



## IN MEMORIAM

Frederic E. Wakeman, Jr.  
Professor of History, Emeritus  
Haas Professor of Asian Studies, Emeritus  
Berkeley  
1937 – 2006

Frederic Evans Wakeman Jr., eminent professor of Chinese history, emeritus, and recently retired Haas Professor of Asian Studies, emeritus, died in Lake Oswego, Oregon, on September 14, 2006. He was 68. The cause of death was cancer.

Fred, who taught at the University of California, Berkeley since 1965, was the world's leading historian of late imperial and modern China. A productive scholar, he had published, edited and co-edited over 30 books in English and Chinese and authored over 100 essays and articles that appeared in learned journals as well as popular journals such as *The New York Review of Books* and *The New Republic*. A leading scholar in the field, he was honored by his colleagues with election as the president of the American Historical Association in 1992. His books have won numerous honors, including the 1987 Levenson Prize awarded by the Association for Asian Studies, the 1987 Berkeley Prize awarded by the University of California Press, and the Urban History Association's prize for Best Book in Non-North American Urban History published during 1995 and 1996. Nationally he had, since 1974, chaired or served on the advisory committees on Chinese Studies at the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Sciences Research Council. He was a key figure, in the late 1970s and 1980s, in the establishment of the Committee on Scholarly Communications with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC), a national committee housed at the National Academy of Sciences that oversaw and facilitated scholarly exchanges in all fields between the United States and China. He was a senior advisor to the Beijing office of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the CSCPRC from 1985 to 1986. This was followed by membership on the U.S. – U.S.S.R. Binational Commission on the Social Science and Humanities from 1986 to 1989, and membership in the Council on Foreign Relations from 1986 to the time of his death. He was president of the Social Science Research Council in New York from 1986 to 1989. He was elected to the American Philosophical Society in 1998 and had been a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences since 1986.

Fred also had a notable record of service at Berkeley: in 1973-79, he served as chair of the Center for Chinese Studies; in 1983-84, he was a member of the Berkeley Division's Committee on Budget and Interdepartmental Relations; and in 1990-2001 he served simultaneously as the director of the Institute of East Asian Studies and the director of the East Asia National Resource Center. Upon retirement, as an acknowledgment of his great service to the university and his extraordinary scholarship, he was awarded the Berkeley Citation.

Born in Kansas City, Kansas on December 12, 1937, Fred left the American heartland when he was quite young. His youthful schooling was distinctly international. His father, Frederic Evans Wakeman Sr., was a

successful novelist who led his family on a peripatetic life, so that the young Fred attended schools in New York City, Cuernavaca, Bermuda, Havana, France, Santa Barbara, and Ft. Lauderdale. Adjusting easily to instruction in Spanish and French, he picked up smatterings of Italian and Portuguese during summer vacations, and learned some Latin at his British grammar school in Bermuda.

In 1955, Fred entered Harvard College, where he majored in the elite program of European History and Literature, adding German and Russian to his linguistic repertoire and graduating magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa. He turned to Chinese studies while studying at the Institut d'Études Politiques in Paris and then earned his Ph.D. degree in Far Eastern history at Berkeley in 1965, mastering Chinese and Japanese in the process. While still an undergraduate he published his first works — a short story and a novel. During the next four decades, through his work and example, Fred set the research agenda in his field and helped build the infrastructure for the pursuit of Chinese studies in the United States and in collaboration with research institutions of the People's Republic of China. He also trained several generations of graduate students who staff the China field at major American universities, including Harvard University; Columbia University; Berkeley; the University of California, San Diego; Northwestern University; and the University of California, Irvine.

Wakeman's writings on China were wide-ranging yet focused, global in perspective, yet vividly detailed in local grounding. He brought to his scholarly work an enormous intellectual drive and unbounded energy. His first book, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-61*, has been widely regarded as a pioneering work in Chinese local history, making extensive use of the original documents of the Guangdong governor-general's office that were captured by British soldiers in 1858. It ushered in a trend in late imperial Chinese social and regional history based on archival research. In *History and Will*, his next book, Fred turned to the twentieth century and intellectual history, examining Mao's intellectual formation through the latter's study of the work of such European and Chinese thinkers as Kant, Hegel, Wang Yangming and Kang Youwei. In *The Great Enterprise*, the monumental two-volume work on the Ming-Qing transition, Fred presented the disintegration of the Ming and the reconsolidation of the empire under the Qing. Wakeman opens his introduction of this grand historical drama of conquest and reconstruction by quoting Alexis de Tocqueville: "In the end the barbarians invite the civilized people into their palaces and the civilized open their school to the barbarians." Wakeman underscored the conceit of the civilized and the vitality of the "barbarians," the Manchu, in the fall of the Ming and the rise of the Qing. He evoked the epic drama and personal poetry in this confrontation between those with their schools and those with their arms. The committee awarding him the Levenson Prize described the book as "a monumental work [of] extraordinary scope, ambition and narrative power... a true history written with an awareness of world events and global connections."

Warfare runs deep through most of Wakeman's works. As his work moved into China's mid-twentieth century, he took note of the change in the nature of warfare and state-organized violence. His impatience with saber-rattling ideologues and narrow-minded nationalists is palpable in his Republican trilogy: *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937*; *Shanghai Badlands, 1937-1941*; *Red Star over Shanghai, 1941-1952*, and in *Spymaster*, a study of Dai Li and the Nationalist secret service that infiltrated and incapacitated the regular police force. These studies chart the modernizing state's quest for order and control with the help of new training and technology, while showing in relentless details the forces of disorder — gangs, gambling, prostitution, drugs, kidnappings, torture and terror. In the end the interpenetration of the forces of order and disorder engendered such a shared conspiracy of intrigue that the two sides became indistinguishable. Wakeman told complex tales in these volumes. He wove a comprehensible narrative from the most tendentious sources, revealing broader patterns that defied ideological clarity and moralistic judgment. His history showed, much as the greatest literary works do, that as modern states mobilized ideology to sanction violence, disciplined violence came to destroy trust and faith, alter any sense of reality, deny love and self-knowledge, and undermine the very foundation of a civilized state of being.

Modernity in Wakeman's portrayal is far removed from bliss and tranquility, heroes and laurels. Through relentless thinking and articulating, the civilized mind wrestled with the unnamable darkness of modernity. As a historian Wakeman rendered human affairs intelligible through their patterns in time. He read individuals by observing the paths they had followed. He asked whether there was an escape from history if the path that men followed did not lead to happiness. He pondered whether civilizations could remake themselves for the better if whole societies threw themselves into revolutionary endeavor to break the chains of the past. His answers to these questions seemed ambiguous. His "voyages" set him on journeys across many boundaries. As Joseph Levenson had observed, it was the sorrow and burden of global explorers, that the more they have

ventured to a new coast, the further alienated they become from their home port. For an explorer in time, the tension was just as palpable between the new and old worlds.

As a scholar Fred Wakeman was versatile. As a teacher he imposed no paradigm. He directed doctoral dissertations across the full span of late imperial and modern Chinese history. He inspired by example and taught his students to find their own voice. His intellectual progenies formed no particular “school” of common interpretive understanding. They draw insights from multiple complementary disciplines – literature, anthropology, sociology, political science, legal studies, economics, etc. – to probe a wide range of historical issues. They cohere in their endeavors to look beyond the obvious, to identify the critical points of historical tension, to consider the weight of documented evidence, and to make a case through a methodical analysis of the intersections between “history” and “value”.

A man known for his incredible level of energy, acuity, understanding, and generosity in spirit, Wakeman was a source of inspiration and support and a pillar for the Berkeley China community. He is to be much missed for a long time to come.

Fred is survived by his widow, He Lea Wakeman; three children, Frederic III, of London, England; Matthew, of Berkeley, California; Sarah, of Providence, Rhode Island; two grandchildren; and, a sister, Sue Farquhar, of Annapolis, Maryland.

Irwin Scheiner  
Joseph W. Esherick  
Wen- hsin Yeh