

Living with reform: china since 1989 – a review

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Living With Reform: China Since 1989, written by Timothy Cheek, a professor and the Louis Cha Chair in Chinese Research at the Institute of Asian Research at the University of British Columbia, offers a stunningly vivid account of Chinese history in the post-Maoist era. Aided by scholarly research, this book attempts to provide the lay reader with a balanced documentation of the preserving legacy of Maoism in the socio-political realm of the nation. It sketches the challenging economic reclamations adopted in China since the 1980s and reveals the working people's response to the aftermaths of reform in modern day China.

Media reports have been synopsisized in the book to let the readers interpret them impartially. Readers also get an overview of the machineries of the Chinese government; and the values and conventions of workers, women and minorities. The important provisions made in the foreign policy of China since 1989 are delineated with particular reference to the domestic concerns of the country. This article seeks to provide a brief review of Timothy Cheek's Living With Reform: China Since 1989. The book has 6 chapters:

1) Making sense: what is 'China'? , 2) Living history: what was Maoism? , 3) Reform: Mao is dead, long live Mao!, 4) Brave new world: reform and openness, 5) Winners and losers: reactions to reform and 6) China in the world today. The two and half decade long struggle to establish an alternative economic model that would benefit the most populous country in the world is presented in an illuminated and easily perceptible manner.

The first chapter gives a generic idea of China as a nation - its ethnic diversity, geographical features, population and longstanding political and sociological heritage. Bearing in mind the sheer geographical vastness, <https://assignbuster.com/living-with-reform-china-since-1989-a-review/>

Timothy raises one basic question in this chapter: Why is China a single country and not many?

The plausible explanation he cites is the history of the nation. “ One way to make sense of this tension between geographic diversity and political unity in China is to imagine that the Roman Empire had recovered from Germanic attacks and reconstituted itself as an effective, stable, and powerful regime in the sixth century CE, comprising the lands not only of Augustus’s empire but what became the Byzantine Empire - all under the central control of Rome - and that this Roman Empire lasted (with Mongol invasions and interregnums) until 1912.” (Cheek 13)

The social order and ethnic diversity have played a major role as far as Chinese reform is concerned. It might be noted that the fundamental reformist operatives in any society are based on the physical, economic, and social diversity of life. China being the most populous country in the world has never run short of manpower which is an integral element of constructive change. The governing system since the Maoist regime has come under contradictory interpretations. On one hand, privatization seems to have two faces among the working class in northeast China and farmers in the southwest.

Again, a part of women population is contended with what has happened since the Maoist regime, as opposed to many who have shown their dissent. Timothy looks into the past events to trace the building up of socio-economic structure in the contemporary times. He goes into minute detailing of how British imperialism acted detrimentally with Chinese population growth in the

beginning of the nineteenth century. (Cheek 17) The second chapter highlights the socialist identity of China.

While the idealisms of communist outlooks have crumbled everywhere in the world - be it Germany, the USSR or many other European nations, China has maintained its political uniqueness over the years. Despite being a people's economy governed by a people's nation, this country has managed to experience outstanding economic growth and attain modern state of affairs, both of which are in impressive accord with other developed nations around the world. The capitalist mode of economy has given rise to market economy in the last 25 years or so.

The influence of Maoism has held such a diverse identity (a socialist state with a capitalist economy) in tact. This influence has been grinded into the breathing habit of China, thus helping the nation to stand in unity despite its cultural, economic and ethnic differences. (Cheek 33) The third chapter deals with the all important question of reform - when and how did it start in China? It's been argued that Mao Zedong himself " set a pattern of bold (and sometimes reckless) policy experimentation. " (Cheek 54), and the change we see today initiated from the times of Mao.

The chapter throws light on the changing political scenario from 1970s up to present days, and outlines the farmers' movement in Anhui province back in the 1970s. (Cheek 54) When modern comforts of living and industrialization go hand in hand, a country can claim to have attained a true reformist state. The fourth chapter gives a broad spectrum of Chinese modern life in the post Maoist era. The results of economic reform are cited with ample empirical evidences. For example, the vertical boom of rural Chinese economy in the

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1980s is set against the relatively depressive period that followed in urban industrial communities.

The next two chapters deal with how the Chinese society, especially the domestic spheres have accepted the benefits of reform and change. It might be noted in this regard that not everything has gone smooth for the country since it took the reformist outlooks. To quote Cheek, “ Internationally, China may be a stable and economically dynamic nation, but internally it is racked by contradictions that rightly alarm informed observers (whether in Beijing or London), worry the current social winners following reform and outrage the losers.” (Cheek 103)

It goes without saying that the mass reaction to current economic status is a determining factor in terms of the eventual course of progress in the years to come. In a nutshell, Timothy Cheek’s Living With Reform: China Since 1989 introduces a well contrived description of how the economic and cultural globalization of modern China emerged out of an identity which was nothing but atypical of a street vendor dealing with vast farming lands.