

RAINER HOFFMANN: *Maos Rebellen, Sozialgeschichte der chinesischen Kulturrevolution. (Historische Perspektiven, Band 8)*  
Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1977. 227 pages.

In writing "Mao's Rebels", Hoffmann has drawn more or less from the same sources as he used for his interesting book on "De-Maoization in China"<sup>1</sup>. He has succeeded in the laborious effort to extract and organize information from all kinds of Chinese publications, primarily Red Guard material.

The author concentrates on the period of the Cultural Revolution. In addition he gives valuable insights on how trends, continuities and changes have developed, taking for example, the Socialist Education Movement and earlier events into full account. Thus, the Cultural Revolution is not isolated and treated as an exclusive phenomenon. The reader understands its significance because Hoffmann shows the overall political aspects and moving forces. While doing so, he does not confine himself exclusively to China, but endeavours to make reference to similar trends in the Soviet Union and other political systems, being careful to show parallels in Chinese history.

The main part of the book is a very elaborate disquisition of the "Revolutionary Rebels". The author not only closely follows their actions, but also informs us about their social background and place in Chinese society in general. A minute observation of various stages and levels of the violent conflict is further enriched by three case studies: circumstantial accounts of developments in Canton, Shanghai and Peking.

The footnotes reveal the enormous amount of literature the author has consulted, and they are arranged in a way that makes it easy for the reader to follow Hoffmann's research. A bibliography and an index complete the book. On the whole, we have a highly readable, scholarly work which will be delightful literature for those who already have sufficient knowledge of contemporary Chinese history. They will appreciate Hoffmann's book although they may not subscribe to all his assessments.

However, the layman who is looking for a "social history of the Chinese Cultural Revolution" (the book's subtitle) may be a bit disappointed. He is confronted with a tremendous number of names, terms, and details. Sometimes the author seems to be carried away by his detailed description. We even get weather reports and are informed that the hot summer days played their part in stirring up the political climate in Canton (p. 128). Those familiar with the tropic humidity of that city might suspect that this kind of climate would favour slow motion rather than full speed.

What we argue here is that the author does not seem to be always successful in pulling the strands together; too many details sometimes blur our vision, and reference to different systems, cultures and centuries do not always clarify our understanding of Chinese politics. From time to time analysis and systematic examination seem to be outbalanced by excessive description. As to the bibliography one might ask why certain publications are mentioned and others are not. Nor is the index always accurate. Another point, a considerable number of documents and other material used by Hoffmann has been translated, even into German. It would have been a courtesy and a service to mention this to the interested reader.

The announcement of the publisher's mentions a book of 350 pages, whereas the main text of printed volume comprises merely 149 pages. The reviewer had the privilege to read an earlier version of the manuscript and fears that the publishing company asked for an abbreviation of the original text. Perhaps many passages that dealt with social aspects and political analysis had to be excised. With more space at his disposal Rainer Hoffmann could surely have said more about the social history of the Cultural Revolution: the closing chapter, e. g. , is far too short.

Even though our expectations are not completely fulfilled this book makes for inspiring reading.

Werner Pfennig

Footnote:

- 1) Rainer Hoffmann: Entmaoisierung in China. Zur Vorgeschichte der Kulturrevolution. München: Weltforum Verlag 1973.  
See also review in Vol. 5 (1974), No. 1, S. 153 of this journal.