When the Chinese communists came into power in 1949, they promised to “turn society upside down.” Efforts to build a communist society created hopes and dreams, coupled with fear and disillusionment. The Chinese people made great efforts towards modernization and social change in this period of transition, but they also experienced traumatic setbacks. Covering the period 1949 to 1976 and then tracing the legacy of the Mao era through the 1980s, Felix Wemheuer focuses on questions of class, gender, ethnicity and the urban–rural divide in this new social history of Maoist China. He analyzes the experiences of a range of social groups under Communist rule – workers, peasants, local cadres, intellectuals, “ethnic minorities,” the old elites, men and women. To understand this tumultuous period, he argues, we must recognize the many complex challenges facing the People’s Republic. But we must not lose sight of the human suffering and political terror that, for many now ageing quietly across China, remain the period’s abiding memory.

FELIX WEMHEUER is Chair Professor of Modern China Studies at the University of Cologne. He belongs to a new generation of Western scholars who are rewriting the history of Maoist China. His publications include *Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union*, 2014.
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A SOCIAL HISTORY OF
MAOIST CHINA
Conflict and Change, 1949–1976

FELIX WEMHEUER
University of Cologne
For my mother, Christina Wemheuer
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# ABBREVIATIONS AND MEASUREMENTS

## Abbreviations
- **CCP** Chinese Communist Party
- **CPSU** Communist Party of the Soviet Union
- **GDP** Gross Domestic Product
- **GDR** German Democratic Republic
- **GMD** Guomindang (Nationalist Party)
- **IUD** Intrauterine Device
- **PLA** People’s Liberation Army
- **PRC** People’s Republic of China
- **ps.** pseudonym
- **UN** United Nations
- **USSR** Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## Measurements
- 1 *liang* = 50 grams
- 1 *jin* = 500 grams
- 1 *mu* = 1/15 hectare