Overall, the editors fail to produce a well-integrated volume, and have left out some important representative developments such as molecular biology. Nevertheless, their collection represents a fresh and daring effort to explore the true impact of the Cultural Revolution on Chinese science, technology, and medicine. It brings out some new and inspiring papers and should stimulate more comprehensive and more profound investigations.

DANIAN HU

Danian Hu, an associate professor in the Department of History, City College of New York, specializes in the history of twentieth-century Chinese sciences. He is currently working on projects concerning Chinese scientific developments during the Republican period and the Cultural Revolution.

Das Motorrad: Ein deutscher Sonderweg in die automobile Gesellschaft.


German motorization blossomed with the motorcycle. This finding is the starting point of Frank Steinbeck’s study, based on his doctoral dissertation. Between 1926 and 1960 more motorcycles than automobiles were driven in Germany. In no other European country did the motorcycle play such a dominant role in mass motorization. In the 1920s there was also a high incidence of motorcycle use in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and the British motorcycle industry was long considered a role model by German motorbike manufacturers. However, the British and Dutch started driving more automobiles in the 1930s. Only in Germany did the motorcycle keep its position as the dominant means of personal transportation until the end of the Second World War, and Steinbeck sets out to reveal the reasons for this special development. The three chapters of his study follow the political developments in the German Empire and the Weimar Republic to the Nazi period. In addition, a brief excursus summarizes postwar developments in West and East Germany.

Steinbeck argues that persistent low incomes in large sectors of the German population, high fees (e.g., taxation and fuel costs), and finally, from 1928, favorable legal regulations (partial abolition of taxes and compulsory driving licenses) contributed to the widespread use of motorcycles, particularly those with small, 200-ccm engines (p. 310). These three factors describe the general scene, but they do not satisfactorily answer the question of why Germans embraced the motorcycle as their primary means of mass motorization. Furthermore, Steinbeck’s study does not answer the question of why German car manufacturers did not develop cheaper car models in the 1920s, and why the automobile was perceived as an upper-class luxury until the 1930s. Here, a discussion of the German Sonderweg...
(“special path”), as mentioned in the study’s subtitle, would have been help-
ful. “Sonderweg” is a theory in German historiography that explains the
unique German course from aristocracy to democracy. Eminent historians
such as Fritz Fischer and Hans-Ulrich Wehler argued that Germany only
partially modernized: industrial modernity was not followed by political
change; instead, traditional reactionary elites maintained power up to 1945.

Despite the book’s subtitle, Steinbeck explicitly states that he does not
want to engage with this discussion (p. 11). Instead, in his conclusion, he
rejects interpretations of other mobility scholars that the conservative
elites hampered German automobilization (p. 314). To support his argu-
ment, Steinbeck points to conservative anti-noise campaigns which con-
demned motorcycle use, and argues that German elites did not promote
the motorcycle for the masses either. However, as sound-study scholars
investigating symbolisms of sound and listening practices of elites and sub-
ordinates have shown, conservative noise-abatement movements did not
simply follow a rational discourse. Upper-class anti-noise campaigners
equally criticized the diabolic bang of automobiles—automobiles that were
predominantly owned and used by these same campaigners.

Beyond the question of the German Sonderweg, Steinbeck does not
engage with other recent scholarship in the history of technology. What
role did mediators like motor clubs and journals play in articulating what
they perceived as the motorcyclists’ interests? What did the history of
motorcycles-in-use look like? What can the self-repair practice of motor-
cyclists tell us about motorcycle culture and the construction of manhood
in the interwar years? Because of his lack of critical historiographical dis-
cussion, Steinbeck does not go beyond the existing literature on German
motorization, such as the work of Heidrun Edelmann or Christoph Maria
Merki, frequently acknowledged in the author’s footnotes. What Steinbeck
adds are numerous details on motorcycles. Thus, if you are looking for
exhaustive statistical data or an in-depth account of legal and technical reg-
ulations, you will find some interesting pieces of information about motor-
cycles in Germany. However, Steinbeck’s study will not help you to better
understand why motorcycles dominated the motorization process in Ger-
many up until the 1960s.

STEFAN KREBS

Stefan Krebs is postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Technology and Society Studies,
Maastricht University.