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Mao: The Unknown Story

Jung Chang & Jon Halliday

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About the Book

Jung Chang's *Wild Swans* was an extraordinary bestseller throughout the world, selling more than 10 million copies and reaching a wider readership than any other book about China. Now she and her husband Jon Halliday have written a groundbreaking biography of Mao Tse-tung.

Based on a decade of research, and on interviews with many of Mao's close circle in China who have never talked before – and with virtually everyone outside China who had significant dealings with him – this is the most authoritative life of Mao ever written. It is full of startling revelations, exploding the myth of the Long March, and showing a completely unknown Mao: he was not driven by idealism or ideology; his intimate and intricate relationship with Stalin went back to the 1920s, ultimately bringing him to power; he welcomed Japanese occupation of much of China; and he schemed, poisoned and blackmailed to get his way. After Mao conquered China in 1949, his secret goal was to dominate the world. In chasing this dream he caused the deaths of 38 million people in the greatest famine in history.

Combining meticulous history with the story-telling style of *Wild Swans*, this biography makes immediate Mao's roller-coaster life, as he intrigued and fought every step of the way to force through his unpopular decisions. The reader enters the shadowy chambers of Mao's court, and eavesdrops on the drama in its hidden recesses. Mao's character and the enormity of his behaviour towards his wives, mistresses and children are unveiled for the first time.

This is an entirely fresh look at Mao in both content and approach. It will astonish historians and the general reader alike.

About the Authors

Jung Chang was born in Yibin, Sichuan Province, China, in 1952. She was a Red Guard briefly at the age of fourteen and then worked as a peasant, a 'barefoot doctor', a steelworker and an electrician before becoming an English-language student and, later, an assistant lecturer at Sichuan University. She left China for Britain in 1978 and was subsequently awarded a scholarship by York University, where she obtained a PhD in Linguistics in 1982 – the first person from the People's Republic of China to receive a doctorate from a British university. Her award-winning book, *Wild Swans*, was published in 1991.

Jon Halliday is a former Senior Visiting Research Fellow at King's College, University of London. He has written or edited eight previous books.

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List of Abbreviations in Text

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
Cominform	Communist Information Bureau
Comintern	Communist International
CP	Communist Party
8RA	Eighth Route Army
GRU	Glavnoye Razvedyivatelnoye Upravleniye (Chief Intelligence Directorate), Soviet Military Intelligence
N4A	New Fourth Army
ZZZ	Zhang Zhi-zhong

Note about Spelling in Text

Chinese personal names are given surname first. In some cases, where people have a very common surname, we refer to them by their given names after first mention. We have spelled the names so as to make them as distinctive and easily recognisable as possible. For those not in *pinyin* (the official Mainland system), the *pinyin* version is given in the index.

For place names, we have used *pinyin*, except for Peking (Beijing), Yen'an (Yan'an), Canton (Guangzhou), and the islands of Quemoy (Jinmen) and Matsu (Mazu).

Mao

The Unknown Story

Jung Chang & Jon Halliday

VINTAGE BOOKS
London



China

PART ONE

Lukewarm Believer

1 On the Cusp from Ancient to Modern (1893–1911; age 1–17)

MAO TSE-TUNG, WHO for decades held absolute power over the lives of one-quarter of the world's population, was responsible for well over 70 million deaths in peacetime, more than any other twentieth-century leader. He was born into a peasant family in a valley called Shaoshan, in the province of Hunan, in the heartland of China. The date was 26 December 1893. His ancestors had lived in the valley for five hundred years.

This was a world of ancient beauty, a temperate, humid region whose misty, undulating hills had been populated ever since the Neolithic age. Buddhist temples dating from the Tang dynasty (AD 618–906), when Buddhism first came here, were still in use. Forests where nearly 300 species of trees grew, including maples, camphor, metasequoia and the rare ginkgo, covered the area and sheltered the tigers, leopards and boar that still roamed the hills. (The last tiger was killed in 1957.) These hills, with neither roads nor navigable rivers, detached the village from the world at large. Even as late as the early twentieth century an event as momentous as the death of the emperor in 1908 did not percolate this far, and Mao found out only two years afterwards when he left Shaoshan.

The valley of Shaoshan measures about 5 by 3.5 km. The 600-odd families who lived there grew rice, tea and bamboo, harnessing buffalo to plough the rice paddies. Daily life revolved round these age-old activities. Mao's father, Yi-chang, was born in 1870. At the age of ten he was engaged to a girl of thirteen from a village about ten kilometres away, beyond a pass called Tiger Resting Pass, where tigers used to sun themselves. This short distance was long enough in those years for the two villages to speak dialects that were almost mutually unintelligible. Being merely a girl, Mao's mother did not

receive a name; as the seventh girl born in the Wen clan, she was just Seventh Sister Wen. In accordance with centuries of custom, her feet had been crushed and bound to produce the so-called 'three-inch golden lilies' that epitomised beauty at the time.

Her engagement to Mao's father followed time-honoured customs. It was arranged by their parents and was based on a practical consideration: the tomb of one of her grandfathers was in Shaoshan, and it had to be tended regularly with elaborate rituals, so having a relative there would prove useful. Seventh Sister Wen moved in with the Maos upon betrothal, and was married at the age of eighteen, in 1885, when Yi-chang was fifteen.

Shortly after the wedding, Yi-chang went off to be a soldier to earn money to pay off family debts, which he was able to do after several years. Chinese peasants were not serfs but free farmers, and joining the army for purely financial reasons was an established practice. Luckily he was not involved in any wars; instead he caught a glimpse of the world and picked up some business ideas. Unlike most of the villagers, Yi-chang could read and write, well enough to keep accounts. After his return, he raised pigs, and processed grain into top-quality rice to sell at a nearby market town. He bought back the land his father had pawned, then bought more land, and became one of the richest men in the village.

Though relatively well off, Yi-chang remained extremely hard-working and thrifty all his life. The family house consisted of half a dozen rooms, which occupied one wing of a large thatched property. Eventually Yi-chang replaced the thatch with tiles, a major improvement, but left the mud floor and mud walls. The windows had no glass – still a rare luxury – and were just square openings with wooden bars, blocked off at night by wooden boards (the temperature hardly ever fell below freezing). The furniture was simple: wooden beds, bare wooden tables and benches. It was in one of these rather spartan rooms, under a pale blue homespun cotton quilt, inside a blue mosquito net, that Mao was born.

Mao was the third son, but the first to survive beyond infancy. His Buddhist mother became even more devout to encourage Buddha to

protect him. Mao was given the two-part name Tse-tung. *Tse*, which means 'to shine on', was the name given to all his generation, as preordained when the clan chronicle was first written in the eighteenth century; *tung* means 'the East'. So his full given name meant 'to shine on the East'. When two more boys were born, in 1896 and 1905, they were given the names Tse-min (*min* means 'the people') and Tse-tan (*tan* possibly referred to the local region, Xiangtan).

These names reflected the inveterate aspiration of Chinese peasants for their sons to do well – and the expectation that they could. High positions were open to all through education, which for centuries meant studying Confucian classics. Excellence would enable young men of any background to pass imperial examinations and become mandarins – all the way up to becoming prime minister. Officialdom was the definition of achievement, and the names given to Mao and his brothers expressed the hopes placed on them.

But a grand name was also onerous and potentially tempted fate, so most children were given a pet name that was either lowly or tough, or both. Mao's was 'the Boy of Stone' – *Shi san ya-zi*. For this second 'baptism' his mother took him to a rock about eight feet high, which was reputed to be enchanted, as there was a spring underneath. After Mao performed obeisance and kowtows, he was considered adopted by the rock. Mao was very fond of this name, and continued to use it as an adult. In 1959, when he returned to Shaoshan and met the villagers for the first – and only – time as supreme leader of China, he began the dinner for them with a quip: 'So everyone is here, except my Stone Mother. Shall we wait for her?'

Mao loved his real mother, with an intensity he showed towards no one else. She was a gentle and tolerant person, who, as he remembered, never raised her voice to him. From her came his full face, sensual lips, and a calm self-possession in the eyes. Mao would talk about his mother with emotion all his life. It was in her footsteps that he became a Buddhist as a child. Years later he told his staff: 'I worshipped my mother . . . Wherever my mother went, I

would follow . . . going to temple fairs, burning incense and paper money, doing obeisance to Buddha . . . Because my mother believed in Buddha, so did I.' But he gave up Buddhism in his mid-teens.

Mao had a carefree childhood. Until he was eight he lived with his mother's family, the Wens, in their village, as his mother preferred to live with her own family. There his maternal grandmother doted on him. His two uncles and their wives treated him like their own son, and one of them became his Adopted Father, the Chinese equivalent to godfather. Mao did a little light farm work, gathering fodder for pigs and taking the buffaloes out for a stroll in the tea-oil camellia groves by a pond shaded by banana leaves. In later years he would reminisce with fondness about this idyllic time. He started learning to read, while his aunts spun and sewed under an oil lamp.

Mao only came back to live in Shaoshan in spring 1902, at the age of eight, to receive an education, which took the form of study in a tutor's home. Confucian classics, which made up most of the curriculum, were beyond the understanding of children and had to be learnt by heart. Mao was blessed with an exceptional memory, and did well. His fellow pupils remembered a diligent boy who managed not only to recite but also to write by rote these difficult texts. He also gained a foundation in Chinese language and history, and began to learn to write good prose, calligraphy and poetry, as writing poems was an essential part of Confucian education. Reading became a passion. Peasants generally turned in at sunset, to save on oil for lamps, but Mao would read deep into the night, with an oil lamp standing on a bench outside his mosquito net. Years later, when he was supreme ruler of China, half of his huge bed would be piled a foot high with Chinese classics, and he littered his speeches and writings with historical references. But his poems lost flair.

Mao clashed frequently with his tutors. He ran away from his first school at the age of ten, claiming that the teacher was a martinet. He was expelled from, or was 'asked to leave', at least three schools for being headstrong and disobedient. His mother indulged him but

his father was not pleased, and Mao's hopping from tutor to tutor was just one source of tension between father and son. Yi-chang paid for Mao's education, hoping that his son could at least help keep the family accounts, but Mao disliked the task. All his life, he was vague about figures, and hopeless at economics. Nor did he take kindly to hard physical labour. He shunned it as soon as his peasant days were over.

Yi-chang could not stand Mao being idle. Having spent every minute of his waking hours working, he expected his son to do the same, and would strike him when he did not comply. Mao hated his father. In 1968, when he was taking revenge on his political foes on a vast scale, he told their tormentors that he would have liked his father to be treated just as brutally: 'My father was bad. If he were alive today, he should be "jet-planed".' This was an agonising position where the subject's arms were wrenched behind his back and his head forced down.

Mao was not a mere victim of his father. He fought back, and was often the victor. He would tell his father that the father, being older, should do more manual labour than he, the younger – which was an unthinkable insolent argument by Chinese standards. One day, according to Mao, father and son had a row in front of guests. 'My father scolded me before them, calling me lazy and useless. This infuriated me. I called him names and left the house . . . My father . . . pursued me, cursing as well as commanding me to come back. I reached the edge of a pond and threatened to jump in if he came any nearer . . . My father backed down.' Once, as Mao was retelling the story, he laughed and added an observation: 'Old men like him didn't want to lose their sons. This is their weakness. I attacked at their weak point, and I won!'

Money was the only weapon Mao's father possessed. After Mao was expelled by tutor no. 4, in 1907, his father stopped paying for his son's tuition fees and the thirteen-year-old boy had to become a full-time peasant. But he soon found a way to get himself out of farm work and back into the world of books. Yi-chang was keen for his son to get married, so that he would be tied down and behave responsibly. His niece was at just the right age for a wife, four years

older than Mao, who agreed to his father's plan and resumed schooling after the marriage.

The marriage took place in 1908, when Mao was fourteen and his bride eighteen. Her family name was Luo. She herself had no proper name, and was just called 'Woman Luo'. The only time Mao is known to have mentioned her was to the American journalist Edgar Snow in 1936, when Mao was strikingly dismissive, exaggerating the difference in their ages: 'When I was 14, my parents married me to a girl of 20. But I never lived with her . . . I do not consider her my wife . . . and have given little thought to her.' He gave no hint that she was not still alive; in fact, Woman Luo had died in 1910, just over a year into their marriage.

Mao's early marriage turned him into a fierce opponent of arranged marriages. Nine years later he wrote a seething article against the practice: 'In families in the West, parents acknowledge the free will of their children. But in China, orders from the parents are not at all compatible with the will of the children . . . This is a kind of "indirect rape". Chinese parents are all the time indirectly raping their children . . .'

As soon as his wife died, the sixteen-year-old widower demanded to leave Shaoshan. His father wanted to apprentice him to a rice store in the county town, but Mao had set his eye on a modern school about 25 kilometres away. He had learned that the imperial examinations had been abolished. Instead there were modern schools now, teaching subjects like science, world history and geography, and foreign languages. It was these schools that would open the door out of a peasant's life for many like him.

In the later nineteenth century, China had embarked on a dramatic social transformation. The Manchu dynasty that had ruled since 1644 was moving from the ancient to the modern. The shift was prompted by a series of abysmal defeats at the hands of European powers and Japan, beginning with the loss to Britain in the Opium War of 1839–42, as the powers came knocking on China's closed door. From the Manchu court to intellectuals, nearly everyone agreed that the country must change if it wanted to survive. A host

of fundamental reforms was introduced, one of which was to install an entirely new educational system. Railways began to be built. Modern industries and commerce were given top priority. Political organisations were permitted. Newspapers were published for the first time. Students were sent abroad to study science, mandarins dispatched to learn democracy and parliamentary systems. In 1908, the court announced a programme to become a constitutional monarchy in nine years' time.

Mao's province, Hunan, which had some 30 million inhabitants, became one of the most liberal and exciting places in China. Though landlocked, it was linked by navigable rivers to the coast, and in 1904 its capital, Changsha, became an 'open' trading port. Large numbers of foreign traders and missionaries arrived, bringing Western ways and institutions. By the time Mao heard about modern schools, there were over a hundred of them, more than in any other part of China, and including many for women.

One was located near Mao: Eastern Hill, in the county of the Wens, his mother's family. The fees and accommodation were quite high, but Mao got the Wens and other relatives to lobby his father, who stumped up the cost for five months. The wife of one of his Wen cousins replaced Mao's old blue homespun mosquito net with a white machine-made muslin one in keeping with the school's modernity.

The school was an eye-opener for Mao. Lessons included physical training, music and English, and among the reading materials were potted biographies of Napoleon, Wellington, Peter the Great, Rousseau and Lincoln. Mao heard about America and Europe for the first time, and laid eyes on a man who had been abroad – a teacher who had studied in Japan, who was given the nickname 'the False Foreign Devil' by his pupils. Decades later Mao could still remember a Japanese song he taught them, celebrating Japan's stunning military victory over Russia in 1905.

Mao was only in Eastern Hill for a few months, but this was enough for him to find a new opening. In the provincial capital, Changsha, there was a school specially set up for young people from the Wens' county, and Mao persuaded a teacher to enrol him, even

though he was strictly speaking not from the county. In spring 1911 he arrived at Changsha, feeling, in his own words, ‘exceedingly excited’. At seventeen, he said goodbye for ever to the life of a peasant.

Mao claimed later that when he was a boy in Shaoshan he had been stirred by concern for poor peasants. There is no evidence for this. He said he had been influenced while still in Shaoshan by a certain P’ang the Millstone Maker, who had been arrested and beheaded after leading a local peasant revolt, but an exhaustive search by Party historians for this hero has failed to turn up any trace of him.

There is no sign that Mao derived from his peasant roots any social concerns, much less that he was motivated by a sense of injustice. In a contemporary document, the diary of Mao’s teacher, Professor Yang Chang-chi, on 5 April 1915 the professor wrote: ‘My student Mao Tse-tung said that . . . his clan . . . are mostly peasants, and *it is easy for them to get rich*’ (our italics). Mao evinced no particular sympathy for peasants.

Up to the end of 1925, when he was in his early thirties, and five years after he had become a Communist, Mao made only a few references to peasants in all his known writings and conversations. They did crop up in a letter of August 1917, but far from expressing sympathy, Mao said he was ‘bowled over’ by the way a commander called Tseng Kuo-fan had ‘finished off’ the biggest peasant uprising in Chinese history, the Taiping Rebellion of 1850–64. Two years later, in July 1919, Mao wrote an essay about people from different walks of life – so peasants were inevitably mentioned – but his list of questions was very general, and his tone unmistakably neutral. There was a remarkable absence of emotion when he mentioned peasants, compared with the passion he voiced about students, whose life he described as ‘a sea of bitterness’. In a comprehensive list for research he drew up in September that year, containing no fewer than 71 items, only one heading (the tenth) was about labour; the single one out of its 15 subheads that mentioned peasants did so only as ‘the question of labouring farmers intervening in politics’. From late 1920, when he entered the Communist orbit, Mao began

to use expressions like ‘workers and peasants’ and ‘proletariat’. But they remained mere phrases, part of an obligatory vocabulary.

Decades later, Mao talked about how, as a young man in Shaoshan, he cared about people starving. The record shows no such concern. In 1921 Mao was in Changsha during a famine. A friend of his wrote in his diary: ‘There are many beggars – must be over 100 a day . . . Most . . . look like skeletons wrapped in yellow skin, as if they could be blown over by a whiff of wind.’ ‘I heard that so many people who had come here . . . to escape famine in their own regions had died – that those who had been giving away planks of wood [to make coffins] . . . can no longer afford to do so.’ There is no mention of this event in Mao’s writings of the time, and no sign that he gave any thought to this issue at all.

Mao’s peasant background did not imbue him with idealism about improving the lot of Chinese peasants.

2 Becoming a Communist (1911–20; age 17–26)

MAO ARRIVED IN Changsha in spring 1911, on the eve of the Republican Revolution that was to end over two thousand years of imperial rule. Though Changsha seemed ‘just like a mediaeval town’ to the British philosopher Bertrand Russell a decade later, with ‘narrow streets . . . no traffic possible except sedan chairs and rickshaws’, it was not merely in touch with new ideas and trends, it seethed with Republican activity.

The Manchu court had promised a constitutional monarchy, but the Republicans were dedicated to getting rid of the Manchus entirely. To them Manchu rule was ‘foreign’ domination, as the Manchus were not Han Chinese, the ethnic group that formed the bulk – about 94 per cent – of the population. The Republicans lit sparks through newspapers and magazines that had sprung up all over China in the previous decade, and through the entirely new practice of public debates, in what had hitherto been an almost totally private society. They formed organisations, and launched several – unsuccessful – armed uprisings.

Mao quickly caught up on the issues through newspapers, which he read for the first time now, at the age of seventeen – the start of a lifelong addiction. He wrote his first, rather confused, political essay expressing Republican views, and pasted it up on a wall at his school, in line with the latest trend. Like many other students in the school, he cut off his pigtail, which, as a Manchu custom, was the most obvious symbol of imperial rule. With a friend, he then ambushed a dozen others and forcibly removed their queues with scissors.

That summer, extremely hot and humid as usual in Changsha, students debated feverishly about how to overthrow the emperor.

One day, in the middle of an impassioned discussion, a young man suddenly tore off his long scholar's gown, threw it on the ground and yelled: 'Let's do some martial exercises and be prepared for war [against the emperor]!'

In October an armed uprising in neighbouring Hubei province heralded the Republican Revolution. The Manchu dynasty that had ruled China for over 260 years crumbled, and a republic was declared on 1 January 1912. The child emperor, Pu Yi, abdicated the following month.

Yuan Shih-kai, military chief of the country, became the president, succeeding the interim provisional president, Sun Yat-sen. The provinces were controlled by army strongmen with allegiance to Yuan. When Yuan died in 1916, the central government in Peking weakened, and power fragmented to the provincial chiefs, who became semi-independent warlords. Over the following decade, they fought spasmodic wars, which disrupted civilian life in combat zones. But otherwise the warlords left most people relatively unaffected. Indeed, the rather loosely governed fledgling republic opened up all sorts of career opportunities. The young Mao faced a dazzling range of choices – industry, commerce, law, administration, education, journalism, culture, the military. He first enlisted in one of the Republican armies, but left within months, as he did not like the drilling, or chores like carrying water for cooking, which he hired a water vendor to do for him. He decided to go back to school, and scanned the array of advertisements in the papers (the ads, colourful and rather sophisticated, were also a new thing in China). Six institutions drew his attention, including a police college, a law college – and a school that specialised in making soap. He picked a general high school and stayed for six months before boredom drove him out to study by himself in the provincial library.

At last Mao found something he loved doing. He spent all day there, devouring new books, including translations of Western writings. He said later that he was like a buffalo charging into a vegetable garden and just gobbling down everything that grew. This reading helped free his mind of traditional constraints.