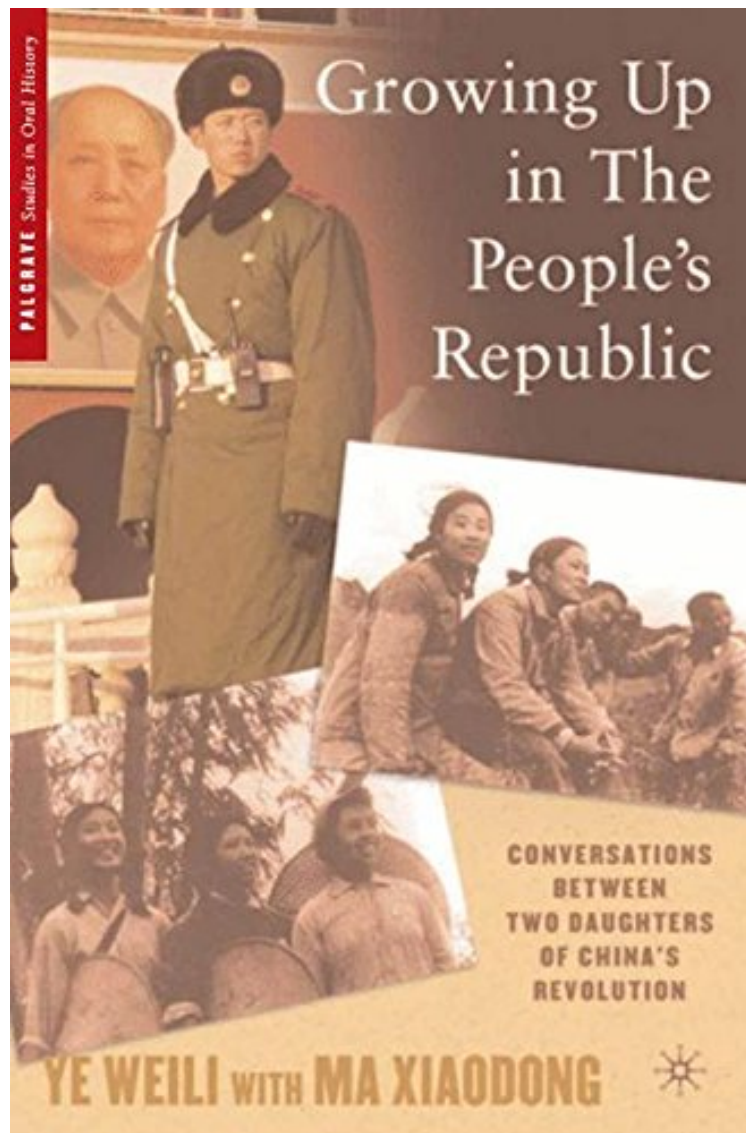


(Free) Growing Up in the Peoples Republic: Conversations between Two Daughters of Chinas Revolution (Palgrave Studies in Oral History)

Growing Up in the Peoples Republic: Conversations between Two Daughters of Chinas Revolution (Palgrave Studies in Oral History)

W. Ye, Ye Weili, Ma Xiaodong

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W. Ye, Ye Weili, Ma Xiaodong : Growing Up in the Peoples Republic: Conversations between Two Daughters of Chinas Revolution (Palgrave Studies in Oral History) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Growing Up in the Peoples Republic: Conversations between Two Daughters of Chinas Revolution (Palgrave Studies in Oral History):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Real Personal Account By Carol Orme-johnson This story of 2 women's lives during the Cultural Revolution in China is about interesting events but is not written in an interesting manner. Disappointing.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. My Reflection By Li Yan I believe a book is best useful when it makes me question myself or change my attitude. Ye and Ma's book is definitely one of such books. They help me see the Cultural Revolution in a new light. Born after the Cultural Revolution, I do not have the opportunity to live this turbulent time myself. Identified as poor-peasants (pin-nong, though not peasant at all) and being non-intellectuals, both my father's and mother's families were not targeted or severely affected in the Cultural Revolution. Or if they were, they did a good job shielding me from that memory. My high school history book only gave a cursory glance at the Cultural Revolution, about which my history teacher did not take the liberty to say more. The notion that "this is a taboo" had been planted in my immature mind without myself knowing exactly where it came from. Therefore, I never thought about inquiring about it before I went to college. Since then I came to understand how and why it was a mistake, a huge mistake that was almost irreparable. However, what has done cannot be undone. What we can do is to mind the present and create a better future to make up for the losses. I brought into the general morale of "looking-forward" (xiangqiankan, this is more telling in its homophone in Chinese which means "looking toward money") and felt reassured about it. However, now being a graduate student in the United States, I was exposed to more western intellectual works. Their obsession with the Cultural Revolution made me unable to continue my "ostrich strategy." As one of the generation "growing up under the red flag," I read such starkly downbeat criticism of the Cultural Revolution as capitalism's unrelenting ideological attack on the Chinese Party: Cultural Revolution, as China's stigma, is the best topic they can engage in order to castigate China. Nationalist sentiment also made me reluctant to directly confront this traumatic national memory. Particularly, I had a hard time reading the "victim literature" produced by people who suffered during that time and later went to the West--the "land of free speech"--to let out their sorrow and hatred. I knew I was unfair to them--they have been so profoundly affected by that past that time cannot separate them from its horror or undo its effects. I also knew my resentment testified to the success of Chinese government's "thought control." However, no matter where my sources of rejecting the negative portrayal of the Cultural Revolution came from and no matter to what extent I could question myself, the more stark and inhuman the Cultural Revolution is depicted, the less I would trust the accounts. Yet, Growing up in the People's Republic finally enabled me to comfortably and bravely face up to this burden of history. On the one hand, Ye honestly related the death of her school principal, the story that has haunted her for years, and Ma daringly confesses her participation in violence, which is made more compelling as she juxtaposes it with the violence her mother was afflicted with. The immense difficulty they have in "opening up deep wounds" reveals the highest moral integrity. On the other hand, their telling of the sweet childhood adds an intimate dimension to this supposedly brutal age. Ye's apathy to join the revolution in contrast to Ma's enthusiasm in embracing the "winds and waves" convinces me that they did not grow up "drinking wolf milk," as they are represented in some literature. The complexity of this era can only be understood by lending a humanistic understanding to the seemingly unimaginable individual behavior. By transforming the unbelievable into the understandable, what this book gives me touches at a level deeper than history.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Remarkable book By D. Hlawek Weili's book is remarkable. I was struck by her honesty, studiousness of recording details, and courage of facing the past events, no matter how ugly they were, and searching for the truths and true feelings. One of the most memorable moments of the book was the story about Weili's mother, walking 20 miles, close to the distance of a Marathon, to give birth in the cold winter by herself in 1945. As a female soldier in the People's Liberation Army, Weili's mother had to go outside of the WWII Japanese controlled territory to avoid capture. She was crippled for many years after this experience. Weili's mother's personal story was an example of the war time suffering the Chinese people went through. Weili described this story to give background on her family and the Great Culture Revolution. Ironically, many people who suffered a great deal to establish the new government in 1949 were tormented, imprisoned, or killed during the Great Culture Revolution. Why should one read Weili's oral history book on the Great Culture Revolution in China? Here are the reasons I would suggest: 1) To understand what happened in history. Weili and Ma Xiao Dong's personal encounters were a part of the Chinese history, and a part of the human history. The author described the years of her youth spent in China when the daily reality seemed so unbelievable and crazy. A totalitarian region was created to isolate the 1 billion Chinese people from the rest of the world. It could be called the biggest scale social experiment. In the name of revolution, beating someone to death, looting, and public humiliation were common practice in those days. Once targeted as a counter-revolutionist for whatever reasons, one lost individual rights and faced physical attacks by the mobs. Yet, those 10 traumatic years were not a total loss. The authors wanted to show you that living an innocent and simple life was somewhat possible at times for young people. The young people were initially enthusiastic to fight for the revolution and get reeducated by going to the country side. They were with people their age, away from home to serve as laborers on the farms for 5, 10, or even sometimes 20 years. They sang, performed, and made friends. Later, the reality of famine, poverty, and personal encounters in the country side left them confused and disillusioned. They matured beyond their years due to the sent-down experience. 2) To learn from this period of Chinese history. How did the Culture Revolution happen? It happened mostly because Mao's communism "religion" dominated all. Weili's stories took us to a different time when

everyone was labeled and categorized into 9 different "red" and "black" types. The man-made caste system marginalized the intellectuals and business people. So beware of religious fanatics or other ideology fanatics who would not tolerate others with different viewpoints, and do not let one voice dominate a country or a group. Masses can be brainwashed into a lot of ugly things such as killing neighbors who are identified as enemies. Racial violence and ethnic cleansings are examples of those belief systems in other parts of the world. Second, life itself was not valued in the teaching of the time. Young kids were taught that life should be easily given up for a greater cause such as the revolution. There were plenty of books and films on the heroes who sacrificed lives for the new government. In addition, killing or beating an "enemy" was encouraged. Not respecting life was also one of the reasons that the Culture Revolution caused so much damage. The third reason that the Culture Revolution occurred was due to the desire to negate history or anything old while jamming down a new belief system. The poetic side of Mao wanted to cleanse the past and create a new society. As Mao grew increasingly impatient with the speed of the progress, he resorted to extreme measures of "cleansing," - the Great Culture Revolution. The Red Guards (young people who pledged allegiance to the revolution) and the masses fought, killed, or tormented anything or anybody who were deemed counter-revolutionary. The violence was justified and praised. The Red Guards thought that they were doing the right thing for a cause. Later Red Guards fought each other because one group thought it was more revolutionary than another. 3) To appreciate women's perspectives on growing up during the culture revolution. The new government was supposed to have liberated women. They were equal to men in a lot of ways. Considering that women still had feet bound 50-60 years earlier, this was a remarkable accomplishment. Weili's mother was a combat pilot during the revolution. Weili's mother said that women must stand tall, which seemed to be something Hilary Clinton would have said. However, the authors described what they experienced and learned as women, Chinese women specifically, in a male-dominated society. Weili's mother held leadership positions outside of the house, yet at home she cooked, cleaned, respected her husband's authority, and was a model wife. Women were expected to play these two different roles in a modern society. Moreover, the media and culture at the time encouraged young women to dress like soldiers with uniforms and heavy belts. Femininity was denied and considered "bourgeois." The young women at times did not want to be mothers because culturally motherhood devalued a woman and raising kids appeared to be hard, tedious, and not as meaningful as other work. If life is not valued, of course the tasks of raising kids are not respected. The dialog format throughout the book was powerful and very easy to read. The author had a very crisp and clear writing style on some of the most difficult subjects. All in all, a terrific reading experience for me.

In a conversational style and in chronological sequence, Ye Weili and Ma Xiaodong recount their earlier lives in China from the 1950s to the 1980s, a particularly eventful period that included the catastrophic Cultural Revolution. Using their own stories as two case studies, they examine the making of a significant yet barely understood generation in recent Chinese history. They also reflect upon the mixed legacy of the early decades of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In doing so, the book strives for a balance between critical scrutiny of a complex era and the sweeping rejection of that era that recent victim literature embraces. Ultimately Ye and Ma intend to reconnect themselves to a piece of land and a period of history that have given them a sense of who they are. Their stories contain intertwining layers of personal, generational, and historical experiences. Unlike other memoirs that were written soon after the events of the Cultural Revolution, Ye and Ma's narratives have been put together some twenty years later, allowing for more critical distance. The passage of time has allowed them to consider important issues that other accounts omit, such as the impact of gender during this period of radical change in Chinese women's lives.

"This oral history of China's revolution brings to life women's experiences in the context of larger upheavals. Personal, compelling, and conversational, the book gives Western readers a glimpse into the daily life of two girls who became Red Guards. Each looks back with a clear, honest gaze at the atrocities and hopes that were the hallmark of Mao's China." - Vera Schwarz, Freeman Professor History and East Asian Studies, Wesleyan University "By casting her historical narrative in the form of an extended dialogue between two Chinese women born into the world of communist privilege, Ye Weili gives her readers a new way to understand the Cultural Revolution as a coming-of-age experience. The result is an absorbing and deftly original book." - Jonathan Spence, Yale University About the Author WEILI YE is an Associate Professor of History and Women's Studies at University of Massachusetts, Boston, USA. She is author of *Seeking Modernity in China's Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900-1927*.