

1988, and, more dramatically, after the fifth plenum of the Communist Party's Central Committee in November 1989. The macro-economic stabilization and industrial policy goals and measures endorsed since then are likely to severely limit the development of private business as well as employment growth in the more dynamic sectors of China's economy. The most recent figures and official declarations show that the containment of private sector activities is well under way.

Chinese authorities have revived centralized economic planning measures in the style of the 1950's. Another switch from ideology to pragmatism as witnessed during the decade of the 80's is a prerequisite for future sustainable economic development. A resurgence of private economic activity, however, will necessarily imply complementary political liberalization measures – a theme Willy Kraus barely considers. The expectations of change, however, should be moderated. There are as yet few international precedents for a smooth transition from an authoritarian regime with a planned economy to a pluralistic market-oriented society.

*Christoph Sigrist*

JUNICHI SAGA, *Memories of Straw and Silk. A Self-Portrait of Small Town Japan*. Tokyo, New York & San Francisco: Kodansha International 1987. 258 pages, ¥ 3500.

Dr Saga has written an exemplary book on rural history: the story of pre-war Tsuchiura, then a small town in rural Ibaraki-Prefecture, on the shores of Lake Kasumigaura. In 60 impressive testimonies, Tsuchiura's senior citizens report about life before the war and Japan's economic miracle. Amazed by the transformation, they acknowledge that their world has long since disappeared: the old ways of life of the townspeople, the fishermen, the traders, women, farmers, craftsmen, soldiers, geishas and children. It is a world of poverty, often at mere subsistence level, of rigid class differences, but there is also an unaccustomed richness in communal life, a cheerfulness in adversity, reflecting the traditional resilience of the Japanese people.

Life below the poverty line consisted often of little more than drudgery and despair: hard, continual and often hazardous physical labour – be it as farmers, fishermen, rickshaw drivers, craftsmen. Threatened by floods, starvation, illness or debts, life was often cheap: infanticide was practised, and early death due to accidents or disease was common. For those surviving the

daily struggle there was often little more to their bare existence than hard labour, frugal meals and sleep.

Among the more fortunate petty bourgeois local elite – the magistrates, landlords, large shopkeepers and officers – life was certainly more diversified and culturally and socially enhanced. Yet rules and social codes remained strict for the members of the middle and upper strata as well.

Yet, for all the drudgery and frequent misery, the stories at times also abound in memories of the smaller joys of life: festivals, parties, days of merriment, wild drinking, gambling or of the enjoyment of an unspoiled, if sometimes savage, beauty of nature. Common to all accounts is regret for the loss of this unique asset of pre-war Japan: rivers and lakes that were still clean and full of abundant fish resources, tidy villages, open landscape and a communal life that was vibrant and intact.

There is obviously a deeper meaning behind the reminiscences of these old men and women which transcends the social history of regional Japan: the price we pay for progress and quality of individual life.

Dr Saga's collection is well written and well translated, it makes good reading, without ever, thanks to his interviewees, becoming banal or tedious. The result is a fascinating, differentiated review of a life unthinkable and forgotten in modern Japan's metropolitan hustle and sprawl.

*Albrecht Rothacher*

BERND MARTIN (ed.), *Japans Weg in die Moderne. Ein Sonderweg nach deutschem Vorbild?* Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 1987. 196 pages, DM 28,-

The reader entitled *Japan's Way into Modern Times* is the outcome of an interdisciplinary series of lectures given at Freiburg University in 1985/6. Of the eight contributors, only one is a Japanologist, and one a Japanese; the others come from different academic fields with special interests in Japan. What they tried to do is present a survey of German studies on Modern Japan, mostly in comparison with German developments, to a broader public. In his essay BERND MARTIN raises the question of "Historical Common Traits of Two Belated Nations", but fortunately does not cling to the term "belated nation", which has not yet given any convincing solution to the problem of why the oligarchs of Meiji Japan chose Prussian Germany as a model in reshaping Japan. Martin discusses structural similarities of the two countries: the tradition of "revolution from above" (imposed, in the case of Japan, on social patterns allegedly unchanged for some 2000 years: an unhistorical simplification