

the London and Bonn records. Obviously there is much more material for a further study. Most of the documents are composed in Amharic, the official language of the Special Court, and are accompanied by generally deficient translations. Some 58 select cases (cf pp. 98–310) are appended to the book as illustrations of the ». . . difficult task of the Court and its judges« (cf p. 92). Amazing though it may seem, the author found no records in Ethiopia where he worked as a visiting professor in 1972–1975 and which he repeatedly visited in the subsequent years. Neither the reason for this curious circumstance nor whether it was also impossible to collect the reminiscences of some of those involved in the activities of the Court is, however, provided in the work. Two appendices (pp. 313–403) include the salient treaties, decrees, notices and other documents pertaining to the Special Court while a glossary, a bibliography, an index and a detailed table of contents provide easy access to this valuable monograph.

*Bairu Tafla*

*Rainer Hoffmann*

**Traditionale Gesellschaft und moderne Staatlichkeit.**

Eine vergleichende Untersuchung der europäischen und chinesischen Entwicklungstendenzen; München etc: Weltforum Verlag, 1987, pp 151, DM 39,—

For almost two centuries China has been bedevilled by her loss of regional pre-eminence in East Asia, mainly to the rising Western imperialism and also to an increasingly powerful Japan. The traditional Chinese élites, steeped in their conviction of the Middle Kingdom's superiority and self-sufficiency, were suddenly confronted with the dégringolade of a universal prestige, long taken for granted, under the impact of modern Western military and industrial power. Ever since the inception of this long decline many Chinese, individual statesmen and intellectuals as well as broader social and political movements, have sought to turn the tide of humiliation and backwardness, mainly by introducing methods of science, industry and government developed in the West in order to reinvigorate the country. Not a few reformers may have perceived such regeneration as a process which would restore China to a splendour considered as rightfully due to Shen Zhou – the Divine Land. The aim of the post-Mao régime »to build China into a modern, powerful socialist state by the year 2000« distinctly echoes the spirit of this quest. China's loss of stature in the world during the last century and the first half of this one naturally prompted the question of why no equivalent to the Western Industrial Revolution had occurred there. After the First World War, Marxist ideology and Communist revolution in Russia and China accentuated a conceptual need to relate the development in Tsarist Russia and Imperial China to a theory of social progress which had located the leading edge of historical advance in the industrialised countries of the world.

Scholarly study would not seem yet to have furnished a satisfactory explanation of China's recent retardation, particularly in view of the fact that the country had for centuries before been the vastest and wealthiest empire on earth. The search, from Marx's »Asiatic mode of production« to Wittfogel's »hydraulic societies« and Elvin's »high-level equilibrium trap« has not revealed why the engine of China's progress suddenly and decisively stalled while the West, and later Japan, sped ahead.

This monograph sheds no new light on the subject. The severely ambitious essay (intended by Dr Hoffmann to initiate the »gebildete Leser« into the Burckhardtian philosophy of history) races through the evolution of government in the West and in China in a few dozen pages, ending with an even terser comparison of modernisation in China and Japan. The difficulty of the Chinese case naturally lies in having to explain why a certain development failed to happen whereas in the West the student faces the easier task of describing past events whose very occurrence relieves the historian of the obligation to demonstrate their possibility.

The author's principal thesis is that, contrary to the large absolutist states in the West, China's central imperial government was never strong enough to deprive the local magnates, the gentry, of their power on the ground and the gentry for its part co-operated with the central dynasties only insofar as the existence of such governmental machinery was indispensable for the preservation of the the social order against external enemies or larger internal upheaval which might have unseated the gentry from its privileged positions. Passive resistance of the gentry, by simple retirement from the imperial bureaucracy, left the central authority without the cadres unconditionally loyal to the sovereign which would have permitted the emperor to penetrate beyond the stratum of the gentry to establish an alliance with mercantile and industrial classes which might have created the socio-economic buoyancy which carried the West towards global supremacy. Entrepreneurs in traditional China therefore tended to seek assimilation with the gentry literati, who were thus able to prevent the osmotic rise of a bourgeois class through the vessels of a truly preponderant central government.

The author's evaluation of local gazetteers and other sources in support of his explanation remains strangely limited to orthodox self-appreciation by the literati, to the well-worn ideological assertions on the moral code of the »superior man« (jun zi), and the propensity of disgruntled literati to repair to their rural domains and a life as Confucian dilettantes when the exigencies of imperial public service did not suit their own predilections. Traditional classical book learning is, as by so many other writers, claimed to have stunted the investigative spirit and to have discouraged scientific discourse in favour of rote learning and conformism. In the end this leads to the questionbegging conclusion that a modern state failed to develop in China because a parochial, hidebound and impractical gentry willed it so. The numerous volatile and potentially fertile conditions in traditional China which nevertheless did not give rise to an industrial revolution are disregarded in favour of accepting a wholly orthodox circularity by which the gentry's junzis are summarily credited with the ability to play the final arbiter between the central

government and any inchoate middle classes. The fact remains that for centuries China had a working system of central administration; that the very gentry said to be the ultimate seat of power sought strenuously to rise – for such was the perceived direction – through the avenues of a central-government defined procedure of examinations which outlasted generations of local magnates and which thus appears much more like the imperial mould into which the gentry fitted rather than an aspect of a central régime which was a mere tool in the hands of this gentry. The old Pekingese Shun Tian Gong Yuan was not the temple in which any gentry supremacy achieved its epiphany.

Unfortunately Dr Hoffmann has little to say about approaches which have concentrated on the economic history of China, on the absence of catalytic effects of often remarkable scientific progress on industry and commerce. The present essay is seen by the author as a framework for future research. It is to be hoped that detailed study of more records will elucidate better why the very potent brew of traditional Chinese civilisation – by no means the mere »jiang-gang wen-hua« of Bo Yang's parlance – did not reach the flash-point of »modernity«.

*Wolfgang Kessler*

*Michael Denis, Esther Dischereit, Du-Yul Song, Rainer Werning*

**Südkorea, kein Land für friedliche Spiele**

Rowohlt Taschenbuch-Verlag, Reinbek 1988 (rororo aktuell) 251 S., DM 10,80

Es handelt sich hier um ein irritierendes, ja ärgerliches Buch: So plakativ wie der Titel ist der Inhalt großenteils nicht. Es finden sich einfühlsame Milieuschilderungen und kenntnisreiche Beschreibungen der sozialen Risse und Verwerfungen mit all ihren Härten für die Betroffenen, wie sie durch die unerhört rasche Industrialisierung der letzten zwei Jahrzehnte hervorgerufen wurden. Den im Vorspann versprochenen *umfassenden* Bericht über die wirtschaftlichen, politischen und sozialen Verhältnisse des Landes findet der Leser aber auch nicht, da alles nur aus der Sicht der Benachteiligten geschildert wird. Angeblich soll dies die überwiegende Mehrheit der Bevölkerung sein, doch räumen die Autoren in einem Nebensatz ein, daß Ober- und Mittelschichten zusammen 40 % ausmachen . . .

Jeder, der Südkorea auch nur oberflächlich kennt, weiß, daß es ein Land voller Widersprüche ist. Gegenbeispiele für die von den Autoren postulierte Unterdrückung und Ausbeutung ließen sich also unschwer auch dort finden, wo die angeführten Beispiele den Tatsachen entsprechen. Schon dadurch, daß jeder Hinweis hierauf fehlt, leidet der Informationswert des Buches. Aber auch die Tatsachenbehauptungen treffen oft so nicht zu: Sicher sind die Löhne ziemlich niedrig, vor allem in der Textilindustrie, nur ist es ausgesprochen irreführend, ausgerechnet die deutsche Firma Adler in Iri als Negativbeispiel anzuführen, und ein ausgesprochenes Billiglohnland ist Südkorea schon lange nicht