

## China Ag Study Abroad 2007 -- Book Suggestions

(don't feel limited by these choices)

**Jung Chang. 1991. Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China.** A true story of how three generations of women in the author's family fared in the political maelstrom of China during the 20th century. Chang's grandmother was a warlord's concubine. Her gently raised mother struggled with hardships in the early days of Mao's revolution and rose, like her husband, to a prominent position in the Communist Party before being denounced during the Cultural Revolution. Chang herself marched, worked, and breathed for Mao until doubt crept in over the excesses of his policies and purges. Born just a few decades apart, their lives overlap with the end of the warlords' regime and overthrow of the Japanese occupation, violent struggles between the Kuomintang and the Communists to carve up China, and the vicious cycle of purges orchestrated by Chairman Mao that discredited and crushed millions of people, including her parents.

**Jung Chang and Jon Halliday. 2005. Mao. The Unknown Story.** Ms. Chang and her husband have spent the last 10 years conducting interviews in and outside of China and conducting research on the life of Mao. Using this information they tell a different story of Mao than the official one supported by the Communist party. The Mao that they describe was a ruthless and brutal tyrant.

**Xin Ran. 2005. Sky Burial.** The true story of a Chinese woman who spends 30 years searching for her husband in Tibet where he disappeared during the Chinese occupation of Tibet. They had only been married 100 days when he had to leave. She was a doctor herself and got herself posted in Tibet but was captured and then fled from rebels and spent many years as a native trying to find what happened to him. It is a fascinating story of a unique culture in a very harsh landscape.

**Xin Ran. 2002. The good women of China.** A fascinating story of the women who called in to a call-in show hosted by Xin Ran in the late 1980's when Deng Xiaoping started opening up China. Not only did she talk directly to these women but many left stories on her answering machine.

**Lisa See. 2005. Snow Flower and the Secret Fan.** Another great story about women's lives in China during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is the story of two women who shared all of their life secrets with each other through a language known only to women and written on fans.

**Adeline Yen Mah. 1997. Falling Leaves.** Story of a girl's journey into adulthood during the 1930's and 40's – a tough time in China. I have not read this yet but it looks good.

**Yang Erche Namu. 2003. Leaving Mother Lake.** Story of a primitive area in China where a matriarchal society exists and there is no word for father and women make all the decisions and inherit property. Very unusual for China. Good read—exciting and interesting.

**Simon Winchester. 1996. The River at the Center of the World.** A fascinating story of a journey up the Yangtze River. Covers the river, its people and its history. Good read.

**Peter Hessler. 2001. River Town.** Story of a westerner who spends several years in the western China town of Fuling on the Yangtze River and his encounters with the people and their culture. A good read also.

**Shu-min Huang. 1998. The Spiral Road: Change in a Chinese Village Through the Eyes of a Community Party Leader (Conflict & Social Change).** Written by a retired Iowa State Professor of Anthropology, this story is told through the eyes of a leading party cadre in a southeast Chinese village about events that affected individuals and families in the village: the downfall of the landlords during the land reform, the rise to political power of poor peasants, the political fanaticism of the Great Leap Forward and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, and efforts to restore rational and pragmatic policies in China's countryside.

**Amy Tan. 1990. The Joy Luck Club.** A story of four Chinese-immigrant women and their American-born daughters. Each of the four Chinese women has her own view of the world based on her experiences in China and wants to share that vision with her daughter. The daughters try to understand and appreciate their mothers' pasts, adapt to the American way of life, and win their mothers' acceptance. The book's name comes from the club formed in China by one of the mothers, Suyuan Woo, in order to lift her friends' spirits and distract them from their problems during the Japanese invasion. (Movie based on book.)

**Pearl Buck. 1931. The Good Earth.** This is a well known classic about a farm family in [China](#) in times of [famine](#), [flood](#), and [prosperity](#). A farmer, *Wang Lung*, who lives with his widowed father, marries *O-Lan*, the homely former [slave](#) of a wealthy household, the Hwang Family.

**Nien Cheng. 1988. Life and Death in Shanghai.** Story of the author's imprisonment in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution. An employee of Shell Oil, the widow of an official under Chiang Kai-shek and educated in London, she was able to afford a comfortable standard of living. Since she would not admit that this made her an enemy of the state she was imprisoned and placed in solitary confinement for over six years.

**John Pomfret. 2006.** A first-hand account of modern Chinese history as it was lived and experienced by five of the author's 1981 classmates at Nanjing University. Pomfret was among the first generation of American college students to enroll in exchange programs with Chinese universities in the early 1980s; the New York native grew up to become The Post's Beijing bureau chief and one of the very best reporters covering China throughout the dynamic 1990s. He writes about the journey of his classmates in a changing China in which consumers' aspirations ratcheted up from bicycles and wrist watches to Audis and flip-phones; it also becomes a splendid human narrative of how fragile souls weather barbaric cruelty, social shifts and the rewiring of a nation.