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Print, Profit and Perception: Ideas, Information and Knowledge in Chinese Societies, 1895-1949

Zemanek, Adina Simona

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Pei-yin Lin and Weipin Tsai (eds.), (2014)

Print, Profit, and Perception: Ideas, Information and Knowledge in Chinese Societies, 1895–1949. Leiden and London: Brill. 275 pages; 39 illus., ISBN: 978-90-04-25910-2, US\$ 152.00 (hb).

This collective work joins an already significant number of academic publications dedicated to the contribution of print media to China's process of modernisation during the first decades of the twentieth century. The book stands out from the rest by adopting a small-scale, niche approach to that complex period. Several core themes make it highly coherent, and the range of topics covered by its nine chapters account for its diversity and relevance to scholars with various research interests.

The introduction gives a detailed explanation of the book's central motifs—transnational flows and appropriation of foreign ideas, personal networks and their role in cultural encounters and exchange, and the commercial incentives that shaped both discourses and networks. The editors place these motifs within a fine-tuned theoretical framework and against the background of existing research. A footnote on the first page addresses what seems to be an unfulfilled promise held by the book's title—instead of covering a larger area, most articles refer to China. Three chapters concern Taiwan; they emphasise cross-Strait connections and the island's significance in the process of Chinese modernisation, while also referring to Japanese colonialism, a political and cultural factor of difference from the mainland. Since this review is published in a Taiwan studies journal, it will place particular emphasis upon this part.

Mei-e Huang's chapter presents readers with an unexpected choice of topic: a less than outstanding novel written during the 1920s by Zheng Kunwu, an advocate of traditional poetic styles, which combines two genres that became established during the modern age and were considered avant-garde in Taiwan at the time, namely science fiction and the detective story. Although never published in its author's lifetime, the novel is interesting as it reflects a global network of cultural exchange and local forms of appropriation: modern scientific concepts and discoveries originating in Europe and the U.S., circulated in Taiwan by the Japanese-language colonial press, widely popular among a local public eager for knowledge on aliens and extraterrestrial worlds, synthesised and reinterpreted by local novelists.

Shi-chi Mike Lan's chapter focuses on the 1940s, a period of transition between two ruling regimes (the Japanese colonial authorities and the Chinese Nationalist government), and on the contrasting perceptions of the Second World War they constructed and disseminated in Taiwan through school

textbooks and other texts targeted at a more general young public. These textbooks shared certain themes and conveyed rather obvious images of Japan and China, shaped by each regime according to its ideological agenda. The central and most interesting point of Lan's analysis lies in showing that these textbooks differed greatly in the significance they attributed to Taiwan. While colonial texts depicted Taiwan as a significant, integral part of the Japanese empire and highlighted local involvement and war-related experiences, Nationalist texts (interested in erasing memories of the wartime link between Taiwan and Japan) rendered the island invisible by shifting the focus towards battles fought in Europe, and the roles played by the U.S. and China in the conflict. The chapter points out that Taiwan's invisibility was maintained in the official discourse during the following decades, and observes how recent studies bring back to light these previously suppressed histories and experiences of wartime Taiwan, as well as disputes triggered by commemorative activities.

While Lan discusses ideological instead of financial profit, Lin Pei-yin's contribution highlights commercial factors that shaped linguistic and thematic choices for articles included in the tabloid *Fengyue bao*, one of the few Chinese-language journals published in colonial-era Taiwan. This journal is placed within the context of cultural exchange networks extending to China, Japan, and Europe—a *café* culture originating in Europe and transmitted to Taiwan via Japan, Shanghai's tabloid culture, Taiwanese geisha culture combining Chinese and Japanese elements, debates on the social role of literature and the arts, or women, love and marriage conducted in both Japan and China, and discussions concerning classical and vernacular Chinese. Lin elaborates on the regional and global awareness that the journal shaped for its readers by combining information of various origins and diverse cultural elements. She also examines the interferences and discontinuities that characterised this often indirect process of transmission based on secondary sources.

From among the China-related chapters, two are noteworthy for their complex approaches and high degree of conformity with the book's core topics. Paul J. Bailey's contribution reflects the book's small-scale, niche perspective by focusing on the lesser-known figure of Li Shizeng, an intellectual and political activist, and France, a less than popular destination for studying abroad at the turn of the twentieth century. Bailey discusses personal networks based in China and France, within which Li operated both skilfully and efficiently, obtaining personal, economic, and political benefits despite their sometimes different and potentially conflicting agendas. He also highlights foreign sources that influenced Li's anarchist, class-transcending political ideals, and his awareness of belonging to a global community of visionary thinkers. The conclusion traces the scope and influence of Li's activity during his life, his

negative appraisal in both PRC historiography and anti-Communist circles, and the (profit-motivated) revival of interest in it during recent decades.

Elizabeth Emrich's chapter reveals a less studied aspect of renowned writer Lu Xun's work (woodblock printing), and discusses his efforts at promoting an individual, alternative vision of socialist modernity that defied foreign imperialism and did not fully overlap with either Communist or Nationalist ideologies. He did so by cultivating personal connections that enabled him to obtain art works and materials and to propagate his ideas, with the aim of educating local artists and writers through various activities made possible by the development of the modern print industry. These included the careful selection and translation of foreign literary and art criticism, personal collections, exhibitions, and publication of artistic works in journals targeted at an educated urban public actively involved in China's nationalist project.

Despite its compelling topic, Che-chia Chang's chapter on Chinese hygiene as described in (mostly) Meiji-era Japanese travel writings is somewhat disappointing. Instead of constructing what may have been a forceful argument based upon changing cultural hierarchies during the premodern and modern periods, with China, Japan, and the West as points of reference, the author chooses to elaborate on travelogue authors in what appears to be a slightly forced attempt at relating to the book's main themes. Hence a long and very detailed section presents various categories of Japanese travellers, while reflections on cultural hierarchies and Japan's imperial ambitions are relegated to the conclusion instead of integrating and foregrounding the author's pertinent and insightful text-based observations. Remarks on connotations between poor healthcare reported by Japanese travellers and China's political, economic, and cultural weakness referred to by the 'sick man of Asia' stereotype are only very brief, and repeated mentions of classical Chinese as the linguistic choice for some of the travelogues, testifying of a lasting attachment to standards of classical Chinese culture, are left without further comment.

This volume is definitely worthy of consideration by scholars of modern Chinese intellectual, literary, and medical history, nationalism, global and regional cultural exchange, print and popular media, Taiwan or Japanese studies. It will also appeal to academics with a general interest in the period covered, to whom it guarantees a challenging and entertaining reading experience, with new stories well integrated into a coherent frame narrative, illustrated with numerous reproductions of journal and newspaper covers, articles, advertisements, and woodblock art.

Adina Zemanek

Jagiellonian University

adina.zemanek@gmail.com

