

WILHELM G. FRANKEN, unter Mitarbeit von D. PASSARGE, M. PRIGGE und H. G. STRIEFLER: China im Spiegel der Weltpresse. (Veröffentlichungen des HWWA - Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung - Hamburg). Hamburg: Verlag Weltarchiv, 1978. 850 pages, DM 68.-

Subtitled "Selected Documents and Data on the Political and Economic Development in 1977/78", this comprehensive reader presents a large number of press articles in German, English and French on current affairs in the People's Republic of China. Covering the period from January 1977 to October 1978, the documentary material is divided by topics and time. The topics include national geography, politics, economic development, individual sectors of the economy and foreign trade; within each of these, the articles are presented in chronological order. The whole "Press-Cutting Documentation" is prefaced by a list of essential data and concludes with a selected bibliography of articles from professional journals.

The editors, the "HWWA - Hamburg Institute for Economic Research" have, in their own words, set out to "make accessible a wide range of data and documentary materials on international economic affairs to a large number of users engaged in industry, politics, administration as well as university teaching and research". They have, indeed, set themselves an ambitious target. The book is intended to help fill in the information gap that results from language difficulties in evaluating domestic publications and from an overall lack of statistics. If the growing demand for information on Chinese current affairs is to be met, special emphasis, it is argued, must be laid on press reports on and from the People's Republic of China.

But a closer examination of this book soon reveals that a mere "Press-Cutting Documentation", however skilfully compiled, can, at the most, be only a first step towards meeting the stated objective. The primary purpose of news items is to secure a quick flow of short-term information. However, even an extensive collection of newspaper articles alone will be of no great use to those specialists engaged in the fields of politics, industry, science and administration who are not well acquainted with contemporary Asian studies. They would be far better off with a selection of scientific articles and essays written for the general public. The scope of such a reader on current developments in Chinese domestic and foreign policies, on her economy and trade could then be broadened to include such relevant source material as is offered by the BBC's "Summary of World Broadcasts" or the U.S. government's "Foreign Broadcast Information Service".

The value of this documentation as a whole is further limited by its lack of clarity and order that inevitably results from the barren compilation of photocopied press-cuttings. Still worse is the arbitrary limitation of the period covered, which results in an almost complete failure to take into account the actual course of events. The question therefore remains as to why the editors who intended to "contribute material on recent political and economic events in China" (see introduction) are only presenting sources dating from January 1977 at the earliest. The formative period from September 1976 until December of that year, covering the death of Mao Zedong, the elimination of the so-called "Gang of Four" and its aftermath, is thus completely ignored.

In spite of these serious shortcomings, the book ought not to be denied a certain documentary value. While it may find its place on the bookshelves of many an academic China Research Institute, it should prove to be of little practical use to the public at whom it is professedly aimed.

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