and silence remains the only option. The recent polemic over a convent of Catholic Sisters and the erecting of a cross on the grounds of the concentration camp at Auschwitz is directly related to this dramatic debate. Those who oppose a religious presence in Auschwitz say: "It is just not possible and fair to pray or to plant a cross in Auschwitz, where God was absent."

Having followed this theological debate, I was quite stricken when, a few months ago, a non-Christian Chinese intellectual told me that the Cultural Revolution is for Chinese intellectuals what the Holocaust is for European theologians. How could it happen? How could it happen in our 5000 year old Chinese civilization, ask the Chinese intellectuals. How could it happen in our 2000 year old Christian Europe, ask Christian theologians. These common questions seem to legitimize an attempt at a theological reflection on the Cultural Revolution.

A Christian theologian reflecting on the Cultural Revolution should consider what a Theology of History might say about it. During the Cultural Revolution the Christians suffered alongside their countrymen and countrywomen. Millions of committed atheists, sincere communists, devoted Buddhists, Taoists, Christians, Muslims, good people, bad people, innocents and criminals, all shared the same suffering fate. Christians were not alone in that immense valley of tears. What does this mean for Christians in China? Can or should anyone strive for theological understanding of such an unusual event of collective human suffering?

The authors of the books analyzed in this article do not ask such questions. They may even find these reflections impertinent or esoteric. As the reader may have surmised, it is my specific theological interest that makes me seek answers to these questions. But I would rather leave this for future studies, hoping that some readers will contribute to this research.

Synopses of Various Works

In the Eye of the Typhoon: An American Woman in China During the Cultural Revolution

by Ruth Earnshaw Lo, Katharine S. Kinderman, 1980

Ruth Earnshaw Lo, An American and the wife of a Chinese professor of psychology, was a language teacher for 40 years in Chinese universities. She shares the shattering experience of her family and friends during the turbulent events of the Cultural Revolution.

Life and Death in Shanghai

Nien Cheng , 1986

The first successful and acclaimed women's memoir. In 1966 Red Guards looted her home; she was summarily imprisoned, and falsely accused of espionage. Despite harsh privation and even torture she refused to confess and was kept in solitary confinement for over six and one half years. She suffered not only from her deteriorating health but especially from anxiety about the fate of her only child, Meiping. When she was released, Cheng learned that her fears were justified: Meiping had been beaten to death when she refused to denounce her mother.

Cheng's book is a tribute to the human spirit. The Christian faith of the author played a decisive role in her resistance, although the same faith is mentioned with discretion. Cheng's widely acclaimed book is compared by some reviewers to the literature of the Gulag in Russia (like Solzhenitsyn), or to the writings of Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Dith Pran in Cambodia and other chroniclers of ideological fanaticism.

No Tears for Mao : Growing Up in the Cultural Revolution

by Niu-Niu, Peter & Enne Amann (Translator),
1989 in French, 1995 in English

As a toddler, Niu-Niu watched her house be destroyed, her parents--deemed criminals by the state--dragged away and imprisoned, and her grandfather beaten to death by the Red Guards. For eight years she lived with her grandmother, gathering trash and stealing, enduring ostracism, humiliation, hunger, and extreme poverty. Now an actress and filmmaker in France, Niu-Niu tells her story

with the voice of a child, which makes the events seem even more powerful and immediate.

Morning Breeze: Memoirs of a Red Guard Woman

by Fulang Lo, 1989.

The autobiography of a teenage leader of one of the largest Red Guard groups in Sichuan Province. She later became a singer, a student, a peasant, a teacher, and a self-taught "barefoot doctor." Her gradual disillusionment with Mao and the Cultural Revolution was devastating, but it did not turn her against China, nor did it destroy her will to continue helping her people.

A Generation Lost

By Luo Ziping, 1990.

Luo Ziping was 16 years old when the Cultural Revolution struck her intellectual family. This memoir is an account on how she struggled to keep what was left of her family alive and to continue the education they were being denied.

Wild Swans Three Daughters of China

Jung Chang , 1992

In *Wild Swans* Jung Chang recounts a gripping story of three generations of women in 20th century China. Jung's grandmother was a warlord's concubine with bound feet; Jung's mother was a committed communist, who married a dedicated Maoist guerrilla soldier. She, like her husband, rose to a prominent position in the Communist Party before being denounced during the Cultural Revolution. Chang herself was sent to the countryside to live as a peasant, serving without any training as a doctor and then as an electrician. Jung's description of the Cultural Revolution is quite severe: "The whole of China was like a prison. Every house, every street was watched by the people themselves. In this vast land, there was nowhere anyone could hide." Mao "... created a moral wasteland and a land of hatred."

Reviews are enthusiastic about this book. The forces of history and the exceptional talents of the young writer makes *Wild Swans* a landmark book and an exceptional success. More than 8 million of copies have been sold around the world. It has also been translated into more than 30 languages.

Red Flower of China

Zhai Zhenhua, 1994.

A Red Guard, daughter of two dedicated communists, recalls 1966, when, as a fifteen-year-old, the Cultural Revolution had transformed her "into a devil." She led a Red Guard brigade that tortured Beijing citizens branded counterrevolutionaries. She and her squad were responsible for numerous home raids, fatal beatings and for sending many into exile.

Her fervor gave way to bitter disillusionment when she saw the Red Guards purged and herself banished to the countryside in 1969 to do three years of hard labor and be "re-educated" by peasants. The book is full of haunting memories written both cynically and remorsefully. She blames the surfacing of her "evil, barbaric side" on her blind faith in Chairman Mao. This is a shocking account of how political brainwashing can induce converts to commit the most monstrous acts.

The Dragon's Pearl

Sirin Phathanothai, 1994.

This is the true story that begins with an eight-year-old Thai girl, Sirin Phathanothai, and her older brother, whose father was active in politics and highly connected. They were secretly sent to China in 1956 as a goodwill gesture of building bridges between the two countries. As wards of Premier Zhou Enlai, they spent their childhood behind closed doors among China's ruling elite. Sirin was later caught in the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, and even Zhou Enlai's protection could not spare her from persecution and suffering. A very unusual story, but the partial justification of the Tiananmen massacre at the end is disturbing.

Red Azalea

Anchee Min, 1995.

At sixteen, in the furor of the Cultural Revolution, Anchee Min is sent to a large communal Red Fire Farm. Life there is devoid of any human warmth or compassion, filled only with long, tedious hours of back breaking labor. There, despite the lack of privacy, she develops an emotional relationship with a woman she greatly admires. Surrounded by the danger of discovery, they yet become lovers. Anchee is chosen to audition for a role in a film titled "Red

Azalea", the story of the life of Jiang Ching (Mao's wife), heroine of the revolution. Here she makes the acquaintance of a man (the Supervisor) who is directing the film. Anchee and the Supervisor have some sort of an affair. When Chairman Mao dies, everything falls apart. The film "Red Azalea" is cancelled. Anchee returns to work as a set clerk. During her years of work at the studio she becomes the friend of a young Chinese actress Joan Chen. Through her contact with Joan Chen, Anchee Min does eventually manage to leave China and go to America.

Anchee Min's successful story is hailed as a masterpiece in the U.S. It has won critical acclaim and has been translated into 14 languages. The book is banned in China.

Red China Blues: My Long March From Mao to Now
Jan Wong, 1996.

This memoir starts in 1972, at the height of the Cultural Revolution, when Wong travels to China as one of only two Westerners permitted entrance to Beijing University. Having been raised in a middle-class family in Canada, Wong is naively devoted to Mao Zedong and determined to purge herself of bourgeois privileges. Her communist fervor is such that she even turns in a fellow student who asks for Wong's help in going to the United States. With the sudden political change after the death of Mao Zedong, she loses trust in Chinese Communism and decides to return to the West (1978).

Returning to China in the late eighties as a journalist for the *Toronto Globe & Mail*, she watches the massacre of Tiananmen Square from her balcony at the Beijing Hotel. Her description of the Tiananmen massacre is one of the most moving, tragic and vivid I have read. She also covers the tumultuous era of capitalist reforms under Deng Xiaoping.

With her Western upbringing and Chinese ancestry and her unusual life (her participation in the Cultural Revolution and witness of Tiananmen), Jan Wong offers an unique perspective, that makes *Red China Blues* one of the most fascinating reads for anyone interested in recent Chinese history. It is also a candid witness of how human psychology works: everyone who has gone through ideological changes will see themselves through Jan Wong's writings.

The White-Haired Girl: Bittersweet Adventures of a Little Red Soldier

by Jaia Sun, Douglas Childers (Contributor), 1996.

This memoir recounts the story of a girl coming of age during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. She was born in 1954 to vulnerable parents, accused and attacked of being "stinking intellectuals."

A Leaf in the Bitter Wind: A Memoir

Ye Ting-Xing, 1997.

The author, who is now a Canadian citizen, tells her story of life in 1960's China both during and after the Cultural Revolution. She describes the hardships brought by her parent's illnesses and the early death of her father, branded as a capitalist after the communist takeover. She endures bitterness and psychological torture on a farm during the Cultural Revolution. She would later be accepted into Beijing University and assigned to the Foreign Ministry as a translator. In 1987 she defected to Canada leaving her daughter behind. One of the most gripping among the memoirs I have read.

Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution

Jiang Jili, 1997

Jiang Jili's grandfather was once a landlord, therefore the home of the twelve year old Jili was searched and possessions taken or destroyed. Her father was imprisoned and her mother's health imperiled. With the detention of her father, Jili faced the most difficult choice of her life, whether wrongly to denounce her father or face hardship and discrimination. Told with simplicity, innocence and grace, this memoir is intended for children, and shows the great courage of a child and her family.

Spider Eaters: A Memoir

by Rae Yang, 1997.

Yang's parents, communist intellectuals who had been in favor with the leadership, were denounced during the so-called anti-Rightist campaigns of the 1950s. During the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Yang, a Red Guard, traveled throughout the country spreading revolutionary fever. Sent into the countryside, she worked on a collective pig farm. Disillusioned by the violence, repression, and hardship all around her, Yang eventually managed to leave China on a student visa for the United States.

Come Watch the Sun Go Home

by Chen Chen, 1998.

A pseudonymous account of life in China after the Communist victory, written by a woman who accompanied her family back to China from the US. An often harrowing account of a life lived in circumstances where tragedy, terror, and the surreal were mixed, by a woman who never lost her sanity or her sensitivity.

Caught in a Tornado: A Chinese American Woman Survives the Cultural Revolution

By James R. Ross, 1994.

This is the biography of Wen Zengde (1900-1988), a Chinese American woman who returned to China in 1956 to teach English in Shanghai. Wen's personal story of hope, determination, and survival during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) is the central focus of this riveting volume. Wen endured years of imprisonment, forced labor, interrogations, and beatings. Yet, unlike many of her colleagues, she refused to confess to charges of espionage and survived the brutalities of the Red Guards.

