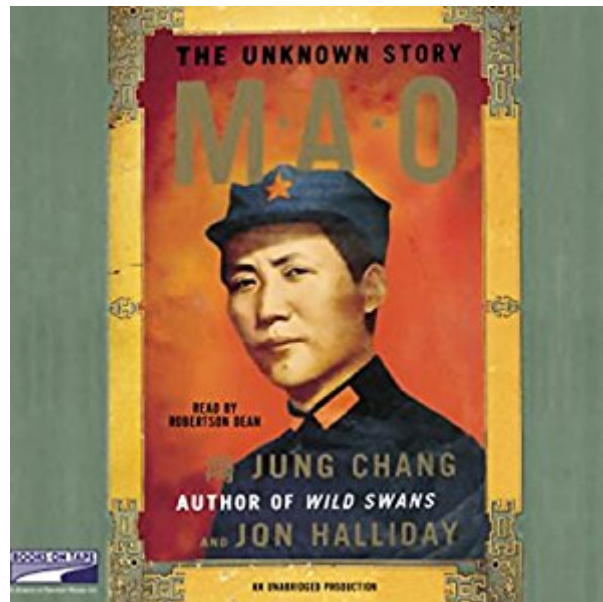


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# Mao: The Unknown Story



## Synopsis

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 biography 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. In all, well over 70 million Chinese perished under Mao's rule, in peacetime. Combining meticulous research with the story-telling style of *Wild Swans*, this biography offers a harrowing portrait of Mao's ruthless accumulation of power through the exercise of terror: his first victims were the peasants, then the intellectuals, and finally, the inner circle of his own advisors. 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 behavior toward 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the review by John Robinson, he mentioned Dr Tsang of Oxford as "one of the authorities cited (a Dr. Tsang at Oxford) actually has a website which CONFIRMS the bulk of the most damning data in this book". Here is the original transcript of the interview. Dr Tsang did NOT confirm the bulk of the

data, instead he thought the authors are "appallingly dishonest" in the use of sources they claimed to have accessed.=====Oxford University's Steve Tsang says the Chiang Kai-shek archives show the KMT chief did in fact order the senior warlord in the area to hold the crossing on pain of court martial, while his 100,000-strong Central Army tried to catch up with the Reds from the south. Some of the Sichuan warlord's forces arrived before the Reds at Luding, but their commander panicked as the Reds' main force arrived. He fled, leaving behind only a few of his notoriously opium-dazed soldiers to defend the bridge. The attempt to burn the bridge could not have amounted to much, as the timbers were soaked by rain. "The Maoist story of the battle was a lie, and a huge exaggeration but there was a battle," Tsang said. Above all, Tsang insists, Chiang Kai-shek did not on this occasion or, as far as the Chiang Kai-shek papers reveal, on any other occasion let the Red Army escape during the Long March. Tsang said that in this case, as generally in the book, the authors had been "appallingly dishonest" in the use of sources they claimed to have accessed. "Mao was a monster," Tsang said. "(But) their distortion of history to make their case will in the end make it more difficult to reveal how horrible Mao and the Chinese Communist Party system were, and how much damage they really did to the Chinese people."

I approached the book wanting to understand how Mao was able to take control of China and the truth about his reign. What I got was definitely not objective. This book would be a good companion piece to research about Mao, but I feel like it's written with an ax to grind. It's written in the textbook manner, although it makes no bones about presenting other points of view or interpretations. Very little in the way of useful maps (they mention Outer Mongolia a hundred times, but don't bother to tell you it's present day Mongolia or have it on a map) and pictures placed in inserts rather than chronologically. I came away from this book with an impressively researched overview of Mao's life and his place in the Cold War but no greater understanding of how he was able to manipulate, intimidate, murder his way to the top, and create an enduring cult of personality. Mao seemed almost like a ghost in his own biography, especially after 1949. I wanted to know more of the how & why as well as the details. I can't really address the other serious scholarly issue of the book as other reviewers have.

I applaud the authors' efforts in producing a sweeping study of Mao and attempting to uncover many hitherto unknown aspects of his fascinating life. `Facts' surrounding the Long March, such as

the famous Luding Bridge heroics, are exposed as being untrue. And claims about the engineered killings of more than 70 million Chinese and the often gruesome nature of their deaths take us to a whole new level of understanding about Mao's megalomania and inhumanity. These chilling revelations are all the more absorbing in an age where we're being made increasingly aware of state-engineered brutality both past and present. Reading this book (and accepting its claims wholesale) will revolutionise the way you think about Mao and such events as the Long March and the 'Great Leap Forward'. Yet the main problem with this book lies precisely in how far we can accept its claims. Most of the reviews here have already highlighted the book's many factual inconsistencies, exaggerations and generally speculative assertions. The book's sources, for one, have been criticised for being either unreliable or unverifiable. The emphasis on Mao has also obscured the role played by the Communist party in perpetrating the said atrocities. No specialist of Chinese history myself, I nonetheless found the claims a little too sensational and the writing too overwrought in places. Mao the man comes across as an utterly self-absorbed, power-crazed, pitiless beast whose one-dimensionality seems too much like a caricature at times. As with other similar books I've read, the authors' profound emotional engagement with the subject (ten years of research, interviewing hundreds of eyewitnesses etc.) seems to have gotten in the way of sober analysis. At over 800 pages long this is not a short book by any measure. But it is written for a general audience and so should be accessible enough to most readers. If the writing doesn't capture your attention, the gripping narrative most certainly will. Just bear in mind the scepticism that book's claims have received from academic circles. Checking these claims against the work of other experts in the field will probably be a good idea; and will most certainly be my next port-of-call.

Jung Chang's young intellect was formed in an environment where totalitarian propaganda substituted for reason and evidence. After she came west, she was unable to make the adjustment. She still thinks and argues the same way. Her ram-it-down-your-throat approach, strained interpretations, and outright distortion of sources make it look as if she does not trust the reader to make up his or her own mind. She should stick to reminiscences, at which she is adept, and leave history to competent historians. There are much better arguments against Mao than this. Philip Short, in just one example, makes an equally scathing case against Mao, but uses reason and an honest appraisal of sources. It is a compelling case. Chang's totalitarian mode of argument is so silly that it actually undermines the case against Mao by making it the subject of mockery. She thus gives comfort to the Maoists. Nobody except fanatics can take this book seriously, and the case against Mao should be taken seriously. As for Halliday, he should know better. "What does it profit a

man...?"

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