Chinese leadership itself feels that China is unable to absorb large volumes of foreign technology. The disdain for technical education fostered by the Cultural Revolution may, we are told on page 160, have exacerbated this problem, but consideration of the Polish case may surely incline us to think that the technology absorption problem is widespread in the communist world. In the light of the universal problem of grossly excessive lead-times discussed elsewhere in the report, the term " obsolescence transfer " might be a much better general description of this aspect of east-west relations.

It would be difficult to dispute the report's general assessment of the Soviet economic situation. Continuing conservatism on the planning system makes it impossible for the authorities to come to grips with the problem of low productivity and investment effectiveness. Nothing is more telling than the fact that the Soviet economy is currently suffering from a *shortage* of steel and cement (p. 109) – precisely the kinds of materials which economic slow-down and technical progress are leaving in embarrassing surplus in the west. While the Soviet economy soldiers on, the strain of trying to maintain high defence expenditures, do something to improve living standards *and* keep investment votes up in order to foster some medium-term growth potential, may become extreme over the next few years. The picture of Chinese economic prospects that emerges is more optimistic. The pragmatic approach of the new leadership has borne fruit in limited decentralization, while growth in the defence budget has, we are told, been held in recent years to an annual 1 per cent. The CIA expects the Chinese economy to grow at above 5 per cent per annum during the 1980s (pp. 160–61). On the other hand, population growth is tending to neutralize increases in the absolute level of food production, as well as creating serious unemployment problems (p. 129).

We should no doubt make some allowance for the fact that the U.S. is currently much more benevolently disposed towards China than towards the Soviet Union. Nevertheless the general picture that emerges – of the Soviet Union as a struggling medium-developed economy and of China as a comparatively successful developing country – is surely correct.

D. A. DYKER

The Information Policy of the People's Republic of China. From the " Cultural Revolution " to the Fall of the " Gang of Four " (1965–1976). By HELMUT OPLETAL. [Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1981. 211 pp.]

As in all communist systems, the information policy of the People's Republic of China presents itself as highly esoteric and hostile to open, unveiled communication. Hence, it is often impossible, not only for western observers but even for the majority of the Chinese population, to discern from mass media statements what is really going on behind the screen of the official propaganda. However, in order to fulfil its primary task of propagating and explaining new policies, the communication system must provide for a network of internal channels of information which fills the gap between propaganda claims and reality and acts as an important instrument of political socialization.

Since comparatively little research has been done on this subject, Helmet Opletal, in his analysis of the Chinese information policy, tries to combine a survey of the specific character of the Chinese mass communication system with a case study in the functioning of the internal information system, based on a comparative content analysis of 113 issues of one of the largest internal daily newspapers, the *Cankao xiaoxi (Information News).* Starting with a short description of the development of the Chinese communication system until the end of the Cultural Revolution, Opletal's analysis of basic aspects of public information in China focuses on connections between the political system, processes of social feedback and the media system in the years 1965–76.

In his attempt to confront the communication theory as developed by the Chinese Communist Party *not* with " western " criteria of the freedom of the press and needs of communication but with the *Chinese* political reality (*cf.* p.10), he first outlines major aspects of this theory, which has never been set out explicitly, using scattered quotations of prominent Party leaders as his primary source of reference (*cf.* Chap. 2).

On the basis of this analysis, he looks into the role mass media play in political reality as instruments of propagating and promoting different Party policies at all levels of society.

The leading question of his whole analysis may be formulated as follows: What information is disseminated to whom, through what channels and why?

Posing this question, the author at the same time, outlines the most important media with special regard to non-public and semi-public channels of information, élite information, " oral mass communication " and alternative ways of overcoming politically motivated blockages of certain channels.

All in all, the reader is given a thorough survey of both the theoretical foundation and organizational structure of the Chinese communication system.

The last part of the book is concerned with a description of the contents of information in representative reports about foreign countries and world affairs appearing in the *People's Daily* and the *Cankao xiaoxi.* Although the latter has meanwhile been replaced by two other special information services – the *Xuexi wenjian (Documents for Study)* and the *Dangfeng yu dangji (Party Style and Party Discipline)* – it can, if available at all, only be found in single issues in western libraries and archives. Therefore Opletal's analysis is, in this respect, perhaps most informative for analysts of Chinese politics, although the one week (12–17 May 1974) he analyses in detail may be too short a time to gain any insight into the working of *Cankao xiaoxi.*

Reviewing his findings the author remains doubtful about the question whether *Cankao xiaoxi* really provides an objective familiarity with politics abroad, since the pressures established by the need to confirm and legitimate official politics are clearly felt even in this *internal* newspaper.

So Opletal tends to regard *Cankao xiaoxi* both as a specific feature of Chinese information policy and as a typical result of the hybrid nature of the official press: in a situation where political events are kept secret an

informed press must lose its functions, because every word is taken as an official political statement.

Thus, background reports and active mediation between the masses and the leadership or in other words – although this may of course be a criterion based on typical " western " conceptions – real journalism, becomes impossible.

Summing up, it may be said that the reader of Helmut Opletal's book obtains a concise and informative survey of the most important aspects of the Chinese mass communication system. But since a thorough knowledge of the official information policy at all levels of society is essential to anyone engaged in analysing any aspect of politics in China, much research still remains to be done. Therefore, Opletal's analysis should only be regarded as a first and useful step towards a broader investigation of the specific features of communication and information in the People's Republic of China.

EBERHARD SANDSCHNEIDER

Mass Communication in China. By JOHN HOWKINS. [New York and London: Longman, 1982. 160 pp. £17·50.]

John Howkins is editor of *InterMedia*, the journal of the International Institute of Communications, and is widely acknowledged as one of the best-informed journalists in his field. His recently-published " New Technologies, New Policies? " (a report for the Broadcasting Research Unit set up last year to investigate, among other things, the implications of the new communications technologies) is probably one of the clearest expositions of communications in Britain available today. Thus, in *Mass Communication in China* he assembles his facts as a specialist in media technology and administration. He is interested in the historical background, but his primary objective is to describe communications as they exist in China today, and how they will develop in the future. He includes television, radio, printing, film, satellites, advertising and, of course, telecommunications.

The section on satellites illustrates the scope and usefulness of the book. The relatively advanced state of China's space industry stems from the development of an independent system of nuclear weaponry. The first bomb was exploded in 1964 and the first satellite launched in 1970. Since then China has launched 11 satellites, and by the mid 1980s is planning to put up its first geostationary satellites to broadcast television and radio programmes direct to community receivers. This is the cheapest and quickest method of achieving almost complete coverage: it is already used by Canada and to a lesser extent by India and Indonesia. The book includes the capacity of the projected satellites, the companies capable of tendering to supply them and future plans for a remote sensing satellite.

John Howkins emphasizes that Chinese communications cannot be isolated from politics. The main communicators are the 38 million or so Communist Party members and that their tools are not television programmes but discussions. There is a chapter on the political context which contains a simple summary of the 1970s ending with Hua