

Oiva Laaksonen: *Management in China during and after Mao.* Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988, 378 pages

The author has addressed himself to a comprehensive task: an analysis of management problems of the government, the communist party, agricultural organizations, industry and commerce during the period 1949 to 1986. He collected the empirical data during visits to China in 1973, 1980, 1984 and – as visiting professor at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing – in 1986.

The book consists of seven chapters and an appendix. The first four chapters give general background information. Chapter 1 gives an overall introduction; chapter 2 provides socio-economic and geographical information including cultural and religious aspects – which, due to the vast dimension of the topic, can only be rudimentary; chapter 3 looks at the prevalent administrative styles and their roots in Taoism and Confucianism; and chapter 4 describes the situation in China in the aftermath of the Maoist revolution in 1949.

Chapter 5 contains the essential empirical observations. The vastness of the topic necessarily involves a lack of depth. Nevertheless, the author provides highly informative data and stimulating insights based on his own observations and interviews. The repercussions of changing Chinese orientations in domestic and foreign policies (e.g. cooperation with the Soviet Union, open door policies towards the West) on the internal institutional structures and decision-making processes, especially in industrial enterprises, become evident.

Chapter 6 is not fully consistent with the preceding text. It deals with a partial aspect: the influence – assumed or claimed by observers and insiders – of hierarchical levels (from top management to workers) in Chinese enterprises on various types of decisions. These findings are compared with the results of an earlier study of European and Japanese firms in which the author had participated as head of the Finnish section. The empirical material on Chinese enterprises appears to be too limited to give a convincing answer to the question: “Is there a special Chinese style of dividing decision-making in enterprises between different interest groups? Can we find cultural differences between East and West in this matter?” (p. 279). This leads to unsatisfactory statements such as: “The Japanese pattern of influence structures seems to follow the European quite closely, although Japanese cultural values are probably much closer to Chinese than to European values. The similarity between Japan and Europe probably comes from the similarity in production technology – more automated and “modern”, and from Japanese close contacts after World War II with Western culture” (pp. 298-300)... “We must point out, however, that the empirical Chinese material used is relatively limited, and does not give statistically significant evidence for the results presented. If we relate the empirical quantita-

tive results to other collected qualitative material, however, we should achieve a reasonably reliable picture of the changes in Chinese management since the beginning of the economic reforms" (p. 315).

Chapter 7 presents a summary of the historical aspects (chap. 1-4) supplemented by a short outline of the author's theoretical concept (a more detailed discourse is given in the appendix) and a number of problems suggested for further research. It should be evident that such an undertaking continues to be extremely difficult under current Chinese conditions. Any empirical study such as the present one requires an exceptional number of personal connections and good luck.

Finally, some of the conceptual elements on which the research was based are outlined in the appendix. They refer to hierarchical levels (central government/provincial government/ state enterprises); party organizations (on central/provincial/local level); state planning (central planning commissions/ sectoral organizations/ enterprises); plan implementation (through exchange/ manipulation/ indoctrination/ coercion) and sources of power (economic power/ knowledge/ personal power/ arms/ ideology). Considering the vast international literature on the subject, the appendix is not convincing. The author admits: "We must once more stress that we have not used the concepts mentioned here throughout the study, as this might have led to difficulties in understanding, especially for those not familiar with these kinds of behavioural concepts. However, we have tried to use them in summaries of the main chapters" (p. 354).

It is an ambitious book. The findings concerning general management problems (chapter 5) are in parts highly informative. The opportunity of extended empirical research in China given to the author is rare indeed, and such studies will not be easily repeated. In view of the complex problems of the world's most populous and – despite attempts towards a more open society – still most inaccessible country, the structuring of questions and the presentation of partial findings meet with particular difficulties. The results will hardly ever fulfill the researcher's original objectives. The structure chosen by the author combines a fairly broad historical perspective (chapters 1-4) with a central chapter focussed on the core problem (5), an international comparison (chapter 6), and a conceptional framework (appendix). Chapter 6 and the appendix are not fully compatible with the rest of the book. Despite these reservations, the main findings remain impressive. Empirical research in China continues to be extremely difficult, and the author has made an important contribution. This type of study will remain a rarity in the years to come.

Dieter Weiss