

[HARDCOVER: US]

It's been quite a journey from Mao to the Met

Hao Jiang Tian overcame extraordinary obstacles, from growing up during China's Cultural Revolution to enduring prejudice in the West, to become a top-level opera singer

BY KYLE MACMILLAN
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, DENVER

If Hao Jiang Tian (田浩江) were just another successful opera singer, his autobiography probably wouldn't stir much interest. In fact, it most likely wouldn't have been published at all, because he is not exactly a household name.

What sets the Chinese-born bass apart are the extraordinary hurdles he had to overcome to even perform professionally in the West, let alone become a regular at the Metropolitan Opera.

That story, which takes him from the dark days of the Cultural Revolution to the often unforgiving opera world, is at the heart of his new memoir, *Along the Roaring River: My Wild Ride From Mao to the Met*.

It is a tale of talent, persistence and luck, as well as timely assistance from a variety of people, including strangers and friends of friends, such as Martha Liao, a generous Denver geneticist who helped him come to Denver and who ultimately became his second wife.

Tian earned a master's degree from the University of Denver in 1987 and lived in Denver for a while afterward, including three years as pianist and singer at Wang's Mandarin House Restaurant. He now lives in New York City.

In addition to opera fans, this book should hold particular appeal for scholars and anyone else interested in Mao Zedong (毛澤東) and the history of communist China, because it offers an unusually evocative and personal view of the country from the inside.

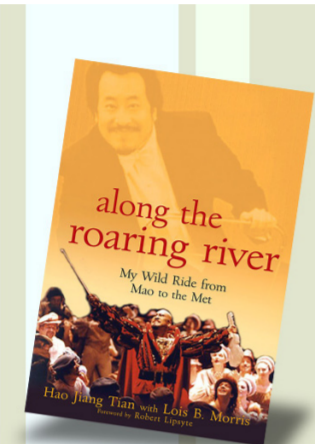
Born in 1954, Tian lived through the Cultural Revolutions' brutal upheaval, and witnessed such horrific events as a violently squelched uprising on April 5, 1976, in Tiananmen Square following Zhou Enlai's (周恩來) death.

"The screams and the moans were horrifying," Tian writes. "In the chaos, I put on my red armband and ran. I was running in the direction of the Chinese Revolutionary History Museum, when I noticed that the attackers were dragging their bloody victims in that same direction, piling their bodies under a pine tree."

"Three guys pulled a man by his hair, his eyeball hanging out its socket, and threw him atop the others."

Tian's parents, prominent musicians and high-ranking members of the military, suffered political disgrace and a 12-

Publication Notes



ALONG THE ROARING RIVER, MY WILD RIDE FROM MAO TO THE MET

BY HAO JIANG TIAN

336 PAGES

WILEY

year exile from Beijing, and he was forced to work in the Beijing Boiler Factory after his graduation in 1970.

As might be expected, music runs through his life and through this book, from the piano lessons he despised as a child to a transformative performance at the Metropolitan Opera he attended just hours after his arrival in the US in 1983.

If there are any surprises, it might be the degree of prejudice that Tian faced as a Chinese singer. He writes, for example, of a time when a French director wanted him to shave his goatee and mustache because he looked "too Chinese."

"The odds were stacked against us for many reasons ... not all of them related to skill," he writes. "Too many people in the business thought that Asian singers could not master this form or that audiences would not wish to see or hear Chinese people in Western roles."

Written in conjunction with author and journalist Lois B. Morris, the book has a natural, conversational feel. And based on the half-dozen or so exchanges I've had with Tian, it effectively conveys his personality and voice.

If the travails of his early life make for the most compelling reading, the book ends on a reassuringly upbeat note — a happy marriage, supportive circle of friends and top-level operatic career.



Once again, she's the talk of the town

Admired and feared editor Tina Brown has shaken up magazines on both sides of the Atlantic. Will she succeed on the Web?

BY ED PILKINGTON
THE GUARDIAN, NEW YORK

IN her mission statement about the online magazine she launched this week, Tina Brown says she decided to call it *The Daily Beast* because that is "the name of the newspaper in *Scoop*, Evelyn Waugh's hilarious satire of Fleet Street, which happens to be my favorite novel of all time." To which one can only reply: Up to a point, Lord Copper.

The spoof newspaper in Waugh's novel is in fact called *The Beast*. If you had a mind to turn it into an acronym (Waugh didn't) it would be *TB*, sharing her initials, which would be fitting given her own reputation for ruthless perfectionism.

For almost 30 years Brown has been shaking up the world of magazine journalism, spreading fear and awe in equal measure. Now she has turned her hand to the web, a medium renowned for shaking up editors rather than vice versa, and medialand is agog as to how she will fare. For some the answer is quite simple. "She will be great as a Web editor, because she is a great editor," is how Maer Roshan, editor of the pop culture magazine *Radar* and a long-time friend, sees it.

He recalls a discussion with her at her last, ill-fated, start-up, *Talk* magazine, soon after the Sept. 11 attacks on New York.

"Someone suggested we find out about the Taliban, and Tina leapt at the idea. 'Who have we got to infiltrate the Taliban?' she said."

Such ambition has been a hallmark of Brown's career and style of editing since she took over the helm of the society magazine *Tatler* in 1979 at the age of 26. By then her reputation was already established — she was making waves while still at Oxford University, wrote a column for *Punch* magazine and struck up a relationship with her editor at the *Sunday Times*, Harold Evans, who she went on to marry in 1981.

She took the *Tatler*, swept aside its staid, debutante air, and turned it into an organ that people talked about. She repeated the trick in 1982 in New York where she gave *Vanity Fair* an extreme makeover, remodeling it into the mix of highbrow writing and lowbrow celebrity gossip and true crime reporting that to a large extent it remains. Her cover of the nude and heavily pregnant Demi Moore was a sensation.

It was at the *New Yorker*, still only 38, that she cemented her fame, or notoriety, depending on conflicting views of her impact on the august journal. Many people thought she took a rather boring publication and made it readable;



PHOTOS BY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

"She's a tremendous perfectionist. She frets if things aren't as good as they should be, which is an advantage but also creates an element of anxiety."

— Alexander Chancellor, former editor at the *New Yorker*

many others were horrified by the first use of photographs, and profiles of celebrities. Alexander Chancellor, who was signed up by Brown to oversee the *Talk* of

the *Town* section, remembers being assailed by two blue-rinse, elderly women in the New York library. "You tell that Miss Brown we don't need a contents list. We are not stupid!" they screamed.

What stands out for Chancellor was Brown's instinct for controversy and rigorous standards. "She's a tremendous perfectionist. She frets if things aren't as good as they should be, which is an advantage but also creates an element of anxiety."

Editing the most famous magazine in the world would have satisfied the ambitions of most journalists. Not Brown, who after six years quit in 1998 to pursue her desire to become a media mogul in her own right. It was perhaps a case of pride coming before a fall. Her experiment with a new magazine tied to book publishing and movie rights, *Talk*, was a massively expensive flop, brought down partly by the economic chill after Sept. 11 and partly by its own hype and overreach.

Despite the commercial success of her bestselling book on the Princess of Wales, the *Diana Chronicles*, the *Talk* debacle still hangs over her and adds an edginess to this week's launch of her Internet magazine. Forget the mistle — will the *Daily Beast* prove as costly a

mistake for its backer, Barry Diller of IAC, as *Talk* did for Miramax?

In the first two days she has demonstrated she has lost none of her talent for creating a stir. The Web was buzzing — to use her own favorite phrase — with chatter about a spiky profile of Jennifer Lopez that alleged she had suffered a form of nervous breakdown. *Elle* had turned the article down for being too unflattering. Brown snapped it up instead.

The site seeks to help readers through the clutter and cacophony of the Web with its own digest of the best reads of the day, supplemented by its own commissions from writers, politicians and household names. Jeremy Gilbert, a Web designer who teaches at the Medill School of Journalism, thinks she will have a steep learning curve as an Internet publisher. "I'm not alone in being a little unsure about what the *Daily Beast* is trying to do. It doesn't have the political slant of the Huffington Post and it doesn't make many concessions to the online format."

So the jury is out on the *Beast* and its celebrity editor. She clearly relishes the challenge, though only time will tell whether the medium matches or overwhelms the scale of her ambitions.

[HARDCOVER: UK]

In Jinmen, caught between the ROC and a hard place

'Cold War Island,' by Harvard professor Michael Szonyi, is a well-researched, dispassionate look at what it's like to live in a militarized zone

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

On Oct. 17, 1949 a mother on the island of Jinmen sent her son over to the mainland, 3km away, to buy some cooking oil. That afternoon the ferries stopped running, and he wasn't able to return for 40 years.

The story is told in a new book on the island, known to Westerners at the time by its dialect name of Quemoy, by Harvard's Michael Szonyi. In it he mixes a description of Jinmen's role as a crucial pawn in the Cold War with a dispassionate look at what the experience was like for the islanders themselves, based on 70 new interviews, together with other recollections already in print.

When Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) was forced to retreat to Taiwan in late 1949, he found himself still in possession of quite a number of islands strung out along the Chinese coast. There was the Dachen group opposite Zhejiang province, the Mazu group, Jinmen itself and its neighboring islets, and the whole of Hainan

to the south. Hainan fell to the Communists in 1950 and the Dachen group was evacuated after a military defeat in 1955.

Jinmen and Mazu, within sight of the mainland and a full 100km from Taipei, thus became nerve centers in a stand-off between opposing ideologies. Eisenhower called the attacks on then a "Gilbert and Sullivan war," meaning it was a comic parody that shouldn't be taken too seriously. But thousands died in the 1949 landing and the artillery barrages of 1954 to 1945 and 1958, and at one point the US announced it was willing to risk a nuclear strike to defend the freedom of the inhabitants of these vulnerable outposts. These tiny islands, too dry to grow rice and having to depend instead on sweet potatoes and peanuts, could have been the trigger for a Third World War.

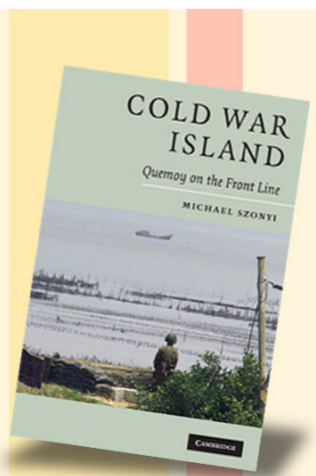
Following the landing of 8,000 People's Liberation Army troops on Oct. 25, 1949 and their defeat by Chiang's forces, leaving almost 4,000 invaders dead and over

1,000 Republic of China forces killed, a thorough militarization quickly ensued. The local fishing fleet, clearly important on an otherwise poor island, was destroyed — ostensibly, Szonyi says, for raw materials, but probably also to prevent military personnel from defecting back to the mainland. Houses were torn down, doors requisitioned as roofs for underground shelters, and the population subjected to forced labor and intense political surveillance. Whereas martial law was lifted in Taiwan itself in 1987, on Jinmen it remained in force until 1992.

All this puts Jinmen on a par with Vietnam's Hue, the fields of Flanders, Korea's Panmunjom, and all other places in the world where military powers have at one time or another found themselves playing out their conflict games, and ordinary life as a result has become impossible.

Of course, in states of emergency of all kinds many ordinary things become non-

Publication Notes



COLD WAR ISLAND

BY MICHAEL SZONYI

310 PAGES

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

viable. The quiet life that on Jinmen had led to performances of operas and the functioning of tea-houses was replaced by villages that were, in Szonyi's words, "no longer civilian population centers to be protected and defended by the army, but military installations in their own right." And this is what militarization is — the seeing and using of everything from buildings to crops, ships to people, as means of furthering the military's aims, rather than as existing as the slow processes of history had led them to become.

By the mid-1970s there were probably well over 80,000 military on Mazu and Jinmen, out of a total of Taiwanese bearing arms of almost half a million. The civilian population was around 60,000, and 40 percent of households were operating small businesses to cater to the gigantic garrison, a figure which, the author comments, "must be among the highest rates of entrepreneurship of any society in history."

There's an interesting section on

the military's brothels on Jinmen, known as "831" (apparently either a sexual pun or a phone-number). The author states, inexplicably, that he's decided not to try to interview former prostitutes from this system, but points out it was quite open, and carefully regulated by the authorities. A couplet outside one brothel read: "The hero risks his life on the frontier; the heroine contributes her body to serve the nation".

Taiwan itself had licensed prostitution at the time, he writes, and locals on Jinmen believed that most of the 250 or so girls who worked there at the system's peak had broken some of the rules that applied in Taiwan itself, and though Szonyi himself doubts this he insists Jinmen females were never so used. He dutifully engages in calculations as to how many soldiers were entertained by each girl in a day. The estimates he collects vary from at least 10 to five times that number, with fireworks let off in celebration when some sex-

worker broke the record.

Though the essence of this book is far from jocular, there are other anomalies that can't help raise a smile. The author relates, for instance, how the idea of tunnels from which to launch a counter-attack after a possible invasion came from the Vietnam War. The Vietnamese tunnels, however, were the work of the Communists, but to admit that was impossible in 1960s Taiwan, so it was claimed instead that they were an aspect of a form of fortified community developed in Vietnam by the US.

The reason *Cold War Island* is such a persuasive account is that the author is everywhere cautious but thorough. When he claims something, you believe him, and this is in essence not because of his academic credentials but because of his style. Michael Szonyi is neither a sensationalist nor a slave to modish nostrums in the history academy, and his well-researched book is as a result a very welcome addition to Taiwan's story.