

Peter O'Connor: The English-language Press Networks of East Asia, 1918–1945, Kent: Global Oriental Publisher 2010, 420 pp.

Rezensiert von
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Talking about the images which have informed, at different stages in history, Western perceptions of Japan, Peter O'Connor concludes this important and well-documented study of press networks in East Asia with the following words: "The power of the Propagandist image has come and gone and seems now, alongside the Menace image, to be shifting to China, but these generalized images are still very much part of the discussion on modern East Asia. Their durability only adds to the mystery of the image approach: its typology is emotive and indeterminate, but everybody knows these images when they see them and they won't go away" (p. 316). In the aftermath of the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, these words have acquired almost prophetic resonance. The events of March 2011 led to a surge of interest in Japan, with international media hastening to cover the disaster and to scrutinize the Japanese Government's response to the ensuing nuclear crisis. In the process, some of the images to which O'Connor alludes in his book have resurfaced: the Japanese people were praised for their resilience and endurance in the face of adversity, while a critical gaze was extended to official reports emanating from Tokyo.

It is such images of Japan – or what O'Connor calls the "Image of Japan" (p. 4) – that form the object of study of this book, albeit in a different temporal framework (1918–1945). The main concern of the study is to understand how the English-language newspapers of East Asia shaped international perceptions of Japan, especially in Britain, the United States and East Asia. To this end, O'Connor identifies and laboriously examines three informal networks of the English-language press which, he argues, have played a prominent role in presenting Japan to the world: the Foreign Ministry network, the Japan Chronicle network and the Japan Advertiser network. After a brief overview of the English-language press in Japan, China and Korea which covers almost a century (1822–1918), O'Connor proceeds to explain how each of these networks was formed and operated. Thus, the Foreign Ministry network revolved around the benevolent Japan Times and incorporated a dozen of English-language newspapers and news agencies based in Japan and China, by means of which the Ministry attempted to shape the international image of Japan (p. 55). The Japan Chronicle network, which centered on the British-owned Japan Chronicle and the North-China Daily News, usually mirrored British policies in East Asia. The newspapers in this group presented to their readers an ambivalent image of Japan, which oscillated between potential threat and backward country (p. 111). Finally, the Japan Advertiser network revolved around the newspaper with the same name and had strong connections in America and China. This made it the main target of the Foreign Ministry, despite the fact that the Advertiser's reports about Ja-

pan exhibited a more calculated tone than those of the Chronicle (pp. 150-51).

The examination of these networks and their reporting of key developments, such as the debates surrounding the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1920–1922) and Japan’s encroachment on China (1927–1937), reveals fascinating details about the transformative stages through which the relationship between Japan and the English-language press of East Asia passed. If, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Japan adopted a policy of persuasion towards Western journalists and correspondents, from the 1920s until the formation of the Dōmei news agency in 1936 the situation degenerated into a veritable “cold war” (pp. 55-56). The Foreign Ministry now made use of financial inducements, in the form of subsidies, and began to interfere in the news market by restricting access to cable and wireless communication. This efficiently challenged Reuter’s control of foreign news despatches in East Asia (p. 84). By 1940, both the Chronicle and the Advertiser had been amalgamated into the Japan Times, in a move which marked the successful takeover of the Foreign Ministry network (p. 302).

O’Connor is to be commended for the patience with which he sifted through a vast amount of English and Japanese-language sources to identify the many individual actors of this story and the interconnected interests which bound them into various networks. This task was particularly difficult since the lines of action of these actors were not always consistent, a fact which had the potential to undermine the overall cohesiveness of the press network as an “informal accumulation[s] of

commonalities of editorial line, worldview and commercial interest” (p. 66). As O’Connor himself repeatedly emphasizes, the English-language press networks of East Asia were, at times, so loose that they appeared “less a network than a group of like-minded mavericks” (p. 113). This was especially the case with the group of newspapers which revolved around the Japan Chronicle.

Despite the fact that the concept of “press networks” needs further theoretical development – as O’Connor himself acknowledges (p. 11) – this book is a most welcome addition to a handful of recent studies which aim to account for the “transnational realities” (p. 14) of the English-language press in Asia by focusing on the networks which integrated journalists, newspapers and news agencies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is one of the main merits of this book that it critically engages with similar research on networks of news and communication in other regional contexts, such as those provided by the British Empire.¹ The concept of “press networks” has been used before in Bryna Goodman’s study of news flows in early republican Shanghai but, to my knowledge, O’Connor is the only scholar who proposes a systematic definition.² Furthermore, many of the themes which emerge from his analysis can be fruitfully used as a ground for comparison with press networks outside East Asia or between formal and informal colonial contexts. Among these themes are: language as a barrier to foreign news reporting, cosmopolitan journalists, official mechanisms of press control, in particular the use of government subsidies and the practice of restricting access to technolo-

gies of communication such as the telegraph, Reuter's position as a distributor of news in Asia, the standardization of news reporting practices and contending interpretations of "objectivity" in news reporting. O'Connor's book is, therefore, an invaluable resource not only for specialists of Japan, but also for everyone who wishes to understand the complex interconnections of news and views in English-language reporting of Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Notes

- 1 The following works are especially relevant for O'Connor's discussion: Bryna Goodman, *Semi-Colonialism, Transnational Networks and News Flows in Early Republican Shanghai*, in: *The China Review* 4 (2004), pp. 55-88; Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj. The British Press and India, 1880-1922*, Manchester 2003; Chandrika Kaul (ed.), *Media and the British Empire*, London 2006; Simon J. Potter, *News and the British World. The Emergence of an Imperial Press System*, Oxford 2003.
- 2 Bryna Goodman, *News Flows in Early Republican Shanghai*, p. 59.

Shogo Suzuki: Civilization and Empire. China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society, London: Routledge, 2009, 256 S.

Rezensiert von
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Although there exist various publications on international relations in East Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century, Shogo Suzuki's study presents a refreshing view on the subject through its detailed

analysis of elite writings in China and Japan between the 1860s and 1895.

Suzuki uses the theoretical concept of European International Society as set out by the English School. However, he replaces its eurocentric approach with an asia-centric one that focuses on the agency of China and Japan in their dealings with European International Society. Suzuki also focuses on the Society's Asian pendant, the East Asian International Society. Thus, he claims that the hierarchical structure of the East Asian International Society was sino-centric only in theory, and that in reality China and Japan developed competing Tribute Systems with their neighbours Korea and the Ryūkyū Kingdom.

According to Suzuki, China began to be incorporated into European International Society with the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, while Japan fully encountered European International Society with the arrival of the first American consul after the Treaty of Peace and Amity in 1854. They came face-to-face with what Suzuki describes as the "Janus-faced" European International Society, referring to the fact that European International Society had two faces, a cooperative one shown to 'civilized' states and a coercive one shown to 'uncivilized' states.

"Civilization" was required for membership in European International Society, but Suzuki demonstrates that the Chinese and Japanese elites reacted very differently when faced with this condition. Since the Chinese perceived China as the most civilized state, they did not care much that China was defined as 'semi-civilized' by the European International Society and did not consider it crucial to improve China's position within the Society's hierarchy. In-