

Commentary

Swan and Spider Eater in Problematic Memoirs of Cultural Revolution

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In the last fifteen years, numerous memoirs have appeared describing modern Chinese society from an individual standpoint. The great majority are written in English by Chinese women who were born in mainland China and “escaped” to the West after the Cultural Revolution. Among the most famous examples are Nien Cheng’s *Life and Death in Shanghai*, Anchee Min’s *Red Azalea*, Rae Yang’s *Spider Eaters: A Memoir*, Tingxing Ye’s *A Leaf in the Bitter Wind: A Memoir*, and, of course, Jung Chang’s *Wild Swans: Three Generations of Chinese Women*.¹

The memoir, with a personal witness as a guide, is an excellent means to enter the “strange” Chinese world. Memoirs blend descriptions of personal life with modern Chinese history. In the basic model, family chronicle is deliberately intertwined with national chronicle.² The narrator presents herself as victim, as well as survivor, of history; her story thus becomes representative of the history of the whole nation. Moreover, these memoir writ-

ers underscore their historical approach by including summaries of events for Western readers and adding details that go beyond personal experience. The result is that, just as the writers and publishers intended, the memoirs are perceived as popular histories.³ But these historical memoirs raise more problems than they resolve regarding the use of memoirs to present social and political history. Faced with a suspiciously uniform chorus of victim narrators, we must question whether and in what way such narratives can be read as history at all.

It is from this perspective that I wish to examine *Wild Swans: Three Generations of Chinese Women*, by Jung Chang. My main reason for singling out this work is its enormous popularity. Since its publication in 1991 in the United Kingdom, it has sold “more than six million copies worldwide in more than two dozen languages.”⁴ In five years it had become the “biggest-grossing non-fiction paperback *in publishing history*.”⁵ Millions of readers who would not normally come in contact with China will have formed their judgments of its recent history based on Jung Chang’s account.

Wild Swans is written in a clear, concise style and structured in a very logical manner. Each chapter deals with a well-contained, dramatic episode in the life of the author’s family, through novelistic techniques such as dialogue and the construction of plausible characters with whom we can identify.⁶ *Wild Swans* is the most detailed of these memoirs; it is over five hundred pages long and ranges from the Republican revolution to the 1970s, including a virtually day-by-day description of crucial episodes, notably the Cultural Revolution. Not surprisingly, many colleges and schools have adopted the book as a text in courses on modern China. This fact, along with the book’s immense popularity outside the academy, should give us even more cause to examine its contents very carefully. For comparison, I have selected another memoir, Rae Yang’s 1997 *Spider Eaters*, to suggest what generic qualities in *Wild Swans* should be contested.

Memoirs and History

We could define memoir as a genre of self-invention.⁷ Understanding this self in all its complexity and ambiguity becomes a first step toward sympathizing with the weaknesses of others, since they, too, like the “I” of mem-

ory, are complex human beings. Jung Chang gives a very engrossing description of her family and of life in modern China. But she displays one consistent tendency that should cause readers to wonder whether her account has strayed over the border between self-invention and idealized self-justification. Throughout her recollections, she constantly depicts herself and the members of her family as stereotypical helpless victims.

With even minimal background knowledge, one can only judge her explanations of the causes of the Cultural Revolution and her family's suffering to be inadequate and self-serving. Her mother, for instance, wages a constant struggle with Chang's father—the archetypal “good Communist official”—over whether the party or the family should come first, and she frequently bends the regulations to help her family and friends get on.⁸ Readers unfamiliar with the situation might consider her behavior normal and humane—she cares for individual people rather than abstract principles—and Chang constantly uses this as a reason to justify her mother's conduct. The problem is, however, that whenever she or her family benefits from their privileges (such as when back-door efforts help her daughter enter the university or leave China) or acts in a less than exemplary manner, Chang always takes the view that this is justified by a flawed Chinese society. Contradictorily, she continues throughout to praise her father as an “incorruptible,” upright, and hard-working Communist official who leads people fairly, that is, according to the regulations.

Vitiating the reliable information she does provide on how the regime operated, Chang always attributes attacks on her father and mother to “revenge” or “personal animosity” (see *Wild Swans*, 323–324, 325) and fails to explore more deeply rooted causes of this revolutionary culture of hatred and conflict. Readers have little impression of the real complexity of the Communist regime, particularly the resentment that developed against those in charge of opposing factions and against those, such as Chang's family, who had enjoyed a privileged position for most of the Communist period.⁹ The Cultural Revolution was not just a handful of evil people attempting to seize power. It flowed as a consequence of a whole political system and leaders who nourished such a “revolutionary” culture, only to be later punished by it. In this light, Chang's father's devotion to Mao's revolution is not innocent.

At her father's arrest in 1967, Chang purports to be shocked at the cruel behavior of his former staff. She seems unable to comprehend that, as coworkers of a "capitalist roader," these colleagues would be natural targets for further accusations and thus might strategically exaggerate their hostility to a disgraced boss out of sheer terror. Nor does Chang consider how her father's autocratic style (see, for example, *Wild Swans*, 167, 182, 299–300) might have alienated people working beneath him. Mystified by their "sudden" transformation, she can only attribute it to their inherent evil tendencies: "It was from this time that I developed my way of judging the Chinese by dividing them into two kinds: one humane, and one not. It took an upheaval like the Cultural Revolution to bring out these characteristics in people" (*Wild Swans*, 342).

Yet, Chang's ready condemnation of others' cruelty is notably absent in those episodes where she or her parents become victimizers. A trivial but illuminating example is her friendship with Wen, a boy who obviously admires Chang greatly. In 1969 she uses this devotion to ask his help to transfer her registration documents from a rural village to the suburbs of Chengdu. Wen provides invaluable support through many difficulties. Chang justifies her subsequent abandonment of Wen, after his usefulness is exhausted, by claiming that she acted from "self-denial," but her manner is suspiciously similar to those who turned against her father. When she later refuses to acknowledge Wen on the street, causing him visible "confusion and hurt" (*Wild Swans*, 410), one cannot help wondering who is the humane one, and who is inhumane.

This lack of self-reflection and constant self-justification makes a sharp contrast to *Spider Eaters*, structured around Rae Yang's repeated dreams of and reflections on what happened in the Cultural Revolution. She recalls her own suffering, especially when she is sent to the countryside. In a resonant episode, Yang describes her conflicting emotions over whether or not to leave her boyfriend in the wilds of the northeast to live a more promising life in Beijing (see *Spider Eaters*, 252–260, 272). Finally, after deciding that she cannot waste the rest of her life in this remote place, where she has already spent five years, she confides that she felt "guilty as if I were a deserter" (*Spider Eaters*, 260). Unlike Jung Chang, Yang describes occasions when *she* is the one doing the violence and being a blind follower, such as

beating enemies of the people and actively devoting herself to the revolutionary cause. In other words, she makes it clear that she was both a victim and a victimizer.

The respective titles chosen by the two writers deepen the impression. *Spider Eaters* alludes to a passage from an essay by Lu Xun (1881–1936). He writes of the “tremendous self-sacrifice” of those who, by trying poisonous foods such as spiders, bequeathed to others “many historic lessons.”¹⁰ Yang sees herself (and perhaps Chinese people in general) as those who have tried something new—a spider, or a revolution—and suffered bitterly because of their experimentation. In the case of the Cultural Revolution, because of her bitter experiences, the spider eater does not die but learns to regret her past actions and to avoid similar mistakes in the future. In the course of Rae Yang’s account, we do see a strong-willed, passionate girl learning that her Communist idealism can lead to terrible and destructive consequences and cause a great deal of shame and regret.

By contrast, *Wild Swans*, besides being a translation of the personal name Hong (common to Jung Chang, her grandmother, and mother), is an ancient Chinese poetic symbol of ambition. The citation comes from the biography of a Han official, Chen She, recorded in Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian*,¹¹ who likened himself to a wild swan who flew much higher and farther than the narrow-minded “common sparrows” around him, a characterization that closely accords with Chang’s behavior and her attitudes toward other people. Unlike the spider eater who has learned from her mistakes, Chang presents herself as a victim of circumstances who deserves better. Of course, the title resonates with the conclusion (the chapter title is “Fighting to Take Wing”), describing Chang’s successful effort to fly to the West in 1978 as one of the very first group of Chinese students to escape after the Cultural Revolution, leaving a trail of less worthy helpers and competitors behind her.

History

Since the late 1970s, the official view of the Cultural Revolution in China has been that a handful of extremist leaders, most notably the Gang of Four, seized power in the mid-1960s and tried to govern outside the estab-

lished party structure, setting up their own revolutionary committees and denouncing anyone who opposed them. The result was unprecedented chaos and violence, which only came to an end with the smashing of the Gang of Four and the rise of Deng Xiaoping in 1977. The most advanced version of this theory includes Mao as the leader of the handful of evil extremists. This simplistic but pervasive explanation is ready-made to condemn others while absolving oneself as a victim. Thus the role that individual Chinese people played in this national catastrophe has been largely neglected.¹²

Since the late 1980s, however, cultural critics Liu Zaifu and Li Zehou, writer Ba Jin, and director Chen Kaige, among many others, have questioned whether a few leaders, no matter how powerful, could have caused such a breakdown of order without the willing collaboration of millions of ordinary people.¹³ As Chen Kaige writes, "When asked about individual responsibility, people always talk about political pressure, blind belief, collective decision, and the like. But when all people are 'innocent,' then those who are *truly* innocent will for ever be stuck in [Hell]."¹⁴

The question of the memoirist's innocence is particularly relevant to the widespread violence of the Cultural Revolution. Jung Chang remembers being opposed to violence from the start. Rae Yang, by contrast, describes several occasions when she and her Red Guard friends were actively involved in beating, stealing, and denouncing class enemies, all in the name of Chairman Mao. She seldom remembers feeling sympathy for the victims; just like her friends, she was convinced that anyone who disagreed with the Red Guards was a traitor to the revolution. Further, in her account of school life in the years before the Cultural Revolution, she shows how socialist education and the political system at large, rather than evil individuals, produced bitter fruit.

For instance, as her first step in eliminating class enemies, Yang describes taking revenge on a teacher who had previously humiliated her. Jung Chang, by contrast, seems to have loved all her teachers and found it impossible to criticize any of them. In order to maintain a consistent character as the rational, peace-loving victim, Chang downplays the extent of the violence in her home province of Sichuan, as compared with Beijing: "People in Sichuan," she claims, "had little idea of the extent of the terror in Peking.

There were fewer atrocities in Sichuan. . . . However, the Red Guards in Sichuan, as in other provinces, copied the actions of those in Peking. There was controlled chaos. The Red Guards may have looted the houses which they were authorized to raid, but they rarely stole from shops” (*Wild Swans*, 287). This typical passage immediately raises puzzling questions. How did Red Guards in Sichuan know to copy those in Beijing if they had little idea of what was happening there? Why is it less serious to loot houses than to steal from shops? How do we define “controlled chaos”? Chang leaves such questions aside but is perhaps aware that her explanation is inadequate, because she also divides the Red Guards into a peaceful majority and a small minority of evil-doers “actually involved in cruelty or violence” (*Wild Swans*, 286).¹⁵ Finally, she constantly insists that she and most students avoided taking part in violent activities (see *Wild Swans*, 292–293).

The impression given is that Chang is at the forefront of a large group of students opposed to the evil aspects of the Cultural Revolution from the very start. Yet she cannot avoid the contradictions that emerge from her self-rationalizing account. Even after all the violent events of mid-1966 involving the Red Guards in Chengdu, she still jumps at the chance to become a Red Guard herself in October of that year and to go to Beijing to see Chairman Mao, since “[her] aversion and fear had no clear object, and it never occurred to [her] to question the Cultural Revolution or the Red Guards explicitly” (*Wild Swans*, 304).¹⁶

Yet this statement follows a string of examples of just such explicit questioning. We cannot avoid the suspicion that her descriptions of disgust and revulsion are actually projections of her later, disillusioned attitudes—altered by hindsight—and do not represent her true involvement at the time. Rae Yang’s unflattering and ambivalent account makes it much more difficult for us to identify with her. Yet perhaps because of this, her descriptions are more convincing, as on one occasion when Yang and her Red Guard team are outraged by a man who apparently intended to sexually assault two of their female colleagues (see *Spider Eaters*, 137–140). When this man treats their interrogation with scorn, they start beating him with their belts. He is a masochist, and his next move, exposing his genitals to his assailants, shocks these naive adolescents. The female students rush out of the room to escape this horrible sight, and the males beat the man until he dies.

The irrational violence described is similar to examples from *Wild Swans*, but Rae Yang's involvement and her later reaction to it are not. Yang does not distance herself from the interrogation and beating; she does not remember hiding at the back of the group or sneaking out of the room to avoid such cruelty. She simply notes that "we" started asking angry questions, and "we" started to beat him (*Spider Eaters*, 137–138). In other words, she admits that she was part of a group of young teenagers who could not control their rage in the face of opposition from a class enemy; she makes herself part of a like-minded group and takes responsibility for its actions (see *Spider Eaters*, 137–140). And she is clear on the psychological consequences of her violence: the troubled conscience that prevents her from sleeping; the crude attempts at self-justification; the fear that she will somehow be punished for her evil.

Yang's and Chang's personal memories of the Cultural Revolution diverge sharply in numerous instances. Throughout *Wild Swans*, Jung Chang tends to remember her past self as quite detached from the chaos and violence around her, in other words, as little different from her present self. Where Rae Yang remembers the joys of freedom, the thrill of power, and the idealistic struggle for a better life alongside the obvious pain and social chaos, Jung Chang remembers only the fear and disillusionment of a victim. But was her victim status really so clear-cut at the time? Perhaps it is more realistic to assume that Chang has altered her story to suit the wishes of hindsight and her market audience, and that her memory has changed past events to make her behavior seem more decisive and less shameful.

Chang's reactions seem more those of an outside observer, someone consistently able to distance herself from the terrible events. At our own distance from revolution we are probably more likely to identify with the character she presents—sensitive, questioning, and fearful of others' brutality—than with a narrator frankly and uncritically committed to the revolutionary cause, yet often shamelessly using its campaigns to settle personal scores.¹⁷ From the outside, we find it difficult to see how an intelligent, well-adjusted girl could turn into a vindictive bully. Yet the evidence of many other witnesses corroborates Rae Yang's testimony. Time and time again we read of former Red Guards recalling their great sense of freedom,

the thrill of power, and the excitement that accompanied those first few months of the Cultural Revolution, as well as admitting their willing involvement in denunciations. Clearly, remembrances of the Cultural Revolution involve judgments and assignments of blame. While Chang arbitrarily divides a whole people into “humane” and “inhumane,” the admissions of Yang and others imply that almost anyone is capable of cruelty under certain circumstances.

At the heart of the memoir is a double bind. If *Wild Swans* is a history, evidence has to be introduced outside or beyond personal experience. Unfortunately, Chang provides no references, no corroboration that would enable us to check her information. Instead, we find that her interpretations differ substantially from both historical sources and other personal memoirs: for instance, her claim that “only a small proportion of Red Guards” (*Wild Swans*, 286) was violent. On the other hand, if *Wild Swans* is just a memoir, we must be convinced that someone could recall events of twenty years ago with miraculous clarity. While at first glance, historical detail and chronological, orderly presentation give Chang’s reader a sense of objectivity, particularly in contrast to a disjointed, emotional, and therefore subjective personal memoir such as Yang’s, I argue that the opposite is true. With its conflicting moods and lots of gaps between powerful experiences, *Spider Eaters* more convincingly captures the illogical workings of memory. Again, I argue that *Wild Swans* is Jung Chang’s imaginative reconstruction of events, using hindsight to alter her recollections.

Jung Chang, consciously or not, projects her later skepticism back onto earlier events and reinterprets them to make her actions seem more reasonable. A final example underscores this point: her first glimpse of Chairman Mao in Tian’anmen Square. It is an archetypal Red Guard memory, and Rae Yang gives a typical, by now clichéd, description of the scene and her exhilaration as she joins with those around her and is carried away on waves of ecstasy.

Everybody was shouting “Long live Chairman Mao!” Around me girls were crying; boys were crying too. With hot tears streaming down my face, I could not see Chairman Mao clearly. . . . Earnestly we chanted: “We-want-to-see-Chairman-Mao!” He heard us! He walked over to the

corner of Tian'anmen and waved at us. . . . My blood was boiling inside me. I jumped and shouted and cried in unison with a million people in the square. At that moment, I forgot myself; all barriers that existed between me and others broke down. . . . I would never be lonely again. (*Spider Eaters*, 123)

Compare Jung Chang's impressions: "Shortly before noon, hysterical waves of 'Long live Chairman Mao!' roared from the east. . . . People sitting in front of me shot up and hopped in delirious excitement, their raised hands frantically waving their Little Red Books." So far, there is little difference from Yang's version. However, Chang's rational observer soon appears:

"Sit down! Sit down!" I cried, in vain. Our company commander had said that we all had to remain seated throughout. But few seemed to be observing the rules, possessed by their urge to set eyes on Mao. Having been sitting for so long, my legs had gone numb. . . . When I finally managed to totter to my feet, I caught only the very end of the motorcade. . . . I spotted Mao's stalwart back, his right arm steadily waving. In an instant, he had disappeared. My heart sank. Was that all I would see of Chairman Mao? Only a fleeting glimpse of his back? The sun seemed suddenly to have turned gray. All around me the Red Guards were making a huge din.

Seeing another girl squeezing blood from her index finger to write the de rigueur record of her happiness on a handkerchief, Chang recalls, "Life seemed pointless. A thought flickered into my mind: perhaps I should commit suicide" (*Wild Swans*, 321).

The sheer detachment of the young woman described by the narrator in this passage is remarkable. She remains totally apart from the crowd, judging, criticizing, and feeling emotions utterly different from theirs. In fact there is an almost comical disjunction between these masses of hysterical teenagers ecstatically yelling, "Long live Chairman Mao!" and one lone girl anxious to obey the rules, shouting, "Sit down! Sit down!" Looking back years later, many participants would wonder how they became so carried away. But in fact it would take an extremely strong, mature personality, someone brought up in an environment where critical thinking was encour-

aged, to be able to maintain such an unconventional opinion in these emotionally charged circumstances. And as Chang herself has made very clear, no unconventional opinions were permitted in the China of the 1950s and 1960s. This maturity, I suggest, is in fact that of the much older narrator of *Wild Swans*.

The Value of Historical Memoirs

Why, then, has Jung Chang's book become so popular? A readable style, the era's intrinsic interest, or perhaps her gender explains the book's appeal to the nonacademic audience. In my examination of Chang's account of the Cultural Revolution, I find more disturbing possibilities.

First, the account is plausible and seductive precisely because we can imagine ourselves adopting a similarly detached, skeptical attitude in episodes of mass hysteria. We like to think that we, too, as sensitive individuals, would avoid violence and would be among the first to challenge it, or at least would avoid participating whenever possible. This is, after all, how rational persons behave. We find it difficult to imagine being carried away by revolutionary zeal or denouncing people as Rae Yang and others did.

Also, Chang's narrator appears so rational and reacts so naturally that we are willing to regard her account as reliable history. By contrast, how can we trust a narrator like Rae Yang, who was so obviously carried away (brainwashed) by the euphoria of revolutionary activity? The difference is made even greater because Jung Chang dresses up her memoir with all the trappings of objective history, right down to the scholarly looking index and numerous helpful historical asides, presumably borrowed from other authors, to fill in the historical context.

Furthermore, Chang's memoir enables readers to divide the Chinese into good and bad people. Although this does make recent Chinese history easier to understand as an old-fashioned struggle between good and evil, it also reinforces simplistic stereotypes. The "insider," personal witness account enables readers to feel satisfied that the majority of Chinese people are simply not as sophisticated as themselves, and hence are so easily seduced by the ridiculous propaganda of the Communist leaders.

In a perceptive essay titled "Paths in the Fog," Czech novelist Milan Kun-

dera attacks the unreflective attitude of his countrymen to their turbulent Communist past. Suddenly, he writes, people make a blanket condemnation of the last four decades as “lost years” of constant suffering under Communist tyranny. Kundera criticizes this tendency to reduce everything to one color and to ignore the complexities and variety of human existence—the joys and sorrows—that must have continued even in a totalitarian society.¹⁸ In particular, he attacks the use of hindsight, the privileged knowledge of the present, to judge others’ mistakes in the past:

Knowing neither the meaning nor the future course of history, knowing not even the objective meaning of their own actions . . . [people] proceed through their lives as one proceeds *in the fog*. . . . In the fog, we are free, but it is the freedom of a person in fog: he sees fifty yards ahead of him; he can clearly make out the features of his interlocutor, can take pleasure in the beauty of the trees that line the path, and can even observe what is close by and react.

And yet, “Who is more blind?” asks Kundera, the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, who praised Lenin, “not know[ing] where Leninism would lead? Or we, who judge him decades later and do not see the fog that enveloped him?”¹⁹

Kundera’s comments provide a remarkably cogent summary of the pitfalls of memoirs such as *Wild Swans*. In conclusion we might ask, What is the possible value of these historical memoirs? By introducing recent China in a vivid way, they can serve as provocative starting points for discussion. Yet as I have sought to demonstrate, many of their interpretations remain problematic, and reading a single version of events simply is not adequate. Readers must also be exposed to other recent, more truly heterogeneous and contemporary historical materials on the Cultural Revolution.

Notes

- 1 Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Generations of Chinese Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991); Nien Chen, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (London: Grafton, 1986); Anchee Min, *Red Azalea* (New York: Pantheon, 1994); Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters: A Memoir* (Berkeley:

- University of California Press, 1997); Tingxing Ye, *A Leaf in the Bitter Wind: a Memoir* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1997).
- 2 *Wild Swans* was one of the first to exemplify this tendency, juxtaposing historical events with the lives of the author's family members, and it has clearly influenced later memoirs.
 - 3 One reviewer of *Wild Swans* noted that the book is "Jung Chang's history of her grandmother, her mother, and herself, beginning in 1909, when the empire still existed . . . and moving through the Nationalist and Communist years to 1978, two years after Mao's death" (Jonathan Mirsky, "Literature of the Wounded," *New York Review of Books*, 5 March 1992, 6). Another reviewer declares that *Wild Swans* is an autobiographical memoir "told against the backdrop of the epic changes that have swept China in the eight decades [since 1909]" (Anne Thurston, review of *Wild Swans*, *China Quarterly* 132 [December 1992]: 1207).
 - 4 Cited in *Asiaweek*, 28 June 1996.
 - 5 *Ibid.*; my emphasis.
 - 6 The *New Yorker* review quoted on the back cover of the paperback edition is certainly true: "Her family chronicle resembles a popular novel that stars strong, beautiful women and provides cameo roles for famous men."
 - 7 See William Zinsser, ed., *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995).
 - 8 Much of Chang's account is actually based on her mother's recollections. See Merle Goldman's review of a BBC video introducing *Wild Swans*, *Journal of Asian Studies* 54:3 (August 1995): 914.
 - 9 For an excellent analysis, see Hua Linshan, *Wenge qijian qunzhongxing duili paixi chengyin* [The causes of the masses' oppositional clique during the Cultural Revolution], in a special volume of *Ershiyi shiji* [Twenty-first century] on the Cultural Revolution 31(1995): 12.
 - 10 Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Quanji* [Complete works of Lu Xun], vol. 7 (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1973), 861. English from epigraph of Yang, *Spider Eaters*.
 - 11 From chapter 48 of Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*. See Ma Chiyong, ed., *Shiji jinzhu* (Taipei: Shangwu, 1979), 4.2001. The wild swan is an image frequently used by bitter scholar-officials as a symbol of exile, uniqueness, and ambition.
 - 12 Much Cultural Revolution literature follows this convention, notably the subgenre called "literature of the wounded" in the late 1970s and early 1980s.
 - 13 Liu helped to introduce the concept of *chanhui yishi* (consciousness of confession). In his book (coauthored with Li Zehou), *Gaobie Geming* [Farewell revolution] (Hong Kong: Tiandi, 1995), and numerous articles, he addresses the problem of individual responsibility. Ba Jin also focuses on individual responsibility. See his *Suixiang Lu* [Collection of random thoughts] (Hong Kong: Sanlian Shudian, 1988).
 - 14 Chen Kaige, *Shaonian Kaige* [Kaige as a teenager] (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1991), 60.
 - 15 Whereas Chang claims in her many trips around the country that nothing violent ever

occurred (see *Wild Swans*, 321–322), Yang gives a chilling episode of bored Red Guards on a train, removing “class enemies” from the sleeper carriages and beating them with their belts (see *Spider Eaters*, 132–134).

- 16 Chang also inconsistently notes that she was “thrilled” to put on the Red Guard uniform but claims that its “aggressive image” made her “uncomfortable” in public (*Wild Swans*, 305).
- 17 See Yang’s ouster of a group of Daoist monks, in *Spider Eaters*, 226–227.
- 18 See Milan Kundera, “Paths in the Fog,” in *Testaments Betrayed: An Essay in Nine Parts*, trans. Linda Asher (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 225–226.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 229–240.

Cultural Revolution, Wild Swans, Rae Yang, Jung Chang, SpiderEater, China, SpiderEaters, Red Guard, Kong I Swan, Chairman Mao, Red Guards, memoirs, modern Chinese history, family chronicle, victim of circumstances, Chinese students, Chen Kaijie, Chinese women, Lu Xun Quanjie, Linda Asher, Milan Kundera, class enemies, Yang, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Kundera, revolutionary activity, witness account, skeptical attitude

Swan and spider eater in problematic memoirs of cultural revolution