

His comments in this last chapter are valuable; unfortunately they are somewhat disconnected from his description to which he makes only passing reference. He does not *systematically* outline the structures of vocational training throughout history as he intended in his introduction. Nevertheless, the book is an important addition to the literature on vocational training. It is worthwhile not only for scientists but also for those engaged in training in the People's Republic. Although his inconsistent use of a lexical style of presentation is not particularly readable, the detailed contents make Risler's work a useful handbook.

Günter Schucher

MECHTHILD LEUTNER, *Geburt, Heirat und Tod in Peking. Volkskultur und Elitekultur vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*. Berlin: Reimer, 1989. 394 pages, DM 78.-

Mechthild Leutner has taken on an overwhelming task; each of the main areas of her book could itself be the subject of a work of similar length. She has assembled an enormous amount of material, much of it previously unpublished. Specialists will appreciate this achievement. Her study is notable for being the first to examine both the existing rites and the literature describing the form these rites took in previous eras. In addition, she is able to draw from her own observations of marriage, burial and cremation ceremonies in Peking.

Mechthild Leutner's book covers the period from the midnineteenth century (late Imperial era) to the present - a period of tumultuous, even wrenching, transitions. During these years China underwent industrialisation and various political changes, which produced tremendous social ferment.

The subjects of Mechthild Leutner's inquiry are birth, marriage and death - not the events as such but the set of traditions and practices surrounding these events, as well as their explanations. She proposes that the differences between popular and elite culture stem mainly from economic considerations rather than from any profound divergence in belief.

Her perspective is unabashedly economic, as is made clear from the outset by the author's aligning herself with the modern *Volkskulturforschung* which considers even the Marxist approach "insufficiently materialistic". Consequently Mechthild Leutner discusses religion and culture only with respect to their purported economic underpinnings.

The book begins with an introduction discussing different approaches towards the study of folk culture and its relationship to elite culture. This introduction is rather long and might prove to the lay reader more confusing than enlightening. In justifying her methodology, Mechthild Leutner cites a large number of authors in a way that somewhat obscures important divergences in approach, both amongst these authors as well as between them and herself.

A serious problem with *Birth, Marriage and Death in Peking* is the author's use of citation. She tends to depict an event as a mosaic consisting of numerous sub-events whose descriptions she draws from different and often rather disparate sources. Reading through the main body of the book one encounters a homogeneous sequence of strings of descriptions and interpretations followed by the name of one or more authors. There are only a few statements that admit to being primarily of the author's own construction; yet, the dearth of direct quotations indicates that she has, more often than not, used her own words. But in making these restatements, how closely has she adhered to the original intent of her sources? It is virtually inevitable that she would at least have provided some of her own emphases; it seems likely that some degree of interpretation would also have crept in. It is precisely the ubiquitousness of Mechthild Leutner's citations which renders this uncertainty of authorship problematic. Moreover, the sources quoted are of widely varying origins with differing degrees of credibility. While Mechthild Leutner acknowledges this problem in her introduction, in the text itself she draws indiscriminately from novels, ethnographic studies, anthropological fieldwork, etc., failing therein to indicate the nature of the respective sources.

I find it a pity that Mechthild Leutner has chosen to ignore the religious or philosophical implications and framework of her material. However, given that she has made this choice, her decision to focus on such minute details is puzzling. These details do not appear to be necessary to the arguments she makes. They serve mainly to raise questions which are not discussed.

Finally – it is perhaps a small point – but a few photographs or illustrations would have given back the subject some of the colour lost in the analytical approach.

*Barbara Volkmar*