

under which an appointment becomes effective and establishes a legal relation between employee and employer. According to German legislation a contractual relationship is the result of an agreement between both partners. In China, however, the labour contract becomes effective only from the first working day.

The last two chapters briefly discuss the appointment proceedings in non-state-run enterprises and give a summary of the labour contract system within the framework of the Chinese economy.

Also included is an extensive appendix, which provides a translation of the 1986 regulations on the reform of the labour system and other related items.

The book provides a sophisticated presentation of the Chinese labour contract system and is useful for readers interested in encyclopaedical knowledge in this field. Unfortunately, it does not refer to the relevance which theoretical discussions of law have to everyday life.

*Uwe Herith*

CONRAD ANDERS, *Korea*. München: Prestel-Verlag, 1988. 412pp., 67 photographs (40 in colour), 5 maps, DM 48.-

RÜDIGER MACHETZKI/MANFRED POHL (eds.), *Korea. Wirtschaft, Politik, Kultur, Gesellschaft, Natur, Geschichte, Reisen, Sport*. (Ländermonographien des Instituts für Auslandsbeziehungen Stuttgart, vol. 16). Stuttgart/Wien: Thienemanns Verlag, 1988. 392 pp., 62 photographs, maps and charts, DM 68.-

With the Olympic Summer Games of 1988 in mind, authors and publishers have gone to some pains during the past two years to provide wider information on Korea. Almost all of the authors involved are academically trained, many of them still being in the groves of Academe. This is why it is justified to review publications of theirs that are meant for the so-called ordinary reader, in a journal that is primarily devoted to scholarly writing.

Many of the works are scarcely worth reading, only three or four of them providing more reason for satisfaction than for displeasure. A fundamental shortcoming of such books is that they are written on the basis of what I would call the "view through the inverted field-glass". Things are reduced to an almost droll size, and the number of objects viewed is much larger than one would perceive when looking at them with the field-glass held in the proper way.

It must be something like such a view that produces the apparently irresistible temptation most people writing on Korea (and many of those writing on China and Japan as well) succumb to: to cover a potentially unlimited number of topics between the covers of one book. Only very few authors and publishers appear to have ever asked themselves whether there is any other imperative reason to do so except for the hope that the more varied the content, the more such books will appeal and the better they will sell. Those among the authors and publishers who do care for reasons other than purely commercial will point to the need to consider "tradition". "Tradition" is meant to provide a background against which the authors hope to throw the present into sharper relief, thus paving the way towards a more appropriate understanding. However, the reference to a need for writing on "tradition" is somewhat dishonest. For by exploiting tradition in the way it is mostly done, the authors pretend not to know that there is nothing like a single and consistent tradition, let alone a smooth passage from past to present. The reference to "tradition" is thus hardly more than a device to at least suggest an impression of coherence, and to do so with regard to at least some parts of a book.

There can be no doubt that most of the so-called ordinary readers do want miscellanies covering Korea's (or any other more remote country's) "land, people, and culture of all ages", as the subtitle of one such earlier book runs. However, one wonders whether the readers should be served in such a way, if the service demands the neglect of certain standards. Their maintenance is less a matter of academic than of moral concern. For dealing with Korea in the way it is often done, books run the danger of increasing the potential for ethnic discrimination. By being looked at through the inverted field-glass, Korea and Koreans are exposed to the danger of being reduced to a strange exotic oddity, their status not being fundamentally different from that of "the natives" in old-fashioned anthropology. Their modes of life and thought are so odd and so incomprehensible that they neither merit, nor are qualified for, serious interpretation. This is what the "medley" kind of books on Korea all too easily suggest. Authors who cling to "tradition" as their one and only structuring principle actually, though perhaps unintentionally, make Koreans prisoners of the past, unable to endow anything with meaning that is not derived from the old. This is why Koreans - "in their hearts" or "fundamentally" - are then believed to be Confucians, Buddhists, or both; the choice is *ad libitum*. What cannot be reconciled with such fundamentalistic statements is merely accounted for as being a constituent part in the "clash between past and present" or the like. Such a view implies the contention that Koreans are either unwilling or unable to see dilemmas for what they are and

to think for themselves of ways to resolve them, which, in turn, comes down to saying that Koreans are culturally immature.

There does not seem to be any easy way of writing books on Korea which appeal to the ordinary reader and at the same time do not fall behind certain moral and intellectual standards. Just whetting the reader's appetite, even at the expense of comprehensiveness, may be rated no mean achievement. And whetting the appetite is what Conrad Anders achieves. He is obviously gifted with a keen sense for the inconspicuous, though significant detail, and seems to enjoy writing. His book therefore makes lively reading. Whereas Anders singles out phenomena from various walks of life, as do most other authors writing on Korea, he refrains from anything that comes near so-called interpretation and instead contents himself with merely suggesting connotations. Never stretching a point too far, he does enough just to stimulate the reader's curiosity for more. The book is thus a guide that can be recommended to any traveller. Anders' book, however, shares a shortcoming with a great many other publications of this genre: the transcriptions of Korean names and terms often are inconsistent and thus do little to help the reader acquire an adequate pronunciation or easily recognize names and terms when hearing or reading them in Korea.

Less lively, though still standing out from the bulk of the genre, is the volume edited by Rüdiger Machetzki and Manfred Pohl. 21 authors have written the 36 articles of which the book is composed and which are fairly evenly distributed over the eight sections enumerated in the subtitle. The careful classification by topic as well as the large number of contributors prevent the book from being criticized as a mere medley of the more common kind. The editorial strategy of assigning each author to his special field of interest has helped to make each article a more or less self-contained whole and turned the volume as a whole into a basic reference book.

One may still question the wisdom of taking as many fields into account as has been done here. For some of what is contained in the volume is either of ephemeral interest or can be found in earlier publications, on which most authors had inevitably to rely. (The scope being as wide as it is, however, one wonders why not more space has been given to religion. After all, at least South Korea is known to be one of the most "productive" countries in terms of religion.) The very scope of the volume at the same time accounts for its two biggest advantages. Firstly, information is available that may not be easily spotted by a reader who is in a hurry or who does not know English, because that information is sometimes found only in fairly remote publications, mostly not written in German. Secondly, the volume has become what to my know-

ledge is the most comprehensive survey of Korea ever published, except perhaps for some similar books which appeared in Korea.

Although strict limitation in space and careful classification by topic have largely prevented the authors from glossing along the lines suggested by the "view through the inverted field-glass", one finds exceptions to the rule. An interesting one is the attempt to attribute certain characteristics of present-day political life to Neo-Confucianism. It seems to have escaped the authors' attention that what Neo-Confucianism mostly did, was either to justify and solidify pre-existent modes of politics or sometimes even to criticize them. Therefore, in any ordinary sense of the word, Neo-Confucianism can hardly be said to have been the cause of what followed it.

Dieter Eikemeier

MICHAEL MARTISCHNIG, *Tätowierung ostasiatischer Art*. (Mitteilungen des Instituts für Gegenwartskunde, 19). Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987. 76 pages, ÖS 140.-/DM 20.-

Martischnig's booklet deals with the Japanese tradition of tattooing. He traces it back to early Japanese history, when it was not yet clear whether tattooing was considered as ornament (*bunshin*) or punishment (*geishin*), for both of which he quotes early evidence. As for the latter, complex rules developed by the mid-18th century according to which criminals were marked. On the other hand, tattooing of body ornaments gradually became fashionable, until at the beginning of the 19th century whole-body tattooing developed. Martischnig suggests it originally expressed a sort of criticism of the political situation during the Tokugawa régime and aimed at mocking the public authorities. In any case, ornamental tatoos became characteristic attributes of professions like artisans, firemen, carpenters, and *yakuza* (gangsters). *Horimono*, or *irezumi*, as the art of tattooing is called in Japanese, was frequently banned and prosecuted by Tokugawa and Meiji authorities, but after Japan's opening to the West in 1854, foreign seamen made it popular all over the world. While many of the artistic themes and techniques were imitated by Western tattooers, whole-body tattooing has not become as popular abroad as in Japan.

Martischnig's narrative is not always easy to follow, because of his somewhat inconsistent style. One wonders why he quotes, e.g., the Japanese writer Tanizaki Jun'ichirô in an English translation, and why many of the Japanese terms he uses are spelled incorrectly (e.g., *Kioto* or *Kyoto* instead of *Kyôto*,