

search, this is a salutary reminder.

Erhard Rosner

WILHELM THIEMANN: China. Photographische Aufzeichnungen aus den Jahren 1929-1936. München: Simon und Magiera, 1982. 100 pages, DM 18.-

The book contains 180 black and white photos. They were taken by a German engineer and merchant during his seven years stay in China (1929-1936).

The pictures dominate the book. The onlookers get the full impact of the photos. Our eyes are not distracted. They are not lead to lengthy comments. On the contrary, they can concentrate and rest on the photos and can discover details. One gets a feeling of the atmosphere which was present when these pictures were taken.

What do we see? Besides some landscapes and historical buildings we see people: Women, men, old, young, some rich, most of them not rich at all. The photos are close-ups. We see Chinese people in their environment, the workplace, the houses where they found shelter. The faces show scepticism, harm, joy and endurance.

The topics are street scenes, work (or rather toil), traffic, refugees, foreign presence, children, families, religion, countryside, peasants, urban life, trade and commerce, poverty, housing conditions and entertainment.

Where were the photos taken? Mostly in central and northern coastal regions and the Yangtse valley: Shanghai, Hangzhou, Shaoxing, Suzhou, Wuxi, Nanking, Taiyuan, Tientsin, Peking, Harbin.

All the photos are accompanied by the date and the name of the location plus a concise explanation containing an average of about three words. The quality of the photos is excellent. Precisely because they are not polished by technical perfection, the subjects are more present; in a timeless way immediate. They quite often enable us to have a poignant look at life in China. The direction the country was to take is not evident or visible, and nevertheless the photos are documents of a time of radical change.

The book is highly recommendable for those who have never been to China and equally for those who have already visited the People's Republic. It provides significant glimpses on historical conditions, thus enabling us to compare and to locate things in their proper context. Those who have been to China will appreciate the selection as all photos were taken at places now open to foreign tourists.

Werner Pfennig