

to German social scientists. MENZEL's highly selective (and legitimately so) collection of texts should stimulate further editing efforts. Such editions should be undertaken not just for information's sake alone but also to give some direction and methodological inspiration to German social science studies of modern Japan. A last remark on translation: *schwimmende Welt* (p. 42) is a nonsensical translation of the Japanese *ukiyo* = "floating world". The explanation in the glossary of volume 2, p. 311 is correct.

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OSKAR WEGGEL, *Die Asiaten*, München: C.H. Beck, 1989. 361 pages, DM 48,-

The author of this book is a senior China-watcher based at the Institute of Asian Studies in Hamburg and a scholar who has travelled widely in the East. From his academic excursions he brought home an abundance of notes and personal observations which encouraged him to engage in a very ambitious project, namely to write a study about "the Asians". Smaller minds would have shunned such a task but O. Weggel goes further: the subtitle promises to deal not only with the structures of Asian societies but also with their economic systems, their ways of thinking, forms of religion, patterns of daily life and the cultural behaviour of the Asian people. This means no less than constructing a kind of analytical framework for 25 countries and four major religions.

Hence, it does not come as a surprise that in his introductory remarks the author has taken some wise precautions against possible criticism regarding the scope of this venture. Thus he assures the reader that "in none of his books did the author have to cut down the manuscript so radically as in this very publication. Every single chapter could have easily been enlarged to between 10 and 20 times its actual volume" (p. 15). In other words, the outcome is a mini-encyclopaedia of Asian studies and moreover a guide-book about the Asian mind. Whatever one may find missing (in terms of literature, qualifications and specifications), might have been included if space had permitted. Furthermore, this book extends beyond the circuit of routine academic consumption. In the author's own words it is conceived as a *Begegnungsbuch* (literature of personal encounter) and should enable a patient reader to better understand the manifold "mysteries" of Asia and its people. In short, a brave attempt to scrutinize the formerly "inscrutable" Asians for students and policy-makers alike. Was Weggel successful and how successful *could* he be?

Weggel's book follows the recent tradition of political culture studies which became popular only in the late 1960's when the need for risk consultancy towards the variety of "young nations" in Asia which had just gained their formal independence arose. Western governments and development agencies had by that time realized that a policy based on pure economics and data analysis could not sufficiently grasp the actual political reality of those countries. Confronted with the failure of many development programmes the search for the impact of socio-cultural factors became fashionable.

To quote an example, societies based on "metaconfucianistic" principles (p. 57) like China and Vietnam were ruled by a high degree of centralism on the one hand and by the autonomy of the village on the other, whereas societies like Thailand and Malaysia were – following the works of J. EMBREE – rather "loosely structured" and consequently developed in a quite different direction. But the element common to all these Asian societies is, according to Weggel, their quest for "harmony" and "wholeness" (*Ganzheitlichkeit*). The "three harmonies" which Asian people aspire to are: harmony with the human environment, harmony with nature and harmony with the spiritual world. This constitutes the main difference between Asia and the West. Moreover, there is a strong impact of "traditional" value systems and behavioural patterns which have formed the minds of the Asian people in the course of their history.

This may all be correct and can be observed at random by looking at the daily life of Asian people. The reviewer wonders, however, whether Weggel has in this case not become a victim of a romantic and rather unhistoric view by confusing the political cultures of predominantly agrarian societies with those of industrially advanced Western societies for comparative reasons. There are a number of studies on countries like Thailand and Singapore, for example, which prove that the old value system has broken down and been replaced by the greed and egoism of "modern" living patterns and high competition. This includes disregard for one's neighbours, the state of nature and adherence to religious principles. A brief look at the *Bangkok Post* or the *Straits Times* of Singapore provides vivid examples of the fact that the old value systems do not hold any more. But this is not due to the weakness of indigenous traditions and customs, but because these values lost their original function which was appropriate to the life of an agrarian village in China or India but not to the rapidly changing urban industrial environment.

In this reviewer's opinion the political culture approach is also not sufficient to explain "why China is rather stable and India is politically unstable, why resource-starved Japan is rich and Indonesia with its abundant resources is poor, why the formerly colonialized Singapore is hyper-modern whereas



modernization is obstructed in non-colonialized Thailand" (p. 13). About China we know better since the events of summer 1989. Singapore's modernization drive was possible precisely because of the already established colonial infrastructure, while in Thailand modernizers struggle with the semi-feudal character of the political system which lasted longer than elsewhere due to the absence of formal colonial rule. On the basis of his studies about the development of the global economy D. SENGHAAS of the University of Bremen has offered some valid propositions to solve these seemingly inconsistent development puzzles.

In another part of his book Weggel claims that "Marxism has only a shaky base in Asia" (p. 88). He denies that class formation and class struggle could develop in Asia due to "pan-Asiatic verticalism" (like the caste-system, patron-client relations etc.) and due to the tradition of non-violent movements, especially in India. For the Asian poor Weggel concedes only three options for dealing with misery and injustice: suffering – migrating – revolting. Probably many Chinese, Vietnamese, Indians, or more recently, Filipinos would disagree with his assessment, namely that "not eruptive revolutions but continuous reforms" will shape the future of Asia (p. 90). Seen from the Asian experience an initial revolt of the people followed by far-reaching reforms may be needed to eliminate crass poverty and marginalization.

Certainly, O. Weggel has made a valiant attempt to fill a gap and to provide a link in the broad field of comparative Asian studies. He has presented an array of interesting information, from the macro to the very micro level of observation. For the uninitiated Western traveller to Asia the book gives cultural guidance and philosophical interpretations, including even body language and how to move your feet and head correctly (p. 309).

However, this reviewer sees two shortcomings in Weggel's work, leaving his basic political and economic contentions aside. Firstly, the author does not easily accept opinions other than his own and he avoids mention of views or schools dealing with the same topic. Thus, the works of authors with some competence and merit in this field like DENIS BLOODWORTH, N. MULDER, E. COHEN or R. COOPER – to name just a few, are regrettably ignored. Some lively arguments would have made the book much more readable and could have helped to highlight the central problems. Secondly, and this relates to the first point, Weggel is one of his own most quoted authors: this is a pioneer's work, do not look any further! It would have been useful for the reader to find at least some quotes from major Asian thinkers and popular leaders which would have given the book more credibility and authenticity.

In conclusion, this way of dealing with controversial evidence and of evading a timely argument may serve as a clue that the author has, in the course of

his studies, become a "traditional" Asian scholar himself, characterized by the avoidance of (academic) conflict and the need for consensus and harmony (p. 295). But – as Weggel himself points out in his final chapter – value systems and political culture are subject to rapid changes even in Asia which seems to be built so firmly on tradition and hierarchy.

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