

BOOK REVIEW

Yang Kuisong

Eight Outcasts:

Social and Political Marginalization in China under Mao

Translated by Gregor Benton and Ye Zhen

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019)

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When I was reading Professor Yang Kuisong's *Eight Outcasts: Social and Political Marginalization in China Under Mao*, newly translated into English in 2020, the COVID19 virus was claiming thousands of lives in China. Candles lit up my Wechat screen, mourning the death of Dr. Li Wenliang. In the stream of candles there were also pictures of a piece of paper—a testimony of admonition with Dr. Li's own signature. He was accused as a rumormonger, for the crime of telling his peers over a Wechat group that some patients with SARS-like symptoms had been hospitalized in his institution and there was evidence of interpersonal infection. He accepted the admonition. We thus saw on that paper three vividly red fingerprints, on the side of his handwritings: "I can," "I understand," and his name. His quiet death turned the injustice wrought upon him into the grievance of millions. People were outraged that, once again, someone died before the wrongs were corrected, before they could even get an explanation.

Yang Kuisong's book is, at heart, a search for just such an explanation. As a PRC historian, Professor Yang serves as "a voice for its voiceless" (2) in the finest historian's tradition, devoting his book to "find answers for all those innocent people whose lives were blighted." (21) However, one ought not expect any sense of closure or relief. On the contrary, as a book that excavates and resurfaces the traumatic experience of the socialist China's outcasts, it offers something closer to a cognitive processing therapy that helps us to rebuild a conscious relation with the past, rather than a hermeneutics of Maoist class struggle. This should be ascribed to the unique sources it employs, namely, the personal archives of eight "problematic elements," accumulated during the multiple political campaigns they endured. Reading the numerous confessions and self-criticism, the historical problematique transforms into empathy with the unfathomable fate and suffering. What is left is, in Yang's words, a book of "semi-biography" that offers "a collection of research materials for a social history." (14) Its affective power and the entanglement of the baffling experience of these marginalized persons recovers a feeling for the heaviness of their lived tragedies.

The "outcasts" in the title points to the fact that not everyone's life was a tragedy. Fear might have been shared, but pain was not. Political marginalization was effected and became all-powerful through social marginalization: "oppressing the very

minority" was not incidental to the policy of "consolidating the majority" but its prerequisite and indeed its very essence. And those of the minority, unable to escape from their own past and present, had to confess, by their own hand, over and over again, their sins and crimes. The unbearable heaviness of the personal archive arises from the interaction between known and unknown. The unknown was the investigation; the outcast was left in the dark as to what information against them had been collected and how. Perhaps more ghastly was the known, that is, the part they had to contribute in the form of endless confessions. One could never know if his writing is gaining sympathy or attracting calamity, and where is that safe border between inappropriate activism and dangerous passivity.

Most of the outcasts studied in this book had received an education and had jobs before 1949 and went on after 1949 to work in government administration, industry, mining, the army, education, health, or a service trade. In other words, they were "work unit-ers" [*danwei ren*] who, by definition, had a personal archive. Therefore none of the eight outcasts was a landlord or rich peasant, who, although undoubtedly marginalized, did not leave personal archives behind them. The author carefully pieced together each of the eight men's turn of fate under multiple political campaigns. The detailed description of the political power play at the microlevel in different institutional settings makes every chapter a rich case study greatly informative to students of PRC history.

Our subject of the first chapter is Liao Xuechang. Liao tried for years to conceal his old job titles in the Nationalist Party and its police department. But it was only a matter of time for him to be exposed and labeled as a "historical counter-revolutionary." Though his expertise in construction was in high demand, he was expelled from work and placed under "surveillance of the masses." He was sent to labor for eighteen years in a rural commune, where he managed to win the masses' approval by always offering a helping hand in the various tasks local people were facing. Yet before his good behavior could be translated into redemption of political status, he died from a work accident in 1978. His "counter-revolutionary hat" was finally removed in the same year of his death.

Li Lesheng, the protagonist of chapter 2, was not a suspect in the eyes of authority in the early years of the new regime.

Distressed by his past as a nurse in a Nationalist military hospital and as a member of a minor secret society, Li stepped forward to give an unsolicited confession. These rather unserious problems were taken seriously after he got involved in a dispute against his work unit's leadership. An investigation against him revealed a more unsavory crime: Li was homosexual and engaged in illicit relationships with many men! He was labeled a "bad element" and sentenced to prison.

The third chapter is on Fang Liren. A former Nationalist Party cadre, Fang had for many years succeeded in shielding himself from the shock of political storm with his status as an outstanding doctor. Even the temporary crisis caused by his overt disobedience against the hospital's leadership did not lead to serious punishment. Yet, whatever security he enjoyed ended with the Cultural Revolution. He was sent down to the countryside, where he labored for the next twelve years.

Mu Guoxuan, the subject of chapter four, was a stubborn and naïve man. He believed that it was the right thing to do to disclose to the Party every single reactive thought he had. He handed over his diary with all sincerity, only to prove that he was an "active counter-revolutionary" inside out.

Chapter five tells the story of Chi Weirong. Started his career as a Youth League branch secretary with a promising future, Chi failed to live up to his superiors' great expectations. His enthusiasm for music, film, dance, travel and romance exceeded his zest for a political career. He was thus beloved by students but despised by the authority. He tried to leave his work unit and seek out greener pastures, but there was no "elsewhere" in Maoist China for someone like him.

The military Youth League cadre Shang Haowen, the protagonist of Chapter six, also handed his diary to the upper-level authority. Shang's parents had both been killed during the land reform. Pretending that he was not shaken up by their death, he nonetheless failed to hide his sympathy with the peasants who suffered under the policy of unified grain purchase, the same policy that ultimately led to the Great Famine. A dozen of entries in his diary containing this criticism, among thousands of others, proved that he was anti-Party and anti-Chairman Mao. He was then put under endless interrogation and struggle sessions.

Che Shaowen was a merchant-turned-cadre in a commercial unit. His story is the subject of Chapter seven. Although having familiarized himself with the political jargon through a short study in the cadre school, Shang was nowhere near an activist. His indifference to politics and resourcefulness in business might have made him successful and rich in other times. Yet he fitted too well into the type of commercial criminals who deviously corrupt the party cadres and damaged the planned economy. He was sent to labor reform despite his serious illness. He most likely died there.

(Space)

The last chapter is about Luo Guozheng. Luo's personal history made him the perfect suspect of counter-revolutionary activity in the eye of the Communist regime. He was trained in communication and had more than one overseas relation—the

ideal background for a spy. Although there was no solid evidence of espionage, the Party did not spare him the label of suspected Nationalist special agent. The mistreatment he suffered from this label continued even after the end of the Cultural Revolution.

The brief summary above aims to serve the readers to locate certain subject of interest, but it by no means does justice to the extensive and complex details provided in this book. Yang describes both the political machinery that dealt out political and social marginalization as well as his protagonists' various coping mechanisms. The book does not attempt to generalize any characteristics of such mechanisms, but it does illuminate some important research directions for students of PRC history. For example, Yang's careful reconstruction of the investigation conducted by the *danwei* to which these "bad elements" belonged deepens our understanding of the function of the work unit. Studies have shown that *danwei* was not only a provider for wage and welfare, as a semi-insulated social space, it was also an arena for fractional power struggles.¹ This book further reveals the *danwei*'s role as a parastatal legal institution. Far more than just organizing study groups and implementing mass surveillance, the *danwei* was committed to long-term, systematic "criminal" investigations in collaboration with other *danwei* and the Public Security Bureau. As shown in Chapter two and Chapter eight, such investigations could be astonishingly exhaustive and costly. They complemented the direct interrogations of the subject in question conducted within the work unit.

Moreover, the book's considerable concentration on two types of people—technical personnel and Youth League cadres—offers opportunities for further inquiry into the different experience of various subgroups under Maoism. For the former, the Cultural Revolution was an especially devastating blow. The protection their technical expertise was able to provide vanished and they were finally driven out from their job, often with the loss of both income and sense of value ensued. As for the Youth League cadres, the two men in the book shared the same fate after they both handed over their diaries. This specific episode points to certain features of the thought control program within the Youth League: through marginalizing both the naïve and the passive, it aimed to select only those who could demonstrate the most enthusiastic activism while possessing extreme prudence.

More importantly, besides showing the self-contradiction underlining the thought reform project, this book brings the reader to question whether "the effectiveness of thought reform" constitutes a meaningful research object at all. Some of the outcasts here actively cooperate with the program, others were passive and cold, and still others announced their resistance loud and open. More often than not, they shifted back and forth from one type of reaction to another, not necessarily forming a pattern that could be seen as corresponding to the methods used upon them. Such uncertainty of the effectiveness of thought reform will not disappear with more case studies being gathered, especially if our attention is focused on the outcasts.

One question we might ask is: how should we put these outcasts' political demise into perspective? Vivienne Shue once proposed to the new generation of historians of PRC to "put politics in perspective." Politics, in particular class struggle, "defined the essential contours of Chinese public life and public discourse." It was "deliberately magnified and kept ever at the center of view."² For people like these eight outcasts, their fates were so decisively bended by the storm of political struggles. While the historian took it to his pen to record their tragedies in hope that these tragedies will not be repeated again, is it possible that by focusing on their political demise, we might have reduced them into the mere victims of that history? Quite a few men in the book had accomplished much in their fields before the Cultural Revolution. Supposedly they had made valuable contributions in their daily work and throughout the various production campaigns and technological revolution campaigns. Will a more inclusive approach that takes into account other aspects of social and individual life under Maoism allow us to hear more voice of these voiceless people? (Space)

Gregor Benton and Ye Zhen translate the English edition. The brief and appealing introduction written by the translators illustrates the historical background of Maoist social and political marginalization with clarity and nuance. The translators did a commendable work and the book in its English

version makes for easy and gripping reading. Occasionally, certain words resist an easy analog in English, and may confuse those new to PRC history. For example, *zuzhi* is uniformly translated into "the Organization." Although further explanation of the word as "the Communist Party, at various level" is provided in Glossary, it would be difficult for those unfamiliar with the PRC parlance to immediately grasp the innumerable complexities implied in such a term. But such problems defy any easy solution. In the end, a book with such exhaustive research and rich materials should be a valuable reference to all readers interested in the history of PRC.

¹ Lu Xiaobo and Elizabeth J. Perry eds., *Danwei: The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1997); David Bray, *Social Space and Governance in Urban China: The Danwei System from Origins to Reform* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005); Lynn White, *Policies of Chaos: The Organizational*

Causes of Violence in China's Cultural Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

² Vivien Shue, "Epilogue," Brown, Jeremy, & Matthew D. Johnson, eds. *Maoism at the Grassroots. Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015): 370.

读到杨奎松老师的著作《“边缘人”记事：几个“问题”小人物的悲剧故事》时，新型冠状病毒正在中国带来成百上千的死亡。为李文亮医生送别的蜡烛布满了我微信的屏幕，同时还有他一个月前亲手签署的一份文件。他因提前在朋友圈中公布疫情而接受调查，并接受官方给他的“散布谣言”的罪名。李医生在文件上三次按下手印，旁边写着“能”“明白”，字迹清晰，手印鲜红。他的平静的死亡让他的冤屈成为千万人的冤屈。他们的愤怒在于，再一次，有人死于得到应得的解释之前。

一个解释，或许相对于背后强烈的诉求而言，是一个刻意弱化了了的词语。然而这是杨奎松选择使用的一个词，也是他声明的撰写本书的目的。作为一位为无声者发声的历史学家，他希望自己的书写可以“替许许多多蒙冤者找到一个他们一生都想得到的解释”。然而大约没有读者在合上这本书时，会获得一种历史已被解释清楚的释然。相反，杨奎松对这些边缘人的故事的再次挖掘呈现并不指向一个理论化的说明，而近似一种在对创伤的再次回顾中重建认知的疗愈。这种效果是基于本书所使用的材料的性质：八位问题分子在历次政治运动中所积累的档案材料。对于他们的一次次的交代、检查、总结的反复审视，抽象的学术问题再次回归到难解的历史和命运。正如作者所说，这是一部多少带有传记性质的著述。这些边缘人物的困惑与历史学家的追问之间互相纠缠，悲剧的重量因而再次得以确认。

以“边缘人”为题揭示了一个现实：并不是所有人都经历了如此的悲剧。恐惧或许是共有的，然而痛苦却不一定。政治的边缘化通过社会的边缘化得以实施其力量，所谓“镇压极少数”和“团结大多数”并非平行的两手政策，前者是后者的基石。而这少数人，在他们所处的历史中，一遍遍以自己之手反复记录他们错误的出身和出格的言行。档案之重负不仅仅在于其中你无法得知的部分：组织上如何实施了调查，你的过往被如何揭发；更在于你需要自己书写其中的一部分，而人无法猜测自己正在赢得同情还是招来厄运，积极和消极之间哪里是最安全的分界线。

如作者在前言中所述，本书考察的对象多数是一些受过教育，在1949年以前即开始工作，49年之后则成为各具档案的单位人。农村的地富分子，尽管也相当的边缘化，但因没有个人档案而不在本书的考察范围以内。作者对此八人在历次运动中起落的详实记录使得每一个章节都成为研究共和国史的学生可独立参考的文本。

第一章的主人公廖学昌隐瞒了自己在国民党警界的真实职务，即使在49年后成为国家建设需要的技术干部，仍然难逃成为历史反革命分子的命运。就在他积极良好的改造表现获得群众认可之际，他在工作中意外死亡，终于在死后被摘掉了帽子；原本并未被组织特别注意的李乐生，担忧于自己有过国民党部队看护的工作经历以及参加过一个个小小的帮会团体，主动交待了自己的历史问题，而这些问题在他单位内部矛盾激化的时刻终于让他成为了被调查对

象，以致他的同性恋行为被揭发而因流氓罪获得坏分子的标签；方立仁，前国民党党团干部，高超的医术在很长时间内成为他的护身符，即便是与单位领导的公开矛盾带来的危机都有惊无险地度过了，然而文革的突然爆发让他立刻失去职务，在农村经历了十二年劳动改造；穆国轩，对思想改造积极配合得过了头，真诚地认为应该向党主动暴露自己有过的反动思想，他上交的日记成为他“现行反革命”的罪证；而原本前途看似一片大好的团支书迟尉荣，自由浪漫的天性和时髦出格的举动让学生在学生中广受欢迎，却成为组织的眼中钉。他企图“到别处去”然而其时的中国并没有别处。部队团干部尚昊文也向组织主动上交了自己的日记，父母均在土改中被斗争致死的他对农民抱有深切的同情，他的上千篇日记中几篇含有反对统购统销政策内容的为他带来了无休无止的审讯和斗争；解放前即经商后来成为商业干部的车绍文，尽管通过在干校的经历掌握了一点运用政治语言的能力，却始终做不到在政治上积极起来。他的四通八达的商业手段若在别的时期可能为他带来成功和富裕，而在此时却成为违反供应政策的犯罪行为，拖着病体去劳教的他从此再无下落。解放前在国民党军政系统多次任职的罗国正，几乎是新政府眼中完美的怀疑对象，他有通讯方面的技术特长和多个海外关系，即使找不到任何真凭实据，他作为一个特务嫌疑分子受到的政治冲击直到文革结束后都未能完全平息。

以上的简短综述目的在于帮助读者定位有特别兴趣的章节，但不能概括文中细节之万一：包括毛时代政治和社会边缘化的运作机制的种种特点以及个体应对的种种策略。因为本书提供的是小范围的案例，其价值并不在于证明这些特点的广泛存在，而在于为我们下一步的研究提供思考的方向。比如，书中通过对档案的细致梳理，详细重建了这些问题分子所属单位对他们的调查过程。单位作为一个相对封闭的社会空间，既是个体收入、福利、社会关系的主要提供者，也是基于 patron-client 关系的权利斗争的角力场。而本书中的案例揭示出单位重要的调查和情报功能。远不止于日常的学习小组和相互监督，单位在对问题分子的定案中与其他单位和公安部门合作进行长期、系统的外部调查。第二章和第八章显示，这些调查详尽细致不惜代价，并与单位内部对问题分子进行的直接审讯互相补充。再有，这本书比较集中地展示了技术人员和团干部两个类型的问题分子在政治运动中的经历，为我们更进一步细化考察不同团体在毛时代的命运提供了案例。文革之所以在很多知识分子心目中尤其惨痛，正在于到此时长期多少起到庇护作用的技术特长也无法再抵挡政治运动的毁灭性冲击，而离开工作岗位也意味着失去了个人价值和认同。而书中两位团干部都因上交日记惹祸上身的经历，似乎指向共青团内部思想管理的一些特性，在这个体系下，只有既能表现出极高的积极性又能时刻保持谨慎的人才能脱颖而出。

更重要的是，本书除了展现出思想改造的矛盾性，也令读者质疑所谓“思想改造有效吗？”是不是一个真正有意义的问题。八位主人公有积极的积极配合改造，有的消极躲避，

有的坚决抵抗，更多的时候，他们在这三种反应里来回变换，并没有一定的时间顺序。而这种不确定性应该并不会随着我们对类似材料的更多积累获得解决，特别是当我们的目光集中在问题分子的身上时。

一个问题是：我们该如何把这些边缘人的政治厄运放在共和国史的全局中考察？Vivien Shue 曾提出“将政治放在全局中”。如 Shue 所说，在毛坚持的阶级斗争一刻也不能放松的时代，政治被刻意地扩大化和中心化了。对于像书中的八位边缘人这样的人群，政治风暴彻底改变了他们的命运。历史学家希望通过记录他们的悲剧而避免同样的悲剧重演。然而当我们如此聚焦时，是否难免将他们的一生浓缩简化为一个特殊时代的牺牲品？书中有若干人物都在文革前在自己的专业领域做出醒目的成就。而毛时代穿插于政治运动中的若干生产运动，增产节约运动，大跃进，以及不时倡导的技术革命，大约都曾是他们贡献力量彰显价值的时刻。如果我们将毛时代社会和个人生活的更多方面容纳进我们的视角，是否可以给这些无声者以更多声音？

这本书的译者 Gregor Benton 和 Ye Zhen 为英译本撰写了简短而吸引人的引言，为共和国史的初学者提供了清晰而富有层次的背景知识。全书的翻译通畅易读。但有个别词语的直译可能会令英语读者感到困惑。比如“组织”被一概翻译为 *the organization*。尽管后附的词汇表对这一词进行了进一步的解释“*the Communist Party, at various level*”，对于不熟悉共和国历史上一些通行词汇的读者而言，阅读时可能难以获得直观的理解。总体而言，这本书对难得的全面的个人档案进行了详尽的梳理，是每一位对共和国史感兴趣的读者都应深入阅读的参考书。