

WITOLD RODZINSKI begins his book with a capsule account of the days when the Chinese revolution was but a gleam in Mao's eye. He then guides us in a clear and chronological manner through the zigs and zags of domestic Chinese politics and along the equally twisted path of China's difficult relationship with the Soviet Union. The tour winds up in the present day, with a look at the post-Mao leadership's program of political and economic reform.

But the exhibits in this museum tour are just a bit too neatly arranged, and the guide does not invite us to ask questions. Nor does he encourage us to form our own opinions: "... only the Chinese can truly judge the issue," he warns as we pass by evidence which suggests, for example, that by the early '70s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had become demoralised, corrupt and faction-ridden.

Rodzinski, the author of three previous volumes on Chinese history and one-time Polish ambassador to China, freely passes judgment on a number of questions. But then, unlike the "soi-distant China experts" upon whom he frequently heaps scorn, Rodzinski hails from another tent in the socialist camp, and this seems to have given him a special sense of entitlement.

A gentleman Marxist, Rodzinski questions how such horrific events as the frame-ups, persecutions and purges of the Cultural Revolution could have happened "in a country which claimed to be socialist". The question seems a bit naive, considering the histories of a number of "socialist" countries. But where Rodzinski's partisan enthusiasms seriously affect his historical writing is in his unwillingness to venture much beyond the limits of speculation imposed by the main official documents made public by the CCP itself — even while admitting the inadequacies of these sources.

Reading 'The People's Republic of China: Reflections on Chinese Political History Since 1949', one wouldn't know that the publishing of semi-official and unofficial political memoirs, histories and analyses has become something of a boom industry in China over these past 10 years.

Of course, the information in many of these publications is incomplete, subjective and generally open to question. But even a sceptical reading of these sources suggests that factionalism, based on personal quarrels as well as ideological differences, played a much

On a party line from Beijing

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THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: Reflections on Chinese Political History Since 1949, by Witold Rodzinski (Collins, \$39.95).

SHOUTING FROM CHINA, by Helene Chung (Penguin, \$14.99).

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Witold Rodzinski: partisan view.

larger role in the history of the CCP than Rodzinski's thesis allows.

These new sources could also have helped Rodzinski to unravel some little mysteries. For instance, China's current leader, Deng Xiaoping, was purged early in the Cultural Revolution but "rehabilitated" in 1973. Rodzinski speculates that Deng's return to power was "quite likely due to Zhou Enlai's efforts". Premier Zhou was famous for having helped many well-known victims of the Cultural Revolution. So it might have been a reasonable supposition — except for the publication on 22 August 1984 in the 'People's Daily' of a memoir

by Deng's daughter. In it she reveals that it was veteran party member Wang Zhen who had aided her father's political recovery.

Perhaps the most unsatisfactory aspect of the book is the false impression given by the author that it is difficult to discern what the ordinary Chinese themselves think of their country's politics. He says, for example, that it would be "extremely interesting and worthwhile" to discover how the Cultural Revolution affected its youthful activists, now in their 30s and 40s. In fact, there are already a handful of memoirs (at least two available in English) and a wealth of literary and other studies of this fascinating subject. Then, of course, there are the Chinese people themselves. Many of them are willing to discuss their experiences. All they need is someone who wants to listen.

LISTENING TO VARIOUS Chinese people was half of Helene Chung's job as ABC Peking correspondent from 1983-86. Trying to yell the results back to Australia over China's infamous telephone lines was the other half, and the reason she titled her memoirs of this posting 'Shouting From China'.

Chung, a fourth generation Chinese Tasmanian, freely confesses that she never mastered the Chinese language, is no sinologist and often felt an "alien in the motherland". She proves the point with her inept romanisation of Chinese words, occasional mistakes in translation and the odd factual or interpretive error.

But she does make a number of interesting and thought-provoking observations. She questions, for instance, why in the three years she reported from Peking, no visiting Western head of state ever raised the question of China's bad record of human rights abuses with their hosts. And her recognition of Deng Xiaoping's considerable accomplishments has not blinded her to what she calls his fundamentally "anti-liberal nature".

'Shouting From China' is a readable if erratic grab bag of impressions, anecdotes, travel tales, holiday snapshots and general information. Most of all, it tells what it's like to be a foreign correspondent in a country which likes to boast of its "open door" policy while frequently leaving even resident journalists with the feeling that they are standing outside, knocking to come in.