
Gunnar Viby Mogensen: *Kinas økonomiske historie* (China's Economic History). Herning: Forlaget Systime, 1989. 239 pp.

Gunnar Viby Mogensen's book is the first comprehensive review of the economic history of modern China in the Danish language. It covers a broad field as it discusses China in the perspective of both a socialist economy (comparing it with the Soviet Union) and a developing economy (comparing it with India), including also social indicators (education and health) as well as the more narrow economic ones. The author makes use of and comments on the whole range of literature on the economic history of China, produced by China scholars in Denmark since the beginning of the 1970s.

The book has several limitations, however. The author is not an authority in the China field. He draws mostly on secondary sources, Danish and American in particular. American contributions to the hearings on China published by the Joint Economic Committee of the US Congress are particularly favoured, e.g. Arthur Ashbrook and Robert Michael Field. Very few Chinese sources are cited and the book, which is based on the notes to courses for students at the University of Copenhagen, does not bring new research results to the international field of China studies.

In his description of shifting strategies the author chooses a sort of two-line struggle conception. It is not a struggle between two classes as in the Maoist conception, but rather a struggle between two dominating factions (pp. 157-158). In doing this Viby Mogensen considers himself at variance with the Danish China researchers, and more in line with the international research on China! This, of course, does not fit with reality. Analysis of the dominating strategy as a result of several struggling factions within the top party leadership is the common international trend within the China field. In my view the difference in approach is not that big. With the exception of several short interludes, especially 1976-78, only two dominating factions, two struggling lines have been on the scene simultaneously, as for instance at present the readjusters (conservatives) and reformers (pragmatists). The analytic importance lies not merely in defining opposing factions within the top party leadership, but also in identifying their alliances within the

bureaucratic system and their - active or passive - supporting groups within society at large. In this respect the present book is rather weak.

To a Danish audience Viby Mogensen's comments on the works of Danish China specialists since the beginning of the 1970s are of special interest. Compared to the size of the population, the number of Danish researchers and their works is rather voluminous, but in an international context the Danish contribution to the China field can not be termed original in substance. The author is right in criticizing the Danish contributions in the 1970s as painting too rosy a picture of the developments in China. The tendency during this period was to confuse one's own ideals with developments in a far away country. But, as stressed by the author, Maoist development strategy was in many ways in line with trends in Western theoretical economic literature of the 1950s and 1960s (Ragnar Nurkse, Arthur Lewis), e.g. the focus on mobilization of underutilized labour in the rural areas, small scale development and community development. Parts of the development strategy in the Chinese rural areas was even commended by the World Bank as a model of inspiration to developing countries in general.

In connection with the enthusiasm for the present reform strategy and its results in the Chinese rural areas (among Chinese as well as Western scholars), there is a tendency to overlook the positive results of the local community strategy of the Maoist period. The green revolution in the Chinese rural areas started during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s, the agricultural extension service was refined, irrigation, educational and health systems were expanded. These areas are exactly the ones which the reform strategy has not found measures to cope with. The author comments on some of the aforementioned achievements of the commune system and also on the negative influence of the reform strategy in maintaining and expanding existing service and social systems. But a serious defect in the author's account is the fact that he does not discuss the general agricultural crisis in the wake of reforms after 1984 - its magnitude and the reasons behind it.

The author's use of statistics calls for discussion. For the period before 1976 he uses foreign estimates, especially figures prepared by American scholars (Ashbrook, Field), published in the aforemen-

tioned Joint Economic Committee reports; for the period after 1976 he accepts official Chinese statistics as a reliable source. In many ways it is false to compare foreign estimates with official Chinese statistics for the 1958-78 period, published in several Chinese yearbooks in the 1980s. Western scholars revised and refined their statistics on China during the period in question, when very few hard data were released from official China. But the main source for most scholars has always been scattered statements from Chinese news media in the form of growth rates expressed in percentages compared to a few selected base years, particularly 1949 (after Liberation) and 1965 (before the Cultural Revolution). This is true regarding the works by Robert Michael Field, Nicholas Lardy and John Philip Emerson on provincial growth within industry. The international tendency now is to accept, more or less totally, the official Chinese statistics for the 1958-78 period, as a reliable source.

All in all the present book can be recommended as a readable, informative and useful book for Danish students with a limited knowledge of China.

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