

wage labourers who had no assured entitlements to subsistence. Viswanath, thus, usefully contradicts the commonsensical attribution of a single imperial logic or character to the colonial state, across space and time, even though, she does admit that something like a singular “state effect” did prevail.

From the early twentieth century, two important developments reconfigured the scenario. On one hand, Indians began to be nominated for legislative bodies and the eventual entry of untouchable members created a more effective site for continuing the conflicts around caste and labour. On the other hand, the emergence of anti-colonial mass movements made the state keen to keep Panchamas out of the nationalist upsurge and inclined it slightly towards reforms. The colonial state now tilted towards some reform measures in order to keep Panchamas out of the nationalist movements. Unfortunately, Viswanath does not describe the content of this new liberalism, nor how it was transmitted to the colonial officialdom. The new elements introduced by an upper caste dominated nationalism into the earlier dynamic are not particularly well substantiated. These, however, are minor quibbles about an otherwise substantial and excellent work.

All four narrative structural elements are closely historicized, and large and small shifts within each of these elements, as well as internal differences and their changing mutual relationships are meticulously tracked. The complicated history is expressed with exemplary lucidity and elegance. Viswanath elaborates and clarifies all the interlocking variables while providing a sparkling account whose crisp narrative elucidates the dense complexity of its plot ingredients. The work puts faces and flesh on long term and intricate historical processes. It retrieves the material dimensions of caste and vividly explains the ways in which they reshaped untouchable lives and struggles.

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WEMHEUER, FELIX. *Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union*. [Yale Agrarian Studies Series.] Yale University Press, New Haven (CT) [etc.] 2014. Maps. xi, 325 pp. \$65.00; £39.00.

This study compares the background, history, and interpretations of the Soviet famine of 1931–1933 and the Chinese famine of 1959–1961. Wemheuer devotes much more attention to the Chinese famine, because he is a China specialist, and his research in Chinese villages revealed its importance for the peasants (p. 17). He relies on an extensive array of primary sources and recent Chinese-language scholarship in dealing with the Chinese famine, to which the book is an important contribution. But he relies on a more limited array of secondary sources on the USSR. The book makes valid comparisons and criticisms of conventional views, but has several important inaccuracies.

Wemheuer argues that the history of these two famines are comparable because both occurred when the countries began rapid state-run programmes of industrialization, urbanization, and collectivization of agriculture, and he labels them both as “Great Leap” famines – applying the Chinese concept to the USSR. He describes how Soviet and Chinese

governments both assumed that industrialization would be based on exploiting the peasants. He explains how both regimes established “hierarchies of hunger” during the famines by prioritizing food supplies for cities over villages. He argues that both famines disrupted early accommodation between the regimes and their peasants, and frustrated both regimes’ plans for a socialist agriculture, forcing the regimes to introduce permanent capitalist components into their agricultural systems. Later chapters explore the long-term difficulties of socialist agriculture and its decline in the late twentieth century.

Wemheuer also compares nationalist interpretations of these famines by Tibetan and Ukrainian writers. After outlining Soviet and Chinese “indigenization” policies to accommodate national groups and their alteration by the famines, he critiques the interpretations developed by Ukrainian and, later, Tibetan émigré writers that view the famines as intentional genocidal policies oriented to destroying these nationalities. He also explains how the Ukrainian nationalist interpretation was adopted in 2005 by the Ukrainian government and propagated internationally. His criticisms of the Ukrainian nationalist views are circumspect and incomplete, but still important. His discussion of the Tibetan case is useful because it has received little attention in the English-speaking world. He also criticizes the intentionalist viewpoint of Frank Dikötter’s *Mao’s Great Famine* (London, 2010).

Wemheuer relies so much on secondary literature that often “his” arguments are his choices between secondary studies. Nonetheless, his study does offer an informed perspective and a more rational view of these famines than most writings. He criticizes scholars who focus on the regime-peasant relationship and see the famines as intentionally imposed. To support this critique, Wemheuer cites studies showing that both the USSR and China had harvest declines of about 30 percent before the famines, and that weather conditions caused 70 percent of the Chinese crop failure in 1960 (pp. 12, 246). He also attributes the famines to a “deadly” struggle between the regimes and peasants over the agricultural surplus (pp. 14–15, 20); to leaders’ prioritizing cities over the villages (the “hierarchies of hunger”) (ch. 3); to failures of plans and visions (p. 36); and to decisions to export grain during the famine (pp. 52–54). These different interpretations reflect Wemheuer’s broad readings and document the complexity of these events.

I am not a China specialist, but Wemheuer appears to present an accurate and relatively detailed picture of the Chinese agrarian and food-supply history from the 1940s through the famine, based on many primary sources, as well as recent Chinese-language scholarship. He cites studies of famines in the Republican period (1911–1949), omitted in most publications (pp. 26ff.), and of chronic food supply difficulties in the 1950s that anticipated the Great Leap Famine (pp. 88ff.). He discusses the effects of political infighting and changing views of Mao and other top leaders on the famine, and analyses how Mao ended the famine by importing food in 1961 and dispatching twenty million new urban migrants back to their villages.

However, in writing about the USSR his discussion has several errors and inconsistencies. In discussing Soviet collectivization, Wemheuer writes on p. 42 that Stalin thought collectivized peasants would be easier to control, but later (p. 46) he asserts that collective farms could develop into institutions that would oppose the state, implying difficulties of control. He writes that during the early 1930s, the politicized atmosphere in the USSR “made it difficult for Stalin” to admit the existence of famine in public (p. 37); yet, the Soviet regime held a publicized national conference on drought in October 1931, and also published the decree ordering transporting grain back to villages struck by the drought.¹

1. Mark B. Tauger, *Natural Disaster and Human Actions in the Soviet Famine of 1931–1933* (Pittsburgh, 2001), p. 10, a source that Wemheuer cites.

Wemheuer asserts that Russia never had a famine relief system comparable to the eighteenth-century Qing dynasty (p. 30); yet, after 1861 Russia developed an elaborate system that aided millions of peasants, employing a railroad system that China never had.² In discussing the urban rationing systems, he writes that during the famines the rural populations were not entitled to government food rations (pp. 46, 64, 70). Yet, Wemheuer admits that during the famine in 1933 the Soviet regime issued thirty-five secret decrees allotting food to villages (p. 58).³

Wemheuer's comparisons lead to a few mistakes. For example, since Mao in 1961 attempted to conciliate the peasants by allowing them to have private plots in the People's Communes, Wemheuer assumes that the Soviets introduced private plots after the 1931–1933 famine as well (pp. 40, 46–47). In fact, except for a few months in certain collective farms during the collectivization campaign of winter 1929–1930, Soviet peasants always had private plots and livestock, which were guaranteed in the kolkhoz model statute issued in March 1930.⁴ Private markets were also never officially abolished, and were made explicitly legal in May 1932, before the peak of the famine rather than after it.⁵

Wemheuer also addresses arguments about peasant resistance and the relation to the famines. Many Soviet and Chinese officials (and later scholars) suspected or assumed that peasants concealed the food they produced from procurements, understated their production in statistical measurements, tried to produce less food to starve the towns, and feigned hunger (pp. 48ff.). Yet, when Soviet writer Mikhail Sholokhov wrote to Stalin about peasants in the North Caucasus, and Stalin accused them of performing a slowdown strike to deprive the cities, the investigation he subsequently ordered found evidence of a shortage, rather than a strike, and the regime then sent food relief (pp. 82–83). Fortunately, Wemheuer does acknowledge recent scholarship that questions the emphasis on resistance (pp. 5, 80).

While Wemheuer is generally correct in criticizing problematic conventional views, he repeatedly accepts the old argument that industrialization in the USSR and China depended on the exploitation or “tribute” of the peasants (ch. 1 and later passages). He cites a quote from Stalin in 1928 (p. 41) explaining that the government had to exploit the peasants by paying them low prices for their crops. But he does not mention that the Soviet government also spent considerable money importing and producing tractors and other equipment for agriculture, and transferred it to the peasants without requiring direct payment, which compensated for the underpayment for crops really. Stalin actually rejected this “tribute” viewpoint during the collectivization campaign and later.⁶

Wemheuer also challenges arguments by Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen that famines result from victims' loss of “entitlement”, or economic, legal, or cultural access to food, and that democracy and freedom inherently prevent famines by forcing governments to take measures to prevent and alleviate famines (pp. 149ff.). He argues that

2. *Idem*, “Famine in Russian History”, in Bruce F Adams (ed.), *The Supplement to the Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet and Eurasian History*, vol. 10 (Gulf Breeze, FL, 2011), pp. 79–92.

3. In all, the regime transferred 5.7 million tons of food back to villages in 1933; *Idem*, “The 1932 Harvest and the Famine of 1933”, *Slavic Review*, 50:1 (1991), pp. 70–89, p. 74.

4. See for example R.W. Davies, *The Soviet Collective Farm, 1929–1930* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), ch. 5.

5. Tauger, “1932 Harvest”, p. 71.

6. Mark B. Tauger, “Stalin, Soviet Agriculture, and Collectivization”, in Frank Trentmann and Fleming Just (eds), *Food and Conflict in Europe in the Age of the Two World Wars* (New York, 2006), pp. 109–142.

non-democratic governments, motivated by ideologies such as Confucianism, have also prevented famines (a valid criticism one might expect from a China specialist).

Wemheuer's comparative study is a valuable reference work to recent literatures on these two famines, with the caveat that readers should be cautious about his discussion of the USSR. It is a corrective to the prevailing trend of "intentionalist" interpretations that have acquired wide political support despite their scholarly inadequacies, and as such is an important book to read for anyone convinced of "famine-genocide" views.

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WU, YICHING. *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins. Chinese Socialism in Crisis*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) [etc.] 2014. xii, 335 pp. Ill. \$49.95; £36.95; €45.00.

Yiching's Wu's masterful social history of three phases of the Cultural Revolution as they played out in three different Chinese cities is the single best book I have ever read on the subject and one of the very best books I have read on any aspect of Maoist Era China in a long time. It is path-breaking in every sense and both changes the ground rules and raises the bar for future scholarship on what was perhaps the most intense and important, but remains one of the least understood, episodes of mass political mobilization and internal contestation (without the complete overthrow of the regime in power) in modern history. Most previous analyses of the Cultural Revolution have focused on elite politics and Mao's Machiavellian designs and their horrific effects on others in the top echelons of China's political and social hierarchy. What work has focused on social history has tended to confine its perspective to individual cities or incidents – notably, the original Red Guard mobilization in Beijing in Spring 1966 and the January 1967 Shanghai People's Commune movement (though some have also examined such other episodes as the July 1967 Wuhan Incident or 1968's "Mango Fever"). For many scholars, both within China and around the world, the Cultural Revolution – especially its most heady years of 1966–1969 – remains a veritable black box, especially at the grassroots of urban China. Though not the only, or even the first, effort in this vein, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins* takes the largest and most significant steps to date towards bridging this notable and unfortunate lacuna.

The opening chapter boldly frames the study as intimately connected to the present day. Wu sees the Cultural Revolution not as a discrete episode of chaos, but as part of an historical continuum of post-1949 Chinese political and social history. The schisms and rifts it laid bare during the 1960s and 1970s have opened up anew since the 1990s, as the reform project has failed to deliver the broad-based growth and gains many hoped for during the 1980s, creating a profound anxiety within the Chinese state surrounding any discussion of the latest and most extreme pre-reform period of intense contestation (pp. 4–6). The second chapter summarizes the politics of class and of history during the Maoist period. The primary conclusion is that the vitally important questions of how classes are defined, of the