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Chinesische Staatsbetriebe zwischen Plan und Markt. Von der "Danwei" zum Wirtschaftsunternehmen

Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde, Nr. 277

Institut für Asienkunde, Hamburg, 1997, 483 S., DM 68,--

Thomas Hoppe

Tibet heute: Aspekte einer komplexen Situation

Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde, Nr. 281

Institut für Asienkunde, Hamburg, 1997, 168 S., DM 28,--

Oskar Weggel

Alltag in China. Neuerungsansätze und Tradition

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Institut für Asienkunde, Hamburg, 1997, 273 S., DM 38,--

China's impressive strides, in the past twenty years, from the poverty of an agrarian society gripped by convulsions of ideologised obscurantism towards more prosperity at home and an even more visible rôle on the world stage have not been without détours or setbacks, among which the killings at *Tiananmen Square* in June 1989 stand out most painfully.

The way ahead likewise remains strewn with hurdles and pitfalls. Among these, separation of state and society at the level of government-owned enterprises, a viable *modus vivendi* between the majority *Han*-Chinese population and minority nationalities living in strategically important regions, and building a culture of modernity that will stably subtend the polity of a vast country remain daunting tasks of a leadership whose domestic legitimacy most delicately hinges on continued success in advancing the late *Deng Xiaoping's* bold project of "Four Modernisations" (i.e. of industry, agriculture, defence, and science and technology). China's legal and societal constitution still awaits profound remaking. The three books reviewed here each deal with themes from this large agenda.

State-owned enterprises in communist mainland China, once the backbone of Soviet-inspired industrialisation and the ideological repository of 'Proletarian' political leadership, have now shown themselves as the weightiest and most rigid shackle of economic development, a bottomless pit for subsidies from the public coffers and for commercially dubious loans from state-run banks arm-twisted by government into lending for mainly political ends. At the same time, they remain the principal source of livelihood for the mass of urban workers. Withdrawing the 'iron rice bowl' from this 'vanguard of socialism' through management-induced large-scale redundancies is politically explosive for a régime nominally still committed, in the words of China's 1982 constitution, to a "people's democratic dictatorship ... led by the working class" and in which the state-managed part of the economy remains (Article 7) "the main guiding force within the national economy". The

Peking authorities now find themselves between the devil of continued massive financial waste and its inflationary side-effects and the deep blue sea of enterprise reforms that may provoke the fury of those "masters of the new (*scil* post-1949) society" [*xin shehui de zhurenweng*] pushed into joblessness and penury by their very Communist leaders.

Ms Hebel's study of the *danwei*, or "unit", which comprise all aspects of entrepreneurial activity as well as services to the workforce (active and retired) and their dependents, describes efforts during the past decade to transform and unbundle the *danwei*, in order to re-create the firm as an exclusively economic organisation and to hive off parts concerned with welfare, education and housing of employées. Apart from documentary sources, numerous interviews with managers of Chinese enterprises, conducted in China between 1988 and 1993, served as the basis of the investigation. A methodological introduction is followed by six further chapters, on "Industrial Structure and the Rôle of the State Sector", "Systemic Reform and Enterprise Reform", "Selected Aspects of Systemic Reform", "The Managerial Concept of State Enterprises", and "Personnel Management". A table of the interviews, a chronology of major Chinese legislation and policy measures in the area of enterprise reform, a bibliography and a detailed index complement the main text. Students of former COMECON economies are familiar with the difficulties of precisely apprehending the significance and relationships of the terms of analysis and policy debates within those planned economies and also with the further complication of discussing these terms in the language of market economists. It is an important merit of Ms Hebel's book to have painstakingly traced in each chapter the key elements of the domestic debate in China, thus clarifying the context of controversies and the import of reform measures.

The dimensions of the enterprise, *si venia sit verbo*, of reform emerging from the study are indeed colossal, progress is slow and often uncertain. Fundamental property relations (who owns an enterprise and is thus free from interference by whom?), the basic sources of financing government (through taxes on independent, chiefly private, firms and individuals, or revenue transfers from state firms to government?), the ambit of workers' individual freedom (through portable pensions housing, education of children and medical care obtained independently of one's employer; or through services tied throughout one's life to the *danwei* and reducing employées to modern *glebæ ascriptitii*?) – are all inextricably intertwined with the countless technicalities and constantly shifting circumstances of remoulding state-owned enterprises. Such reform would be an extremely tall order even for a government solidly grounded in the determined support of a democratic electorate. It is even more arduous for a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) whose present-day backing, apart from the officially emphasised "historic choice of the Chinese people" (*scil* following the 1945-49 civil war between the CCP and Chiang Kai-shek's *Kuomintang*), lies largely in a continued ability to implement policies that produce mostly winners and few, if any, losers among the general population. The persistence with which China's rulers are keeping reform of the country's economic system on the agenda, even at considerable risk to the stability of the régime itself, is an eloquent measure of the urgency of the undertaking felt in the highest quarters of the CCP. All those interested in a closer look at the laborious

process of recasting China's constitution for her future part in a world society¹ will find a richly documented survey in Ms Hebel's monograph. This reviewer's sole quibble is about the use in the book of German academia's latest with-it Anglicism, "Emergenz". "Auftauchen" will do quite nicely instead – it's even comprehensible to your average reader.

One aspect of reforming China's state sector – re-equipping the country for a global arena through adoption of foreign techniques and practices – has informed domestic debate ever since Lord Macartney's 1793 mission to the *Qianlong* court and the Opium War of 1840-42. The perennial defensive argument, of safeguarding allegedly autochthonous Chinese 'essence' against usurpation by supposedly just ancillary alien 'utensils', has raged until today, e.g. in the xenophobic animus of the 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution', or, albeit mutedly, in the penchant of some, under the hapless *Zhao Ziyang*, for a 'New Authoritarianism' [*xin quanwei zhuyi*]. Yet this particular controversy is conspicuous by its absence from today's discussions in China on triangular debt and corporate downsizing (euphemistically termed 'flowing towards society' (*scil* or redundant workers [*liu wang shehui*]), although it is much in evidence in other countries of the region, from crisis-wracked South Korea and Indonesia, in their governments' arm-wrestling with the International Monetary Fund, to rich-world Japan, in simmering displeasure at US-inspired transmogrification of Nippon's accustomed ways. Policy makers in Peking will probably go to great lengths to avoid rousing such sleeping dogs, the belt-tightening to be demanded of their citizenry being painful enough without the added drag of nationalistic resentment, but enterprise reform would in fact seem to be one further instance of Chinese modernisers' self-conscious re-invention of their country along lines drawn by a different tradition.

The writ of Chinese emperors claimed to run among "all under Heaven" [*tian xia*] regardless of race, colour or creed, and many a conquering dynasty in the Middle Kingdom has practised this ecumenic form of *imperium*. Anti-*Manchu* Chinese nationalism during the *Qing* Dynasty and nationalist reaction to Western imperialism have since forged an identity centred on Chinese ethnicity, while producing at the same time national consciousness among peoples who before were more or less loosely part of the wider realm of the "Son of Heaven". When "People's China" stepped onto a world stage of nation states in 1949, the question of what place minority nationalities would occupy in the new state soon starkly posed itself, and the new powers that be in Peking made amply clear, through the "peaceful liberation" of Tibet in 1951 by the People's Republic's armed forces, that they intended to leave no room for traditional arrangements of tenuous association or pretensions of equal partnership. "No two Suns in the Heavens, no two Rulers in the Land" [*tian wu liang ri, guo wu liang jun*] remained a maxim unchanged under communism.

¹ Cf. *Jürgen Osterhammel*, *China und die Weltgesellschaft*, München, C.H. Beck, 1989, p. 15, for further references on "Weltgesellschaft".

Tibet, itself an ancient civilisation and a prize in former power struggles between Imperial China, Tsarist Russia and the British in India, has remained the most visible example of ethnic discord in modern mainland China. The high international profile of the exiled Dalai Lama and the exotic appeal of the "Roof of the World" among numerous Westerners have continued to focus attention on *Han* Chinese policies in Tibet.² *Thomas Hoppe* has conducted extensive research on minorities elsewhere in China³, and his brief survey of contemporary Tibet has again benefitted from the author's opportunities for field work, in Tibet and other adjoining regions in China. An opening chapter describes the various meanings of 'Tibet' as a spatial and ethnic entity, often defined differently by the Dalai Lama and his followers, the Chinese government or foreign countries and commentators. Further chapters deal with demographic developments, Chinese birth control policies in the Tibet Autonomous Region, images of Tibetan identity among Tibetans themselves and other ethnic groups in China, events surrounding the selection of the eleventh reincarnation of the Panchen Lama, and religious life in areas of China settled by Tibetans. Appendices include demographic statistics, a list of the names of counties in the Tibet Autonomous Region in Chinese characters, their pronunciation in Roman transliteration and the Romanised Tibetan reading of these names. On occasion the author jumps to conclusions that may seem, to him, in the interest of Tibetans but which have no basis in the facts. Diplomatic practice of third countries would, e.g., not appear to provide support for the view⁴ that Tibet should be regarded as an object of decolonisation processes of the United Nations. But this sporadic tendency towards polemical exaggeration is amply compensated by the numerous illuminating close-ups which Mr Hoppe has brought back from his travels and conversations with Tibetans and Chinese on the spot.

² Cf. the review of *McCorquodale / Orosz* (eds.), *Tibet: The Position in International Law*, in: VRÜ 1996, p. 267.

Initially, People's China ranged herself in the van of an international movement that sought to create a New Society and a New Man. Emulating the Soviet Union as an 'elder brother' [*lao dage*] until the ideological schism in the 1960s, mainland China's new rulers blanketed the country with many of the appurtenances of Stalinist communism: A planned economy with its bent in favour of heavy industry and collective agriculture, the wide and empty urban avenues flanked by ornate street lights and cheerless concrete architecture, the stifling intellectual dominance of a 'Great Helmsman's' words of wisdom, 'creatively applied' for the edification of the populace by pliant litterateurs, the badly cut suits, and the *proletcult* official disdain for what China's past had to offer, all seemed to have obliterated one of the world's splendid civilisations. But once economic reform after 1979 had allowed more room for all kinds of non-political individualism, former habits resurfaced speedily and vigorously, from high-heeled shoes to pre-Liberation hairdos, from Peking opera to gambling, from an unabashed passion for good food and slap-up weddings to old, unsimplified, versions of Chinese characters and a hotchpotch of superstitions long thought dead thanks to enlightenment by the science and dialectical materialism. Hong Kong and Taiwan served as important conduits of this revival, but it is mainly due to the strength of a millennial popular culture which a few years of communist tinkering had hardly been able to dent. Dr Weggel introduces us to this kaleidoscopic world of contemporary mainland China in eight chapters, on the changes in the social environment of villages and cities, the shifting landmarks on the way from cradle to grave, marriage, work and leisure, the governed and their governors, popular culture, and reappearing folk religion. Many new expressions spun from these developments are listed in the original Chinese characters in a useful appendix. Academic sinology has long studied these quotidian manifestations of China's "Little Tradition" (as opposed to the "Great Tradition" of canonical philosophy, high literature and orthodox historiography) quite apart from the context of post-1949 transformation on the Chinese mainland. It is therefore to be welcomed that Dr Weggel's book provides a handy perspective of how technological and commercial progress are now mixing in Chinese everyday life with the newly revived sediments of the past, and indeed with Western, mainly US, mass culture incessantly pouring into the country despite the CCP's restrictive efforts. We can gather from the author's comprehensive overview of popular manners and customs the constant theme of focussing on life's tangible labours and rewards and less on transcendental visions and grand schemes that promise jam tomorrow. The murderous chaos of the "Cultural Revolution" no doubt reinforced a disinclination to put one's trust in utopian theories. The clickety-clack of mah-jongg tiles, chopsticks and the abacus again rings louder than any music of distant spheres, and the qualified *enrichissez-vous* proclaimed by China's leaders thus much accords with established popular propensities. Not all of this renaissance has been to the good. Beggars and vagrants nowadays abound in big cities, accosting the newly rich as they leave a restaurant after a sumptuous dinner with their "brains full and their guts fat" [*nao man chang fei*]. Crime is on the rise, and observing a scruffy country lad performing his "flying knife" [*feidao*] artistry on the impassive target of an unkempt little girl by the entrance of a Shanghai park conjurs up images of the stunted

Dr Weggel's fast-paced guided tour through so many walks of Chinese life necessarily touches on a host of details, and a note of caution has to be struck that, while the broad description seems accurate enough, a number of pronouncements and conclusions by the author on particular points do not stand up to scrutiny; there are also many errors. For example, *daban* (to dress up, deck out) [p. 72] does *not* generally carry a negative connotation⁵; asserting [p. 213] that, compared with Japanese, Chinese is capable of much earthier expression, especially on matters obscene, is pure tosh⁶. In the discussion of the contemporary written language [pp. 211 ff.], no mention is made of the ubiquitous reappearance of traditional full-form ideographs in everyday life, on name cards and shop signs, and the complications in scientific lexicography where dictionary entries now confusingly contain quotations from historical sources in unsimplified script alongside post-1949 citations in simplified characters, in addition, of course, to listing as entries the full original characters as well as their simplified variants. The authoritative encyclopaedic dictionary *Cihai* was last re-edited in 1989, not 1979 [p. 218]. The dichotomy examined in domestic debate in the late seventies and early eighties about guarding against autocratic excesses was not between *ren-quan* (human rights) and *fa-quan* (right) [p. 182], but between *ren-zhi* (rule of man) and *fa-zhi* (rule of law). Sometimes translations are simply off the mark, as of the Chinese *Kekou kele* for Coca Cola [p. 67], where the first *ke* means "to suit", "to fit" (whence *kekou* = palatable, tasty), not "be able to". Nevertheless Dr Weggel's book provides an instructive portrait of a society whose regenerative powers are clearly immense and by no means exhausted.

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Gibt es Rechtsstaatlichkeit (*rule of law*) ohne Demokratie? Das Rechtsstaatsprinzip ist ein wesentlicher Bestandteil der westlichen, liberalen Demokratie und wird, gerade im Hinblick auf die Entwicklungen in Osteuropa, als notwendige Voraussetzung für die Markt-

⁵ Cf. the usage examples in *Xiandai Hanyu cidian*, Peking: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1996; *Hanyu da cidian* (suoyinben), Shanghai: Hanyu da cidian chubanshe, 1997.

⁶ A linguistically rewarding and hilariously written introduction for beginners (thought not for faint-hearted) can be found in: *Peter Constantine, Japanese Street Slang*, New York / Tokyo: Tengû Books, 1992.