

Robert Culp: The Power of Print in Modern China: Intellectuals and Industrial Publishing from the End of Empire to Maoist State Socialism

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Robert J. Culp is an associated professor of History and Asian studies at Bard College but has also been affiliated with environmental and urban studies. His book *The Power of Print in Modern China: Intellectuals and Industrial Publishing from the End of Empire to Maoist State Socialism* is a chronological walk-through of the history of print in China, focussing not on technological, but instead on cultural aspects, especially on the people who wrote and compiled the publications.

The book covers several important historical events and eras in Chinese history. It starts by following the lives of literati from the late Qīng (清) dynasty, who pursued publishing as a career after „the abrogation of the civil service examinations in 1905“ (p.27). Later, Culp introduces the three major publishing companies: Commercial Press, Zhōnghuá (中华) Book Company and World Book Company. These were centres of cultural life (cf. p.2) as they uniquely combined several steps of the publishing process. The book follows their development throughout the years as they face the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the educational revolution, the transformation of the Chinese language, and the rise of Communism. During these years of revolution, books and print played a vital role

in introducing new cultural concepts to the public, thereby shaping the country that we know today. Some of the most important projects that the editing departments took on were the compilation of textbooks and dictionaries, as they needed to catch up with the strong western influences (cf. p.100) and the ongoing revolution. The book ends with the early days of the People's Republic of China, as public-private management was enforced by the government and division of labour became more common due to political changes like the attempt to implement a centralized media control system.

The Power of Print in Modern China references many publications on the topic of print in China but also uses diary entries from literati and petty intellectuals (as Culp calls them), as well as other documents. This gives the book a broad base to build on. Furthermore, the reader is introduced to several concepts – like the knowledge production, as theorised by philosophers like Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. While there is no new, ground-breaking research being conducted, the publication's significance lies instead in offering a basic introduction to the topic and a starting point for further studies. Since it covers almost 100 years of history, it manages

to point out the changes that occurred and how the industry was shaped by historical events. Although the book was published in the category of East Asian history, it also shows ties to the field of media studies. It introduces the effects that the medium of print has on the construction of culture and society, straying away from the common focus of the discipline.

However, the publication does have some weak points. One of them would be the use of a Roman script that is not pinyin (拼音; the phonetic writing which I opted to use in this review). In consequence, there is no instruction on correct pronunciation, nor on which character coincides with the word. Due to that, some of the meaning and origin can get lost making it harder for those who know the language. Furthermore, some overview or deeper explanation of the historical events mentioned would be very useful. Since the book covers

an almost 100 years spanning period of Chinese history, it makes it highly unlikely for the reader to be familiar with every historical aspect.

Overall, *The Power of Print in Modern China* is a great contribution, not only to the field of Chinese studies but also to media studies. Furthermore, it serves as a solid base for the introduction to the world of print and publishing in China. The written text is enriched with black and white photos, mostly of archived prints of Chinese texts from different time periods, giving the reader a feeling for the materials discussed. The author has a enjoyable writing style and introduces the private lives of literati and publishers, illustrating a vivid picture of their work and leisure conditions. The chronological structure makes it easy to follow along and sort the information given.

Laura Drischel (Marburg)