
This volume under review is part of the series entitled “Mass Dictatorship in the Twentieth Century.” The idea of the book dates back to a conference held in Seoul, South Korea in June 2005 and has grown out of the efforts of professor Jie-Hyun Lim at the Research Institute of Comparative History and Culture at Hanyang University. *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship: Collusion and Evasion* is a collection of 13 individual studies edited by Alf Lüdtke. Within the chapters, which have been arranged chronologically, the studies focus on a given country, its political system, and societal phenomena. The 13 authors come from universities in the USA, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and South Korea, and this is reflected in the diversity of the themes treated in the volume.

Analysis of the history of everyday life and ordinary people, however, is hardly a new approach. In German historiography, the trend of “Alltagsgeschichte” appeared for the first time in 1989 in Lüdtke’s book (*Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* [1989]). Researchers in this subfield claim that political-historical study of the state party and related institutions yields a one-sided and restricted interpretation of the history of GDR. Research, which examines the party state from the perspective of everyday life, in contrast, furthers an understanding of how the state influenced society. If we regard this conception as a historiographical school, its most important characteristic is simply the shift in perspective, which embraces the notion of the study of “history from below.” This trend, in turn, is characterized by interdisciplinary approaches. It integrates the results of cultural studies, discourse analysis, and historical anthropology. Lüdtke’s work functions as an important reference point, and it has become part of a mainstream trend in research dealing with totalitarian regimes (mainly Nazism and Socialism). The most influential scholars in American-British Sovietology (Sheila Fitzpatrick, Stephen F. Kotkin) were also inspired by this approach.

The authors in this collection focus on the interplay between political power and society. As Lüdtke repeatedly emphasizes, social history and political history do not exist as independent entities. They are intertwined. Since people live their everyday lives under the influence of central decisions, researchers seek to learn more about the kinds of processes which unfold from below and the motivations and meanings which shape people’s reactions. The contributors to
the volume also highlight the roles of the multiple forms of active participation, mobilization, and self-mobilization under dictatorships. The attitudes of ordinary people included many forms of resistance, compromise, and collaboration. The main question concerns how the historical actors lived their lives and addressed challenges, which arose from Germany to Ghana and North Korea. How were their strategies everyday practices different, and how were they similar?

The book relies on two kinds of sources. Naturally, the sources chosen by the historians depend on their assumptions and methodologies. This yields a mix of two types of studies. The first group of authors offers historical summaries. These summaries focus on how preceding studies identified connection points between the state and society, thus going beyond the one-dimensional approach inherent in the totalitarian paradigm. In accordance with their practice and goals, the contributors use secondary sources, including monographs and essays. Peter Lambert, for instance, examines the role of the Gestapo in denunciations of ordinary people. Kevin McDermott presents the findings of research on the Great Terror which scholars have been able to pursue since the opening of the Soviet archives in the 1990s. Harald Dehne examines changes in consumption patterns in the GDR, focusing on what shortages meant for the rulers and the citizenry.

Other authors examine primary sources, including police reports, documents produced party organizations, and personal texts. Michael Wildt compares diaries of German people with different social backgrounds at the time of Hitler’s rise in 1933. Michael Kim examines how Japan tried to identify and promote the role of labor heroes in colonized Korea through propaganda campaigns and how this shaped the discourse about this phenomenon. His sources were newspapers and the oral testimonies of Korean workers. Andre Schmid focuses on the personal account of a North Korean woman, “Comrade Min.”

Undoubtedly, the main strength of this book consists in the comparative approach and the wide geographical framework within which the interaction between the state and society is examined. We read about Soviet and Eastern European socialisms, German Nazism, and Italian Fascism, but also Japanese colonialism and the postcolonial dictatorships in Asia and Africa. This wide selection of totalitarian regimes offers an opportunity to compare the different political, economic, and social systems in the interwar period and after 1945.

By applying the experiences of the military mobilization during World War II dictatorial regimes were established not only in Europe but also in post-colonial states in Africa and Asia. Can we compare these very different countries? All
over the world, people need money, food, accommodation, and leisure time, and they have to work, study, consume, and travel. Every act takes place within the framework of the given societal, economic, political system. The viewpoint of everyday life (instead of central political decision-making) offers a comparative approach. Furthermore, the goal of these totalitarian systems was the same: to influence people’s thoughts and feelings and mobilize them to commit acts. In this situation, people not only confronted or collaborated with the system, they also lived in it, and to fulfill their everyday needs, they had an interest in ensuring its functioning. Self-mobilization is related not simply to terror and suppression, but also to self-interest. In addition to practical concerns, people have ideological imaginations, which support or criticize the regime. Together, these factors determine how ordinary people create their own strategies.

Two key statements in each contribution merit particular mention. Lüdtke suggests that it is more precise and adequate to use “many” instead of “mass.” This difference touches on the core conception of the book: in a totalitarian dictatorship, active individuals lived and acted. The word “mass” implies a shady, inaccessible entity. The other main statement concerns the basic level of the interplay between everyday people and decision makers. The regime expected a certain attitude from people, but at the same time, people could influence power with regard to the frames of everyday work, study, consumption, and so on. This was possible because they were individuals among the “many,” and not simply a “mass.” These practices included bargains, games, tricks (as Harald Dehne aptly puts it, “the petty everyday swindle for private gain”), and sometimes threats, extortions, and enforcement.

The structures and methodologies of the individual studies are very different. Authors who give historiographical syntheses focus mainly on the macrohistorical processes and use secondary sources. They do not connect these processes with the experiences of individuals. These studies do not accomplish the aim of the book, because the perspective of ordinary people is not a central aspect or concern of their interpretation, and the analyses they offer are confined to general political and economic processes. Consequently, it is not clear how these processes impacted everyday life.

The analytical practices of the authors include only a few of the numerous methodological approaches which would add further viewpoints from which to interpret the sources. For instance, in the empirical chapter Lüdtke demonstrates the importance of the “emotional turn,” but one could also mention the results of “spatial turn,” the “visual turn,” and so on. As an exception, Michael Kim
examines the colonial discourse of labor heroes in the representations of these heroes in the media and the expressions used the press as part of a “linguistic turn.”

Consequently, the study of everyday life under dictatorships includes focus on a variety of different processes, including the expectations of the ruling political forces and the needs of ordinary people. This topic must be examined in a complex way and must take these aspects into consideration.

This volume is a promising initiation into this subfield of inquiry, and it shows how we can broaden our geographical scope in the study of this topic and how it is possible to create a common system of frameworks within which different totalitarian regimes become comparable. The further task is to use as many methodological approaches as can be effective and inspiring in analyses of the sources. *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship* is a good example of how to study macrohistorical processes and case studies simultaneously. The authors draw our attention to the fact that these sources (reports, diaries, newspapers), which originated in different countries, could reveal the features of individuals’ everyday practices in different but ultimately comparable social, economic, and cultural contexts.

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