

Book Reviews

Ethics and Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. By LOWELL DITTMER and CHEN RUOXI. [Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1981. Center for Chinese Studies, Institute of East Asian Studies, Studies in Chinese Terminology, No. 19. 127 pp.]

This monograph is the latest addition to the well-known series, *Studies in Chinese Terminology*. It attempts to assess the cultural impact of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution by examining the characteristics of radical rhetoric and the distinctive features of the popular entertainment media during this turbulent decade (1966–76). The authors focus attention on the cultural objectives of this revolution in which they find substantive content, unlike others who have regarded them merely as pretexts for a sweeping purge of the elite. The main body of this paper is divided into two parts: the inflation of language and the revolution in culture.

Never had the Chinese people been subjected to political propaganda so intensively or so harshly as they were in this period, and it was inevitable that a jargon of stereotypes should have been imposed on the language. This paper provides a clear analysis of the striking language phenomena of this period. The personal experience of one of the authors, Chen Ruoxi, who lived through most of the Cultural Revolution, makes the illustrations more vivid and meaningful. In addition to an eight-page glossary covering the “gang of four” period there is a brief survey of the new trends in terminological development since the downfall of the “gang.” A section devoted to language divergence between Mainland China and Taiwan is also, somewhat surprisingly, included. Unfortunately however, many of the few examples are problematic and the discussion fails to do justice to this important subject.

In order to wipe out bourgeois attitudes and elitist culture, the radicals tried to change human nature by transforming the cultural superstructure. But what is the model of socialist morality portrayed by the radicals? By analysing recurrent role relationships, images, themes and plots in “the ten leading revolutionary theatrical productions” of the period, the authors have attempted not only to answer this question but also to explain the internal contradictions within patterns of radical fantasy life. Their conclusion is that the ethos of Maoist radicalism was incompatible with the conditions of the nation and that the Cultural Revolution, at least as far as its cultural objectives were concerned, was doomed to failure.

This paper makes a useful contribution both to the study of Chinese terminology and to the understanding of the fundamental nature of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The presentation is, however, unnecessarily blemished by not infrequent orthographic errors in both English and Chinese.

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