

Zhou Enlai: Some insights and some omissions

by Michael O. Billington

Eldest Son: Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China, 1898-1976

by Han Suyin

Hill and Wang, New York, 1994
483 pages, hardbound, \$27.50

Despite the fact that Zhou Enlai was second only to Mao Zedong in the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from its inception until his death in 1976 (the same year as Mao's death), and, in addition, was a central figure in 20th-century international diplomacy, still, there have been few biographical studies of his life, and none which goes beyond the surface. The recent publication of *Eldest Son* by Han Suyin does not change that unfortunate state of affairs, but is nonetheless a quite readable account of certain aspects of Zhou's life by a lifelong admirer who, between 1941 and 1975, held a dozen extended private interviews with him. If the reader is forewarned of the extreme pro-CCP prejudice and the romanticism of the author, then her personal knowledge and insight into 20th-century China provide the basis for a revealing glimpse of the ubiquitous Zhou Enlai.

In fact, Han Suyin contributes, perhaps unwittingly, to the mass of evidence that Zhou Enlai throughout his life was the key figure in the British creation of the CCP and their shaping of CCP policy. From his youthful studies of Darwin, J.S. Mill, and other social Darwinists, to his close alliances with British diplomats in the 1950s and 1960s; from his protection of British Hongkong, to his infamous friendship and collaboration with self-confessed British agent-of-influence Henry Kissinger in the 1970s, Zhou always considered himself to be in basic agreement with the British geopolitical outlook, although viewed from the perspective of China's parochial self-interest.

Author Han Suyin, of mixed Chinese and European (Belgian) heritage, was granted just this September the China Literature Foundation's "International Understanding and Friendship Literature Award" and \$5,000 cash, presented by one of the "Old Men" of the CCP's original leadership, Wan

Li. To have been so honored indicates that her biography of Zhou Enlai faithfully follows the party line, as have all of her many books on China (all in English) during her 78 years. Her multi-volume autobiography conveyed a romanticized view of pre-revolution China, with Chiang Kai-shek portrayed according to the politically correct CCP line as a monster—a portrayal she maintains in the biography of Zhou Enlai.

From the 'Great Leap' to the 'China Card'

Generally, Zhou is shown to have served faithfully as Mao Zedong's primary adviser and administrator, even while attempting to moderate the recurring fanatical excesses of Mao's reign of terror (the Rectification Campaign of the 1940s in Yenan, the Great Leap Forward and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns of the 1950s, and the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s). Han Suyin, who herself glorified the Cultural Revolution in her writings before the horrors of that era were made public, justifies Zhou Enlai's allegiance to Mao throughout each psychotic episode by arguing that, had Mao been brought down at any time after the Long March, then the Russians would have seized control of China, either directly or through the more doctrinaire Bolshevik-trained layers within the CCP leadership. Such reasoning was certainly not unjustified as regards the intentions of Stalin and his successors. However, what remains unexplored is the obvious coincidence of this view with British geopolitical interests, both in regard to keeping the Eurasian powers divided against each other, and in regard to the self-destruction of China virtually assured by continued Maoist rule.

Ultimately, this geopolitical view led to Henry Kissinger's "China Card" in the 1970s. Even in the heady days of the hyper-doctrinaire Anti-Rightist Campaign in the 1950s, Zhou had established close ties with leading British and French colonial masters. Han quotes Zhou in regard to his relations with the British High Commissioner in Malaysia, Malcolm MacDonald (the son of the Labor prime minister) that this was "one of the most fascinating friendships of my life." Pierre Mendès-France, the head of the French government after the fall of Dien Bien Phu (Vietnam) in 1954, was praised by Zhou as a "very sincere friend" who had an "excellent grasp of politics." In fact, Zhou brokered the 1954 agreement dividing Vietnam into North and South, convincing his ally Ho Chi Minh that the French and the United States would live up to their pledge to hold nationwide elections in 1956. Han Suyin reports that "Zhou did not encourage immediate socialism in Southeast Asia" because, among other things, "the presence of Overseas Chinese communities, wealthy and unbendingly capitalistic . . . sent money back to China."

Han Suyin reports that Zhou viewed both the Korean and the Vietnam wars as primarily Russian-instigated provocations intended to incite a war between the United States and China, keeping China dependent on Russia. The Korean

War, in fact, drained off both the money and the millions of youth desperately needed for the development of China in the early 1950s. As to Vietnam, although Zhou had been a close friend of Ho Chi Minh since their days together at Sun Yat-sen's Whampoa Military Academy in the 1920s, he never approved of Ho's intent to maintain, under his own leadership, the political merger of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, which the French had originally united into colonial French Indochina. Zhou preferred a non-communist, or at least an anti-Vietnamese *variety* of communism in Cambodia and Laos, not only to prevent a strong Vietnam on China's border, but to prevent a Russian-influenced communist Indochina from encircling China. This, of course, was one area of agreement between Zhou and Henry Kissinger. Han Suyin quotes Kissinger: "The problem for the Chinese is to stop Hanoi or Moscow from laying their hands on Cambodia." Han Suyin fails to mention that part of the deal that Zhou and Kissinger reached to end the Vietnam War and reestablish relations between China and the United States was that the United States would turn over Cambodia to the Chinese-trained and -supplied Khmer Rouge, who then carried out one of the most systematic mass slaughters of innocents in history.

Zhou's 'moral ambivalence' and Taoism

Han Suyin provides an insightful clue to Zhou's ability to support Mao at Mao's worst—even to carry out immoral and often bloody policies which he knew to be wrong—in order to retain some influence to "moderate" the disastrous results. She quotes Kissinger *praising* Zhou for this "talent," saying that Zhou exuded a "moral ambivalence" but, at the same time, an "inner serenity." Han Suyin then writes: " 'Moral ambivalence' is an inapposite term, indicating Kissinger's ignorance of Taoism, that fundamental duality of spirit which made Zhou accept that good and evil are inseparable Siamese twins. The Judaic notion of guilt and expiation did not haunt him." It is precisely this moral relativism, this acceptance of evil, which characterizes the cult of Taoism, which has been the pole for tyranny throughout Chinese history, as opposed to the Confucian belief that man reflects the perfection of the Creator, and that man must fight evil even if it costs his own life. Not only did Mao identify with the anti-Confucian elements throughout Chinese history, but it was precisely this same Taoist tradition which the British recognized as a kindred spirit to their own gnostic, anti-Christian radical empiricism. Han Suyin is wrong to think that Henry Kissinger doesn't understand Taoism.

A final note: Han Suyin leaves out of her biography one of Zhou Enlai's most infamous contributions to China's communist era. It was Zhou who implemented the draconian birth-control measures, including the official limit on how many children were permitted and the forced-abortion policies. Mao, in fact, had totally opposed population control, believing that more hands meant more production, rather

than just another mouth to feed. Zhou Enlai, during the early 1970s, while meeting regularly with Kissinger and many other leaders of the Anglo-American establishment who flooded into Beijing at that time, implemented the new population policy, turning China into the model for the genocidal depopulation lobby centered around the United Nations and William Draper's Population Council. It could not be the case that Han Suyin was unaware of this fact, since she herself was one of the leading spokesmen for the policy, even writing a chapter for Draper's magazine praising China's program.

There is no question that Zhou Enlai's opposition to the more insane aspects of Maoism contributed to the overthrow of the Gang of Four after his death, and that the reform era has been significantly influenced by his ideas. Zhou always fought for scientific research.

The Chinese development of nuclear technology and other scientific research continued, due to Zhou's protection, even while the country was plunged into chaos.

The ending of the isolation realized under the reform era since 1979 is to a large extent a realization of his policies. But this is all the more reason that a more critical and comprehensive study of Zhou's life is needed, so that the future does not become a replay of the disasters of the past.

Books Received

Crossing the Threshold of Hope, by Pope John Paul II, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 244 pages, hardbound, \$20.

Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist, by Robert Merrihew Adams, Oxford University Press, New York, 1994, 433 pages, hardbound, \$55.

Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment, by Allan Arkush, State University of New York, Albany, 1994, 304 pages, paperbound, \$19.95.

The Life and Death of NSSM 200: How the Destruction of Political Will Doomed the U.S., by Stephen Mumford, Center for Research on Population and Security, Research Triangle, N.C., 1994, 384 pages, hardbound, \$24.95; paperbound, \$18.95.

Scarcity or Abundance? A Debate on the Environment, by Norman Myers and Julian L. Simon, W.W. Norton, New York, 1994, 254 pages, hardbound, \$21.

Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan, by Nancy MacLean, Oxford University Press, New York, 1994, 292 pages, hardbound, \$30.