

Frederic E. Wakeman, Jr.

President

**American Historical
Association**

1992



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Frederic Evans Wakeman, Jr., brings a keen intelligence, a global historical vision, and an infectious energy to the presidency of the American Historical Association. A noted historian of China, whose publications range from the seventeenth-century founding of the Qing dynasty to the thought of Mao Zedong, Wakeman has trained a generation of China scholars at the University of California at Berkeley, played an instrumental role in promoting scholarly access to the People's Republic of China, and served as president of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC).

Born in Kansas City, on December 12, 1937, Wakeman left the American heartland when he was but a few months old, and his youthful schooling was distinctly international. His father, Frederic Evans Wakeman, Sr., was a successful novelist (author of *Shore Leave*, *The Hucksters*, *The Wastrel*, and *The Saxon Charm*), many of whose stories became Hollywood movies. In the years after the war, Frederic, Sr., led his family on a peripatetic life, and the young Frederic attended school in New York City, Cuernavaca, Bermuda, Santa Barbara, Havana, France, and Ft. Lauderdale. With a gift for languages, Wakeman adjusted easily to instruction in Spanish and French, picked up smatterings of Italian and Portuguese during summer vacations, and learned some Latin at his British grammar school in Bermuda. The Cuban years left some special legacies.

Returning from school through a tough neighborhood, Wakeman learned to fight—and he would later refine these skills with lessons in Chinese martial arts. One summer, the adventuresome family traced the Caribbean portion of Columbus's second voyage on its 56-foot ketch, and sailing continues to be one of Fred's recreations, along with tennis and skiing, which he enjoys with his children, Frederic E. Wakeman, III, Matthew Clark, and Sarah Elizabeth.

In 1955, Wakeman entered Harvard College, where his education continued in a cosmopolitan vein—though still focussed on Europe. He majored in European history and literature, added German and Russian to his languages, and began, in his father's footsteps, to write novels. One, *Seventeen Royal Palms Drive*, was published in 1962 under the pen name Evans Wakeman and sold several hundred thousand copies—a publication run that most historians can only dream of! While at Harvard, one of his professors from the wartime OSS spotted Wakeman's unusual combination of language and analytical skills and suggested a career in intelligence. When he graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1959, Wakeman might indeed have headed that way, but fortunately for the historical profession, he received an Augustus Clifford Tower Fellowship to pursue Soviet Studies and Political Theory at the Institut d'études politiques in Paris. A career of government service was postponed, and later abandoned altogether.

It was in Paris that Wakeman first moved in the direction of China studies—encouraged by friends and intrigued by a course at the Institut d'études

politiques. He applied for graduate school at both Harvard and Berkeley, and, attracted by Joseph Levenson's work and with his Harvard chums' suggestion that at a public school like the University of California you could probably pick up a Ph.D. in a couple of years, he headed West. From that time forward, Fred Wakeman and Chinese Studies at Berkeley have been inextricably linked. In 1965, he received his Ph.D. and was appointed assistant professor. Rising through the ranks at record speed, Wakeman was full professor by 1971. From 1973 to 1979, he served as chairman of the Center for Chinese Studies; and now he is director of the Institute of East Asian Studies and Walter and Elise Haas Professor of Asian Studies.

The range of Wakeman's scholarship knows few parallels in the China field. His first monograph, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861* (1966), was an influential, pioneering work of local social history. Borrowing eclectically from the literature of the social sciences, it both reflected Wakeman's earlier training at Harvard and Paris, and foreshadowed a particular contribution of his writings, teaching, and service to the field, bridging the gap between sinology and social science theory. In 1973, *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of the Thought of Mao Tse-tung* was published, receiving a nomination for the National Book Award. The depth and breadth of this analysis of Mao's thought is unparalleled, as the reader is led from Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu) to Marx, from neo-Confucians to neo-Hegelians, from the textbook

Mao used in college to his poetry during the Cultural Revolution. Once again, the example of Wakeman's scholarship made an important point: a full appreciation of China's modern history requires a broad consideration of comparative issues in Europe and other corners of the world.

It is symbolic of the range of Wakeman's scholarship that even as he was writing *History and Will*, he was working on a magisterial two-volume study of the transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasties. Published in 1985, *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China* is a work of great erudition—narrative history on a grand scale based on a wide range of seventeenth-century official and literary sources of considerable linguistic complexity. Embedded within a complex tale of court debates and literati culture is a provocative analysis of the seventeenth-century crisis in China—a crisis whose effects were dramatically different in Asia and Europe. *The Great Enterprise* was properly honored with both the Joseph R. Levenson Prize of the Association for Asian Studies and the Berkeley Prize.

Wakeman has also published *The Fall of Imperial China* (1975), a book that remains the standard textbook on Qing history and a model of analytical synthesis. He has edited or coedited four volumes: *Nothing Concealed: Essays in Honor of Liu Yuyun* (1970), *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China* (1975), *Perspectives on Modern China: Four Anniversaries* (1991), and *Shanghai Sojourners* (1992). Articles have treated secret societies,

intellectual autonomy in Ming and Qing politics, rebellion and revolution, the Canton trade and the Opium War, historiography in China, the funeral rites and mausolea for Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong, and the Shanghai police. In recent years he has regularly introduced current China scholarship to the general public through the pages of the *New York Review of Books*.

The 1970s and '80s were years of tremendous growth and change in the China field, and Wakeman played a pivotal role in one of the most important changes—scholarly exchange with the People's Republic of China. As Educational Adviser of the United States Inter-Agency Negotiating Team on Chinese-American International Exchanges in 1978, he helped negotiate cultural exchanges with China in such a way that the Chinese desire for scientific and technical exchanges would be matched by a commitment to Americans' social science and humanities research opportunities in China. Since that time, Wakeman has devoted much of his prodigious energy to protecting and expanding this delicate and often troubled opening to China. He has chaired and served many years on the various committees that support the China field: the ACLS Committee on Studies of Chinese Civilization, the National Academy of Science's Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China, the Committee for Advanced Study in China, and the ACLS/SSRC Joint Committee on Chinese Studies. In addition, he has served on the editorial boards of the *American Historical Review*,

Contemporary China, Modern Asian Studies, Modern China, China Quarterly, and several Chinese journals.

In 1986, the board of directors of the Social Science Research Council called on Wakeman's energy and talent to serve as the council's president. The SSRC has long been a mainstay of support for foreign area studies, but Wakeman was the first foreign area scholar selected for the presidency. At the council, he was particularly active in sponsoring the application of the social sciences to social policy issues (such as the social impact of the AIDS epidemic) and to improving their relations with the humanities. He also continued and expanded his commitment to foreign area studies and scholarly exchange, joining the Council on Foreign Relations and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and serving on the board of directors of IREX, the Steering Committee for European-American Exchanges in East Asian Studies, the U.S. Board of the International Institute of Applied System Analysis, and the Asia Society's Contemporary Affairs Committee and China Council. Since returning to Berkeley in 1989, Wakeman has continued to sit on many of these councils and committees, and in addition joined the advisory boards of a number of centers and foundations: the MacArthur Foundation, Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, Stanford Center for the Humanities, and the National Resource Center for East Asian Studies.

Even while he was living in New York and serving as president of SSRC, Wakeman continued to train graduate students at Berkeley, returning regularly for

a couple of frantic days when his eager graduate students would line up for a few precious minutes with their mentor. Students from those years remember the experience well: you went in frustrated that Fred was back for only a few days, but you came out half an hour later feeling he was the greatest guy you'd ever met, who brought an intense personal interest in your life and your research, and who raised more new ideas on your project than you thought possible—quite enough to last until his next visit. His command of bibliography and his memory of key sources are legendary: students recall asking about books to read in preparation for their oral exams and being told author, title, and the precise pages on which key information was to be found. In seminars, his criticism of scholarship in the field set a fearsome example: a student could enter a session believing a work quite illuminating, only to hear Wakeman's detailed and withering criticism reduce the book's argument to shreds.

Berkeley's outstanding program in modern Chinese history was established by Wakeman's mentor, Joseph R. Levenson, whose legacy was a commitment to broad comparative training and large philosophical questions. Under Wakeman, that legacy was continued; and he added a concern for integrating history and the social sciences. His own training at Harvard and Paris lent a broad comparative and theoretical perspective to his teaching and research on China. His own work spanned three centuries of Chinese history, and combined political, social, and intellectual themes. Not surprisingly, he trained

students of similar diversity. Their periods ranged from the seventeenth century to the twentieth, their topics from Ming dynasty intellectuals to twentieth-century student protest rituals, from silk weavers to pettifoggers, imperial fiscal reform to Chinese adoption practices.

A generation of China scholars has been inspired by the breadth of Wakeman's scholarship and learning, and awed by the zest and energy which he has brought to the task of promoting China studies and the social sciences generally. We are all indebted to his enormous contribution to the field, and to the example of scholarship, commitment, and service that he brings to his latest position and honor, the presidency of the American Historical Association.

Respectfully submitted,
Joseph W. Esherick
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