

### **Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer: Mao Zedong - Es wird Kampf geben; eine Biographie. Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2017, ISBN 978-3-95757-365-0**

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commercial partner and an investor and Russia for military protection against largely internal threats.

In conclusion this is a fascinating, well-researched and documented, yet succinct study on the interactions between two challengers to the Western democratic capitalist order. For China the road to great power status is through continued economic development, with geopolitical interests taking a back seat. For Russia, geopolitical and military posturing comes first, with economic development a distant second. Yet precisely its self-inflicted poor relations with the West have weakened Russia's bargaining power in Beijing. In spite of shared fantasies about a common encirclement by the US and its missile defence deployments, both are unwilling to turn their uneasy partnership into a formal alliance.

*Albrecht Rothacher*

HELWIG SCHMIDT-GLINTZER, *Mao Zedong. Es wird Kampf geben. Eine Biographie*. Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2017. 465 pages, 23 maps, €30.00. ISBN 978-3-95757-365-0

The last two decades have seen a noticeable number of Mao biographies in the German language, such as Charlotte Kerner's *Rote Sonne, Roter Tiger. Rebell und Tyrann* (2015), Alexander L. Pantsov's and Stephen Levine's *Mao. Die Biographie* (2014), Felix Wemheuer's *Mao Zedong* (2010), Wolfram Adolphi's *Mao – Eine Chronik* (2009) and Sabine Dabringhaus's *Mao Zedong* (2008), to mention just a few examples. The most popular among recent publications is certainly Jung Chang's and Jon Halliday's biography *Mao. Das Leben eines Mannes, das Schicksal eines Volkes* (2005). While the sheer number of postmillennial publications on Mao's life begs the question as to why yet another book on Mao is needed, Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer's volume takes an interesting counter-stance to frequent narratives of the former leader's inherently "evil" character – a narrative taken up not only in popular writings such as that of Chang and Halliday but also, more broadly, in China's political cultural discourses. This book specifically counterpoints the volume written by Chang and Halliday, which – in short – argues that already as a child Mao showed the traits of a bad and scheming individual.

Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer contends that Mao was a man of many faces, a point underscored by the renowned China historian John K. Fairbank, who saw Mao as an ambivalent character inhabiting the role of both a revolutionary leader (according to his self-perception) and that of an emperor (in terms of power). Schmidt-Glintzer illuminates Mao's trajectory within the context

of China's modern history and the history of ideas, within China's modernisation discourses since the second half of the 19th century and within the endeavour of China's elites to bring about development and modernisation. In the end he classifies Mao as a key pioneer of the Chinese developmental state, thus rightfully, and rather refreshingly, contrasting with existing Mao biographies.

However, Schmidt-Glintzer's standpoint has provoked considerable criticism among some scholars and journalists. Critics contend that this book has sought to rehabilitate Mao and has whitewashed his misdeeds, perhaps most tangibly felt in the author's rejection of the term "dictator" to describe Mao. In turn, Schmidt-Glintzer argues that rather than seeing Mao as the main culprit causing the "suffering of millions", what needs to be emphasised instead is the "conscious involvement" or joint action "of many individuals". Accordingly, Schmidt-Glintzer's analysis examines Mao in a highly differentiated way by embedding him in the context of China's modern history.

Three overarching sections recognise Mao firstly as a teacher (according to Edgar Snow this was the classification Mao cherished most), secondly as a strategist and thirdly as a visionary. The first part focuses on Mao's adolescence, his maturation and his commitment during the May Fourth Movement (1919), his initial revolutionary steps with regard to the peasant movement in his home province of Hunan and his organising of the peasantry. Part two addresses Mao's strategic acting in the "liberated areas" under control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), his path to power within the CCP and his actions during the civil war against the Guomindang until the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The final part encompasses the dispute with the Soviet Union, the major mass campaigns (Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, etc.) and the new realpolitik in the context of Nixon's visit to China, as well as Mao's final years.

In his final chapter Schmidt-Glintzer makes some broader assessments with regard to his findings: Mao's positive role in creating a unitary state; his establishment of a regime of (dis)order based on legalist concepts; and his creation of the preconditions for a successful process of opening-up and modernisation, as the pillars of the current developmental state.

These benefits are contrasted with the costs of these processes: huge human and material costs and human suffering, although Schmidt-Glintzer does not blame Mao individually but rather shifts focus to the institutions of the party-state and the networks implementing and enforcing these policies. The author is right in arguing that Mao is just one figure in the context of China's Confucian "super-fathers" in the 20th century – super-fathers accepted by a majority of the people and in the alleged interest of national stability and unity. In the end, Schmidt-Glintzer characterises Mao as a "product of modern Chinese history" and not as an inherent "dictator".

However, the volume displays certain weaknesses. By embedding Mao solely in China's historical context, the analysis of his ideas and objectives lacks complexity. In fact, Mao's thinking is the outcome of a synthesis: from Kang Youwei he adopted the utopian imaginations (the "visionary"), from Liang Qichao he borrowed the idea of an authoritarian developmental state, from Sun Yatsen he employed the concepts of national independence, land reform and the necessity of an "educational dictatorship". Mao added three further components which turned out in the end to be disastrous: the mobilisation of and the transformation of the minds of the "masses" by means of campaigns, the idea of class struggle as the driving force of history and the militarisation of society. Mao's principle objective was the creation of a "Chinese" model as a counter-model towards "Western" models (this is, by the way, a very topical subject: see e.g. Xi Jinping's "Thought on *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*", enshrined into the Party Constitution at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017), the creation of a new man, national self-reliance and mass campaigns as a substitute for technology imports. Mao aspired to industrialisation without modernisation. It is precisely these factors that are underexposed in this book. However, as Schmidt-Glintzer correctly argues, his successors were able to learn from Mao's failed attempts and mistakes.

In addition, the book contains a number of under-elaborated ideas. To give just a few examples: as when the author tells us that Mao's wife Jiang Qing specifically utilised Mao's female partner Zhang Yufeng without specifying what is meant by this (p. 384). Or when he informs us that Deng Xiaoping had initiated a military reform with the outcome that the armed forces withdrew its support of him (p. 394), without mentioning the contents of this reform and the reason for this withdrawal. On the same page he speaks of the violent repression of a conflict in Muslim villages, again without further explanation. Moreover, at the beginning of the book Schmidt-Glintzer speaks of new and comprehensive Chinese texts and documents on Mao without quoting these new documents or providing any new sources. Finally, it is not very clear why Stalin should be classified as a "dictator" but Mao not.

To sum up, this book is intended for readers interested in a well-written and readable book providing basic information on Mao within the historical background of his time. In addition, it provides ideas with regard to a farther-reaching and differentiated perspective on Mao's personality and his basic intentions. In this way it is highly recommendable.

*Thomas Heberer*