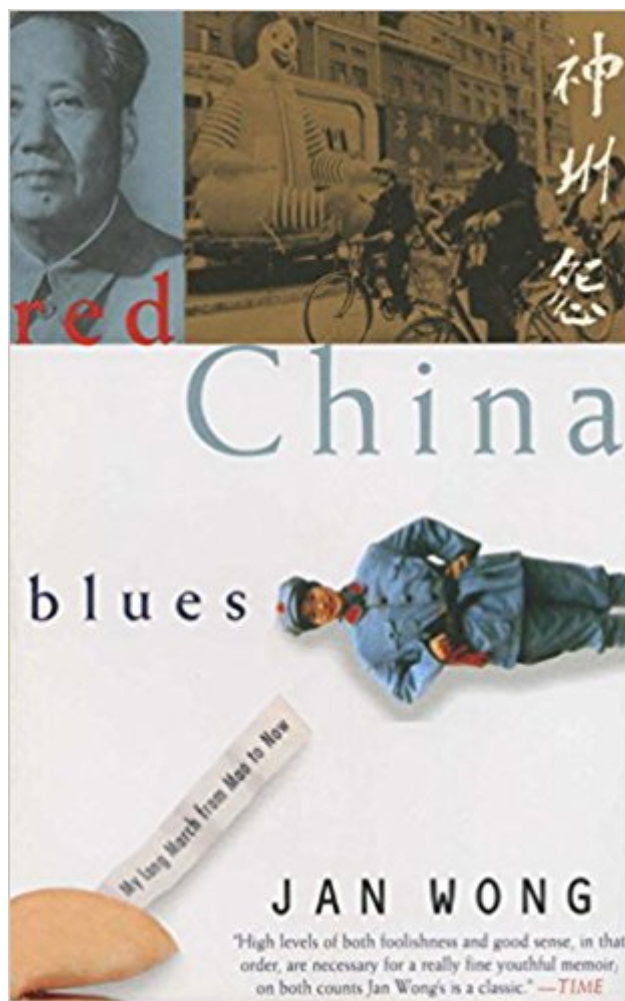


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# Red China Blues: My Long March From Mao To Now



## Synopsis

Jan Wong, a Canadian of Chinese descent, went to China as a starry-eyed Maoist in 1972 at the height of the Cultural Revolution. A true believer--and one of only two Westerners permitted to enroll at Beijing University--her education included wielding a pneumatic drill at the Number One Machine Tool Factory. In the name of the Revolution, she renounced rock & roll, hauled pig manure in the paddy fields, and turned in a fellow student who sought her help in getting to the United States. She also met and married the only American draft dodger from the Vietnam War to seek asylum in China. *Red China Blues* is Wong's startling--and ironic--memoir of her rocky six-year romance with Maoism (which crumbled as she became aware of the harsh realities of Chinese communism); her dramatic firsthand account of the devastating Tiananmen Square uprising; and her engaging portrait of the individuals and events she covered as a correspondent in China during the tumultuous era of capitalist reform under Deng Xiaoping. In a frank, captivating, deeply personal narrative she relates the horrors that led to her disillusionment with the "worker's paradise." And through the stories of the people--an unhappy young woman who was sold into marriage, China's most famous dissident, a doctor who lengthens penises--Wong reveals long-hidden dimensions of the world's most populous nation. In setting out to show readers in the Western world what life is like in China, and why we should care, she reacquaints herself with the old friends--and enemies of her radical past, and comes to terms with the legacy of her ancestral homeland.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This superb memoir is like no other account of life in China under both Mao and Deng. Wong is a Canadian ethnic Chinese who, in 1972, at the height of the cultural revolution, was one of the first undergraduate foreigners permitted to study at Beijing University. Filled with youthful enthusiasms for Mao's revolution, she was an oddity: a Westerner who embraced Maoism, appeared to be Chinese and wished to be treated as one, although she didn't speak the language. She set herself to become fluent, refused special consideration, shared her fellow-students rations and housing, their required stints in industry and agriculture and earnestly tried to embrace the Little Red Book. Although Wong felt it her duty to turn in a fellow student who asked for help to emigrate to the West, she could not repress continual shock at conditions of life, and by the time she was nearly expelled from China for an innocent friendship with a "foreigner," much of her enthusiasm, which lasted six years, had eroded. In 1988, returning as a reporter for the Toronto Globe Mail, she was shocked once again, this time by the rapid transformations of the society under Deng's exhortation: "to be rich is glorious." Her account is informed by her special background, a cold eye, a detail. Her description of the events at Tiananmen Square, which occurred on her watch, is, like the rest of the book, unique, powerful and moving. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

" 'Tis better to have believed and lost than never to have believed at all." Concluding her memoir with a paraphrase from Tennyson, Wong vividly describes her 12-year experience in China. At first, as a confused teenager coming of age amid the tumultuous late Sixties and early Seventies in Canada, she became a devoted Maoist, believing China to be "Paradise." She studied and worked in China for six years as an ordinary citizen, going through the Cultural Revolution and the period of the "Gang of Four." Later, as a reporter for the Toronto Globe and Mail, she spent another six years in China, witnessing the Tiananmen massacre, interviewing important dissidents such as Wei Jingsheng and Ren Wandong, and reporting on issues such as birth control and peasant riots in rural areas. The "insider" status gives her account a unique touch that set hers apart from numerous other "journalistic" writings about China. She is describing the people she knows and the events she experienced. Highly recommended. Mark Meng, St. John's Univ. Lib., Jamaica, N.Y. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

In her autobiographical *Red China Blues*, author Jane Wong does what the much more vaunted Jung Chang and her similar *Wild Swans* did not. Specifically, she injects much-needed humor and self-effacement along with the obligatory tale of hardship during

China's Cultural Revolution. To be fair, Wong also plays things almost problematically middle-of-the-road, never fully condemning Mao's edicts nor providing readers, especially bewildered Westerners or seething Chinese the kind of good vs. evil narrative that Chang does. In fact, she gets downright wistful for Mao's socialist extremism as she frets about the dramatic economic changes that transform China following "The Great Helmsman's" passing. Yet, I'm giving her a pass for several reasons, mainly that her honesty is never in question. She tells things as she saw them and doesn't spare self-condemnation. While she does blame the propaganda she eagerly devoured at the beginning for the climate of frenzied paranoia that defined the Cultural Revolution, she admits that she was a true believer in the promises Mao made. She ends up sadder but wiser even as she strives to make it clear that she doesn't regret much from her years in China, and I respect that level of personal integrity. Whereas Jung Chang railed at Mao for turning her into a bad person, Jane Wong takes the blame for willingly being duped. Engrossing, particularly when describing the rigors of life in rural China or the Tiananmen Square nightmare, Wong uses the skills she has as a journalist (and the rigorous journals she kept during her years of indoctrination) to give the reader a genuine first-hand experience. The book tails off a bit during the post-Tiananmen chapters, wherein she chronicles the economic changes in China during the era of Deng Xiaoping, but it's still an interesting look back at the antecedents that have led to today's economic circumstances in China. There are a lot of books about the Mao years and their effects on individual Chinese people, yet this is one that not only provides insight, but also a sense of wry humor to what is often written of in angry, bitter, and stark terms.

Nothing is at it seems. Jan Wong, a teenager during the Vietnam era, was dissatisfied with capitalistic Canada and radically sought change. For Wong the truth was to be found in Mao's 'little Red Book' and her reading room was to be China. Looking back twenty-five years and with 20/20 hindsight, Jan Wong takes us into the dragon's lair revealing both her youth's ideology and Mao's China gone by. For many who remember the 60's and early 70's you will understand how she could turn her back on the comfort and freedoms of her home in Canada, renouncing all, and go to live in Mao's China. For fourteen years, with a religious, fanatical devotion, Jan Wong dedicated her life to become a missionary of Mao. Her red world crashed around her in 1976, the year when the cultural Revolution and Chairman Mao died.. All of her sacrifice, all of the suffering she went through as a worker-peasant were for naught, as China drastically discarded Mao's ideology and moved towards a hybrid capitalistic communism. She felt betrayed, suckered and stupid, "I vowed I would never

again suspend my disbelief. I promised myself I would question everything. I became a skeptic." Her opportunity to question everything came when the New York Times hired her as a Journalist in its Beijing office. Jan Wong's on site coverage of the Tiananmen Square massacre of 2600 Chinese citizens in 1989 stands out as one of the best on site reports I have read on the subject. Even Mao, in his 40 years of rule, did not turn tanks on his own people, but Deng Xiaping slaughtered his own people to keep his grip on Communist power. She writes, "The guns at Tiananmen Square killed my last illusions about China." This book is a must read for anyone traveling to China today. It does more to help you understand the current history than a dozen guide books will.

I teach high school Chinese. In at least three documentaries that my class watched, Jan Wong was interviewed. I thought, "Who is this Jan Wong?" The book was excellent. She has seen and experienced so much of China's modern history with her own eyes and ears, living through the Cultural Revolution...watching the Tiananmen Massacre take place from her hotel balcony. I have tremendous respect for her as a person and I also respect her opinions and evaluations in terms of what she imagines China's future will look like. Her stories are always dusted with a bit of humor, as well. I am a huge fan of this book and of Jan Wong.

I've read this book twice, and recommended it innumerable times. If you're curious, or even mildly interested in China's Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square protests of June 1989, this book will hook you. Wong is a strong author, and her story is captivating.

Very illuminating . Could be shorter but great that almost three periods are totally described. Vivid descriptions and of her feelings.

Jan Wong's honesty and candor infuses this terrific book about growing up in Chinese in Canada and then moving to China and really growing up. China from the inside is her gift to the reader...from avowed communist to lukewarm socialist is a long stretch and very ably detailed by Ms. Wong. Her harrowing description of the Tiananmen Square massacre puts the reader in a front row seat and gives shocking statistics of the death toll and the prison sentences that followed. The 're-education' process up country that many middle class and professionals went through under Mao is sickening to follow as Wong describes the uneducated and untrained taking over China. She details many strands of the long road back for China as China 'drops' Mao in favor of an increasingly capitalistic outlook. Kudos for Wong in her ability to detail her personal reflections and "aha" moments and her

development as a person while China goes all the way out to Mao and back. Must read!!

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