

Culture



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Yue DAIYUN and Carolyn WAKEMAN, *To the Storm: The Odyssey of a Revolutionary Chinese Woman*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985. 387 pages, U.S. \$9.95 (paperback).

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A keynote to this volume is offered in the words, *To The Storm*, the title of a poem Yue Daiyun wrote in 1957 shortly before her denunciation as a Rightist. The poem itself does not survive - she burned it together with her other early poetry in 1966. It is best read in conjunction with a quote in the middle of the book - she refers to Red Guards early in the Cultural Revolution as using a slogan of Lin Biao, "You can forget everything else but the word 'power'" (p. 224). The volume is a sustained exploration of the relation between words, power, and truth in the context of the political turmoil in China that dates from the Anti-rightist Campaign of 1957.

On the surface this is a work in the now-common genre of Chinese accounts of politically induced hardship and suffering. Although some of the features to be discussed below are shared with other works in this genre, this particular work is distinct and unusually valuable in at least two respects: the location of the author at the centre of the storm, and the analytical depth of her autobiographical account.

In the formal sense this book is presented as an autobiography. It was, however, conceived as a collaborative effort from the beginning, on the part of a Chinese intellectual who spent 1982-83 at Berkeley, and Carolyn Wakeman, who describes herself as having rendered Yue Daiyun's experiences, sentiments and insights into the form of an autobiography in English. Wakeman's skill in doing so, with both understanding of the Chinese experience and concepts, and sensitivity to the English language and readership, is a major factor in the accessibility and significance of this book. While it is surely being read in China as well, the work is one of intended intercultural communication (xviii-xix). I will limit myself to these few observations and proceed within the terms of the co-authors' narrative strategy.

Yue Daiyun's experience has much in common with those of numerous other Chinese intellectuals during the same time period, but she was unusually well-placed to record and to analyze them and had the will to record her interpretation of the truth of those years. Yue Daiyun (b. 1931) joined underground activities as a student at the elite Beijing University in 1948 and became a member of the

Communist Party in 1949. She was both a prominent student leader (and subsequently faculty member) within the new order and, very shortly, the daughter-in-law of a noted scholar who was also President of Beijing University. In the early 1950's she enjoyed both an established elite status derived from her marriage, and a new elite status as a Party secretary. Indeed, the book is imbued with the dual sense of social responsibility implied by both statuses in China - if she lost mundane leadership status through most of her adult life, her autobiography is permeated with the assertion of that status through the deployment of words.

In 1958, Yue Daiyun unexpectedly moved from being a Party secretary who assessed the political reliability of others, to being an officially declared Rightist with her Party membership revoked. In the following years she experienced work in the countryside, political criticism (from both sides), and a return to work and politics in Beijing University. Her husband, who was not directly involved in her early political difficulties, was drawn into the centre of political debate in the Cultural Revolution when he was one of the prominent classical philosophers called upon by the "Gang of Four" to lend their scholarship to the re-evaluation of Confucius in the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius. He was a highly visible figure in the Liang Xiao writing group and was not cleared politically until 1979; the entire family lived under a shadow until that date. The book covers a longer time span than most such accounts, and portrays in detail the effect of political campaigns on family and personal relations.

Much of the richness of Yue Daiyun's account comes from her having been both judge and judged in the intense political struggles of those years. Even after being labelled a Rightist, she could still, in her vulnerability, be called upon to criticize others, and she did so. Unlike some other accounts of those years, this is not a simple account of victimization, but a complex portrayal of a complicated and fluid political field, one in which the appropriate deployment of highly (and unavoidably) politicized words was critical, and in which control of truth was at the heart of political contention, whether principled, factional, or purely self-seeking.

Works of this character add a deeper dimension to an anthropological understanding of China. The complexities of the truth-power relation now at the centre of contemporary theory lie beyond the grasp of conventional methodologies. In such apparent non-anthropological sources can be found detailed accounts - generating their own truths - of the internal workings of an exceptional intense history-in-the-making.

Where we otherwise turn for insight, for example, to Foucault's rich work on truth and power in the Western tradition, a contemporary body of material is now available in this emerging genre of Chinese writing. Many of these works have been used as indicators of the political culture of the time in a relatively straightforward documentary sense. Yue Daiyun's work can also be used in this manner, but

as one of the best works of the genre, it moves further and draws attention to the emergent internal analysis of contemporary generations of Chinese intellectuals, steeped in their own (multiple) traditions of sophisticated attention to the politics of truth. Here lies a convergence of intellectual concerns which crosses cultures and disciplines, and is at the theoretical storm centre of contemporary discourse.