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BOOK REVIEWS

Wei, Shuge, *News Under Fire, China's Propaganda Against Japan in the English-Language Press, 1928–1941*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017. ISBN: 9789888390618. 288pp +26 illustrations. $45.00 (cloth).
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Shuge Wei's *News Under Fire* is a fascinating, intricate, and well-written addition to scholarship on Republican China's print-based media, Nanjing Decade (1928–37) party politics and institution building, and Sino-Japanese diplomacy, propaganda, and war. Only rarely does a book appear that changes the reader's long-held beliefs about one topic, much less three. *News Under Fire* is such a book. Persuasively influenced by multiple English- and Chinese-language historiographies, the core of this book is grounded in Wei's own painstaking research in some fifteen archives, twenty-six newspapers and journals, and many libraries.

After World War I, argues Wei, propaganda became an essential instrument of international politics. Agendas, cultures, practices, and success rates varied widely. However, well-known scholarship on the propaganda histories of strong powers sheds little light on those of weak nations, particularly China's.[1] In the absence of a strong military and economy, propaganda work served a vital role in the Nationalist Party's effort to assert China's sovereignty. At the same time, though, factionalism and division plagued the party's propaganda efforts, both domestic and international. In the international sector, unofficial, non-state editors as well as transnational actors supplemented official propaganda efforts, complicating things further.

Challenging earlier scholarship that viewed the relationship between the Nanjing government and the press as one of unvarying repression and resistance,[2] Wei argues the interaction was more nuanced and contingent than that model suggested. Rather than view treaty-port newspapers as an unchanging hindrance to Republican China's international propaganda effort after Nanjing was established as the new national capital in 1928, Wei redeems many journals and some journalists as occasional advocates for Republican China's "news propaganda" up

[1] E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations, 1919–1939*. First published in 1939 (reprint, New York: Perennial, 2001), and Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda* (Manchester: Machester University Press, 2003).

[2] Lee-hsia Hsu Ting, *Government Control of the Press in Modern China, 1900–1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

through the start of the Pacific War in 1941. "News propaganda," a term likely influenced by Tomoko Akami's *Japan's News Propaganda and Reuters' News Empire in Northeast Asia, 1870–1934* (2012), is defined here as "the use of news . . . as a tool of diplomacy" that involved managing the context (or perception) of the news rather than merely reporting it (pp. 14–15). Without the treaty-port press's talent at doing so, Wei argues, Nanjing's ability to project its interpretation of international issues impinging on China's sovereignty and interests would have matured even more slowly than it did.

Treaty-port-based English-language newspapers, ready at hand, often financially vulnerable, and frequently at odds with each other and with their home governments, could and did become pro-China outlets. Such papers, numbering at least a dozen, were run by foreigners (both Western and Japanese) and/or by cosmopolitan Chinese. By erroneously assuming that publication language determined permanent political identities and sympathies, Wei observes, scholars have heretofore largely ignored this treaty-port press, its evolving messages, and its actual relationships with the Nationalist government. Adding studies of funding sources, editorial boards, and individual biographies to those of editorial content, Wei argues that the decentralized English-language treaty-port press, somewhat surprisingly, eventually provided opportunities for the Kuomintang (KMT) to create centralized institutions for disseminating international propaganda.

The book's eight substantive chapters organized into three parts are generally divided between issues of "context," meaning institution building and policy development, and "text," that is, close-up discourse analysis of how institutions and policies played out in particular instances. Context chapters detail the KMT's evolving efforts from 1928 to 1931 (chap. 3), 1932 to 1937 (chap. 5), 1937 to 1938 (chap. 7), and 1939 to 1941 (chap. 8) to influence the English-speaking treaty-port press, and, by extension, overseas English-speaking nations. Textually based case studies include the Jinan Incident (1928), Mukden Incident (1931), Shanghai Incident (1932), and the Amô Doctrine ("Monroe Doctrine of Asia," 1934), all of which adumbrated the Sino-Japanese War (1937–45). Wei reads each of these contests to control interpretation in Japanese-run English-language organs, English-language treaty-port journals, and metropolitan newspapers.

Thanks to Wei's analysis of the Nationalist government, its leadership, and its factions, her book also changes our understanding of the party-state in significant ways. One of the book's central themes is the ill-effects of the contradiction between the goals and daily operations of the KMT's propaganda networks. Echoing the work of John Fitzgerald, Wei explains that, in the Soviet-led reorganization of the party in 1924, the KMT propaganda department cloned the organizational system of the Soviet Communist Party. Its responsibilities included "thought control and ideological indoctrination . . . [C]ensorship, political training, distribution of propaganda outlines and publications were . . . implemented [via] a

top-down form of information control [b]ased on the belief that the party represented public interests and that it was equipped with the knowledge to solve China's problems . . . ." (p. 11). The party's outlook was reinforced by both the early 1928 transition from the military phase of the revolution to the tutelage one (p. 66) and the organic law, which made the party, in effect, the government (p. 71). Party propaganda personnel, work, and operations emphasized seniority, ideological commitment, repetition, and authoritative information (p. 69).

Unlike other ministries subordinated to the Executive Yuan after 1927, the KMT's propaganda department, responsible for both domestic and international efforts, remained attached to the party. Even in the USSR, not to mention Japan, the UK, and the US, state apparatuses (usually foreign affairs ministries) ran international propaganda. Until now, however, it has not been clear why the KMT departed from the standard model. In one of the book's most interesting, original, and extended discussions, Wei gives a new twist to our understanding of the impact of factionalism within the Nationalist government.

In Wei's account, ongoing "leftist influence" in the Central Executive Committee (CEC), even after 1929's 3rd Party Congress house-cleaning, prevented the propaganda department from migrating to the state apparatus, where it might have fallen under Chiang Kai-shek's control. Over several chapters, the identities of the relevant party figures emerge, with the list including factions around Hu Hanmin (p. 12), Ye Chucang (p. 77), Sun Ke (pp. 90, 137), and Wang Jingwei (pp. 136-37). These figures, "reluctant to abandon the party's anti-imperialist tradition [in turn] continued to raise hurdles for the implementation of propaganda policies aimed at forming an alliance with Western powers" (p. 12) against Japan even once it became clear that such an alliance was unavoidable.

Their obstructionism also prevented the emergence of a coherent and centralized system of international propaganda. This disadvantaged China most obviously in relation to Japan, which had a vast, well-run system that was found particularly persuasive by, among others, the *North China Daily News* [NCDN] even after the departure of "diehard" anti-China editor O. M. Green in 1930. Japan's propaganda efficacy was clearly demonstrated in the Jinan Incident, less so in the Mukden and Shanghai incidents, and not at all in the Amô case, in which Shanghai's *China Press* editor Hollington Tong (Dong Xianguang) finally changed the terms of the debate by linking the Amô Doctrine with the (now-discredited) Tanaka Memorial, with each laying out Japan's plans for world domination. Japan's propaganda in turn influenced the Western Powers, at least until 1932. The KMT's pursuit from 1929 onward of censorship rules that evolved from content-based to "intention-centered," official registration of newspapers and news agencies, its attempts to manipulate postal and cable access, as well as party efforts to end the extraterritoriality on which English-language newspapers

depended, exacerbated complex relations with the treaty-port newspaper sector.

In 1932, the Lytton Commission Report on the Mukden Incident and the CEC's creation of a multi-departmental system for international propaganda produced the first real progress in separating China's international news propaganda system from the central party. When this new committee proved dysfunctional, Chiang Kai-shek took matters into his own hands by reorganizing the Central News Agency, secretly to subsidize the *China Press*, and creating a new censorship system. Even so, full centralization was not achieved until after the outbreak of full-throttle war with Japan. In 1938, with the KMT holed up in Wuhan, Chiang appointed his stalwart Shao Lizi director of propaganda and "Holly" Tong as Shao's deputy.

Tong's roots lay in the early Republican political press (Sun Yat-sen's *Republican China* and the Communications Clique-owned anti-Japanese *Peking Daily News*) and later in the treaty-port press (Millard/Powell's sympathetic *China Weekly Review*, Tong's own anti-Japanese Tianjin-based *Yongbao*, and the Sino-American, anti-Japanese *China Press,* which ran second in sales but not credibility to the British-owned, often pro-Japanese NCDN). In Wei's view, the KMT's one-party propaganda "logic ran contrary to the values held in the treaty-port press, where independence and credibility . . . were the key factors determining how far a message could travel" (p. 11). International news demanded "credibility of sources," which contrasted with the party's "authority of information" (p. 69). Professionalism and qualifications, particularly but not solely associated with alumni of the University of Missouri's School of Journalism, were also essential to the operation of the treaty-port press.

Tong, Chiang Kai-shek's co-provincial and early (1906) English teacher, Missouri alumnus, and, by 1932, editor of *China Press*, personified both those values and those connections. Although Wei's book is not a biography of Tong, his personal story, journalistic work, professional relations, and political activities do help to unite the second half of the book. Indeed, Tong's belief in "indirect propaganda . . . in which the true source and intention were concealed and messages were transmitted to audiences via an independent outlet" colors the book's project as a whole. Wei writes "Hollington Tong was undeniably the most important person linking Chiang Kai-shek with the treaty-port press" (p. 146), but, even so, in 1932, "Tong agreed to work . . . for Chiang [only] on the condition that his connection with the government was concealed [because Tong] understood the Anglo-American audience's distrust of propaganda after World War I" (p. 147). In fact, while Tong ran the American-style *China Press*, it served as "an incubator" for many of America's China correspondents, including future

New York Times correspondent Tillman Durdin and the pro-Communist *China Forum* editor Harold Isaacs.

With the outbreak of war in 1937, Chiang Kai-shek created the Fifth Board of the Military Affairs Commission (MAC) to supervise all international propaganda. For the first time, Tong now openly joined the government, serving as deputy propaganda director under Wang Jingwei's ally Chen Gongbo. As a new member of the KMT with less than two years' standing, however, Tong suffered pressure from more senior rank-conscious party officials, his "organizational insulation," in Julia Strauss's phrasing, derived from his affiliation with Chiang and Soong Mei-ling notwithstanding.

Therefore, to relieve the Fifth Board of the need to disseminate party ideology in favor of a liberal "truth is the best propaganda" policy, Tong moved its operation from Nanjing to Shanghai. There, among others, Tong interacted with *Manchester Guardian* correspondent H. J. Timperley. Late in 1937, however, perhaps to rid himself of Chen, Chiang abolished the Fifth Board altogether. In Wuhan by 1938, Shao and Tong now established the centralized international propaganda system sought by many inside and out with the party since 1924. Tong also relied on Westerners such as Timperley to conduct China's international "truth propaganda."

Starting in 1939, though, concurrent with the retreat to Chongqing, Tong's approach to the international propaganda war lost ground. The KMT's propaganda orientation now shifted from presenting "the news" to convincing Western audiences that China had not lost the war. Foreign journalists oriented toward "sensation, conflict, and novelty" (p. 224) resisted efforts to encourage them to praise the KMT. By 1940, moreover, Tong's "liberal censorship" system and "truth propaganda" was superseded by the demands of the MAC, Executive Yuan, and Chiang Kai-shek himself. The New Fourth Army Incident turned into a propaganda fiasco, with Zhou Enlai and other Communists now helping Westerners "get the story." Tong's influence did not improve when Zhou Fohai replaced Shao Lizi as propaganda chief; or when Tang Liangli was appointed to Tong's job in Wang Jingwei's puppet Nanjing government. Despite Tong's efforts to pursue liberal news policies, readers soon came to view even real news as propaganda, undermining the international journalistic credibility Tong had long pursued for China.

Wei's book is populated with numerous players who often swap identities (one example is American George Bronson Rea of the Shanghai-based *Far Eastern Review* who converted his journal's political affiliation so abruptly from pro-Chinese to pro-Japanese in 1920 that his co-editor, W. H. Donald, felt

compelled to resign; meanwhile, Rea collected $100,000 annually from Japan), involving many moving targets (such as Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Kwantung Army), and covering start-and-stop story lines (including those of Chiang Kai-shek, Tang Liangli, and even Tong). Throughout, Wei skillfully keeps her focus and steadily moves both story and analysis forward, layering on new details as they become relevant or available in her sources. Embracing both context and text, Wei's book gives a strong sense of the KMT's uphill climb against internal disorder and international indifference or hostility from 1928 to 1941.

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Hans van de Ven, *China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China, 1937–1952*. London: Profile Books Ltd., 2017. ISBN: 9781781251942. 368 pp. £16.33.
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This book is Hans van de Ven's third monograph on the power struggles between the Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party, his second on war in modern China, and his first on the making of the Cold War. His first monograph is *From Friend to Comrade: The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920–1927* (1991), and the second is *War and Nationalism in China, 1925–1945* (2003). From the periodization of the three monographs, it is clear that Van de Ven investigates modern Chinese history history of China from the perspective of partisan, political and military struggles between 1920 and 1952.

A number of topics covered by Van de Ven have been addressed in works by other historians, such as Frank Dorn's *The Sino-Japanese War, 1937–41: From Marco Polo Bridge to Pearl Harbor* (1974), Suzanne Pepper's *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945–1949* (1978), and Hsi-Sheng Ch'i's *Nationalist China at War: Military Defeats and Political Collapse, 1937–45* (1982). In the 1990s, modern Chinese military history became less popular, although Edward Dreyer's *China at War, 1901–1949* (1995) is an exception. In the twenty-first century, this topic, seemingly, has become more popular with publications such as Odd Arne Westad's *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946–1950* (2003), and Rana Mitter's *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945* (2013). However, none of them has provided readers with a continuous account of the