

SAICH, TONY. *The Origins of the First United Front in China: The Role of Sneevliet (Alias Maring)*. Brill, Leiden 1991. 941 pp. (in 2 vols.). Dfl. 318.00; \$171.50.

The most important criterion is for assessing the quality of collections of archival materials is *reliability*. The historian who uses the work must be absolutely sure that she or he can trust it.

A secondary criterion is *relevance*. Is it useful to have the archival material available in this form? How many people are going to use the material for research? Is the material of such a quality that it would not be more useful to paraphrase the material and present it in analytical form?

To answer the last point first, *Sneevliet was an agent of some importance for the Communist International. He had a certain influence on the Chinese Communist Party and he was able to play a role which should not be neglected. But he did not contribute with great visions, theories or significant analyses. Most of the material in the volumes expose Sneevliet as a political meddler who was given power far beyond his capacities. A man who was unable to keep track of his own life, who had the impertinence to involve his Comintern superiors in his personal problems.*

The texts are generally not of a quality which makes them readable as contributions to the formation of the CCP and its ideology. Some are important sources which deserve to be included in the research on the history of the CCP. However, this could be done better in a monograph bringing them properly into context. The majority of sources only serve the study of the ramshackle administration of the ECCI or Sneevliet's personality. The few historians taking these tasks upon themselves just as well use the material as it is kept in the archive.

The organisation of the two volumes is due to the special problems the documents cause and constitutes an awkward compromise. They are transcribed in their raw form without alterations. This would seem the only acceptable thing to do: to deliver the texts in a totally unadulterated form. The problem with this is that the sources are in German, English, French, Dutch, Russian and Chinese, in many cases written by non-native speakers of these languages. The improper use of these languages by Sneevliet and his correspondents causes great problems of interpretation. In order to use the material in the raw form, the historian must master at least four or five languages at an advanced level. In order to help the reader, therefore, non-English texts are translated into English, thereby giving an authoritative reading. The editor must have assumed that people would read the English version and would take recourse to the transcribed version to verify the correctness of the translation.

However, this is not helpful: *either* the translation is reliable (and so the transcriptions are superfluous) *or* the translation is superfluous. A proper translation into English with indication of difficult or incomprehensible passages would suffice, given the relative unimportance of the majority of the texts. Nothing in the texts indicates that a word-for-word exegesis would yield results beyond that which a crude reading divulges. Sneevliet and other Comintern figures were working at the limits of their foreign language skills and were not able to express themselves with any depth.

The transcription of the poorly handwritten and typed documents must have been an arduous task. It is not clear whether the persons who undertook the

transcriptions had a sufficient grasp of the languages to be alerted to problems of interpretation at the stage of transcription. It is also impossible to distinguish Sneevliet's mistakes from mistakes *added* by the transcribers. That this might be the case is clear from the fact that footnotes that contain German, Dutch and French titles abound with grammatical and spelling mistakes due to careless proof-reading and obvious lack of knowledge of these languages (p. 12,3; p. 15,11; p. 23,49 are examples of this). One must doubt whether the "exact transcription" is competent.

The English translation is annotated with possible alternative readings, explanations, biographical data and other information. In the transcribed texts, the Chinese names are given in the form from the original documents, while they are given in Hanyu pinyin in the English translation if known. *Maiphong* (sic! p. 297) is identified as Haifeng (p. 317), while Svete (p. 236) goes unidentified while it is obvious from the context that it is *Shunde*.

This edition, first, overstates the role of Sneevliet by overloading the volumes with material that ought to have been paraphrased rather than taken *verbatim*, and, secondly, squanders a lot of space by providing transcriptions which are superfluous for all but very few historians.

The translations are so imperfect that they ought not to have passed through to final publication. They are misleading in details. For example: did the Chinese Labour Secretariat have 26 or 27 members in 1921? On page 211 it says in the English translation of a Chinese document: "Declaration of the Chinese Labour Secretariat Head, Zhang Teli and 26 members". The Chinese version is "Zhongguo Laodong Zuhe Shujibu Zhang Teli deng ershiliu ren xuanyan", and so *the number of people is 26* (not Zhang *plus* 26, and furthermore, the Chinese version does *not indicate that Zhang Teli is "Head"*).

The seriousness of these mistakes compels me to give substantial evidence below. Generally speaking, the translations are in poor and clumsy English, and although they are in most parts understandable, they do not convey an idiomatic and clear meaning. The following inventory of mistakes is not complete, and does not include the many instances of slippage and poor style.

(i) Translations from Chinese. On page 210 the sentence "Capitalism in each of China's large trading-ports is in a state of development and developments in any place throughout the world are linked" should be "There is no difference between the state of development of capitalism in China's trading ports and its state of development anywhere in the world"; *qianwan* means "millions and millions", not "hundreds of thousands"; *jiagai* [. . .] *shenshang* means "impose [the burden of something] on", not "increase"; *suo juzhi jichu* means "the base they occupy", not "their basic policies".

Mingwei Guomindang means "nominally KMT", not "known as KMT" (p. 257). On page 331 (ff.), *Zaocheng jieji de zhanzheng* means "creates class war", not "constitutes class struggle"; *wei zijide lihaji* means "weighing up their gains and losses", not "desiring privileges"; *kongtanzhuyizhe* are "phrasemongers", not "utopians"; *houbude gemingzhe* here are "would-be revolutionaries", not "revolutionary candidates"; the sentence "The proletariat does not join this kind of struggle for the benefit of the democratic elements. The sacrifice is not for them but to gain freedom that remains temporary" should be "The proletariat joins this war not for the benefit of the democrats, to sacrifice itself for them, but for the freedom that the proletariat itself requires right now"; *qingxiang* means "incline

toward", not "support"; *gexin* here means "reform", not "revolutionary".

On pages 573–576, *dedao tongqing* means "won sympathy", not "reached accord"; *buyinggaide* here means "wrong", not "unnecessary"; *bu zai yiqi* means "not together", not "not agree".

On page 594, the passage "China currently has a party. Only the KMT [. . .]" should read "Of China's present parties, only the KMT [. . .]".

(ii) German to English translations. On page 307, *aufreten* means "act", not "reside"; *dass in diesem Sinne entschieden war* means "that a decision in this sense had been taken", not "that this will come about".

On pages 313–314, *unvollkommen* means "imperfect", not "weak"; *auffordern* means "encourage", not "demand". *Weil* (page 316 and page 669) means "because", not "while". A recurrent mistake is to translate *Verhältnisse* with "relations" rather than "circumstances".

On page 320, *war es noch nicht zu einem Bruch* [. . .] means "it had not yet come to a break", not that "a break was avoided". Pages 324–325, *und zwar* means "namely", not "to be sure"; *Herausgabe* means "publication", not "replication". On page 346, *treiben* means "drive", not "prompt". Page 352, *Abtreten* means "resignation", not "retirement"; *unnütz* means "useless" or "pointless", and not "unnecessary"; *leugnen* means "deny", not "lie about".

The sentence on page 354, "The cabinet has wavered and given its consent for the arrests" should be "The cabinet has hesitated to authorise the arrests". On page 358, *sich einmischen* means "meddle", not "get entangled"; *bis auf* means "with the exception of" or "even including", but not "until".

Wenn on page 368 means "if", not "even when". *Knebelung* on page 370 means "gagging", not "extortion". On page 406, *konnte* means "was able to", not "should". Page 426, *eventuell* means "if possible (or necessary)", not "eventually"; *entsprechend* means "accordingly", not "where possible". Page 463, *Ereignisse* means "events", not "results"; *Bahn brechen* means "pave the way", not "gain ground". On page 632, *ekele* should clearly be *heikele*, i.e. "ticklish problem", not "loathsome problem". Pages 615–616, *für zwei Monate* means "for two months", not "two months ago"; *angreifen* means "attack", not "append".

On pages 638–639, "anti-nationalist" should be "nationalist"; *Losung* means "slogan", not "solution". *Düster* on page 652 means "gloomy", not "mysterious". *Im Ausland erzogene Chinesen* on page 654 in this context means Chinese "educated abroad", not who "grew up abroad". The phrase "its own revolutionary force" on page 678 should be "his own revolutionary force". *Entscheidend* on page 680 means "decisive", not "deciding". On page 689 the sentence "there should also be problems with Chen Jiongming's troops" should be "there are also said to be difficulties among Chen Jiongming's troops".

On page 696 and 697, "co-members" should be "members"; and Chiang Kai-shek was not "brought up" but "educated" in Japan. On page 707, *in den Ländern draussen* means not "in the countries out there" but "in other countries".

(iii) Translations from Dutch to English. On page 254, *overvoekering* means "excessive proliferation", not "loss". *Organisatie* (page 340) is mistranslated as "sympathy". *Twijfelachtig* on page 340 means "dubious", not "doubting". On pages 380–381, *plaatsen* means "to place" (an article), not "to arrive"; *gelukkig* means "fortunate", not "fortuitous"; *mogelijk* means "possible", not "necessary". On page 385, *weliswaar* means "admittedly", not "indeed"; *parten spelen* means to "mislead", not "influence".

I shall not continue this embarrassing list. A *proper* translation of about ten of the most important texts and a substantial analysis of Sneevliet's role could have provided a valuable contribution to research on the early evolution of the CCP and the significance of the ECCI in China. The almost 200 pages long introductory chapter contributes elements of a useful analysis and paraphrases some of the sources transcribed and translated elsewhere in the volumes.

The volumes touch on key issues of general concern in the research of the early CCP. However, the project has evidently not been sufficiently developed and the necessary expertise has not been drawn in to ensure that it could be carried out fruitfully. It seems that the editor has been under time pressure and that a breathing space could have been provided him with time to make proper arrangements for the research. The whole concept of the edition seems to have been vaguely formulated from the outset. But if that is normal practice with this type of editions, then so be it.

Flemming Christiansen

KIFT, DAGMAR. Arbeiterkultur im gesellschaftlichen Konflikt. Die englische Music Hall im 19. Jahrhundert. [Schriften des Fritz-Hülser-Instituts für Arbeiterliteratur.] Klartext, Essen 1991. 237 pp. DM 38.00.

The British public is inclined to romanticize the music hall – a rather curious phenomenon in view of the fact that few of them can ever have experienced its popular appeal, its alleged close rapport between the artistes and the audience, or the sentimentality of its repertoire. The nostalgia for things unseen and unheard must derive either at second hand from the memory of others who survived and remembered or from the surviving songs. No doubt only the best of these have survived with their universal appeal in describing the lives and loves of ordinary men and women – human beings like the hearers themselves.

Music halls have, however, also become a favourite field of study for the social historian. It is not only the mass audience which interests him or her, made up of the ordinary people about whom so little is known, but also the concept of a counter-culture, a culture not controlled by the hegemonial classes and in some respects opposed to them. Were the music halls a focus of rebellion, or at least a symbol of disaffection and independence?

Dagmar Kift has much sympathy for the current literature, but is also critical of it in some respects. Above all, she complains, and not without reason, that it tends to concentrate on London, and London was in many respects different from the provinces. This study deliberately sets out to focus on the provinces, which in this context tends to mean some of the larger cities of Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, together with Glasgow.

Among the obvious differences between these and the capital is the fact that whereas in London there was a chronological sequence from the “free and easies” via the concert room or singing room to the music hall proper, in the provinces these tended to co-exist, the music halls in the centres of the towns not fully driving out the less ambitious public houses with entertainment in the lesser streets in the suburbs. By the 1890s, which mark a turning point in several respects, there was a certain convergence, however, especially in the programmes, which is not entirely surprising in view of the chains of music halls which some entrepreneurs had been