

translation “Mainstay.” They did this in spite of my strong protests and arguments to the contrary.

In their translation of the *Suling jing*, the authors of the present book, seem to wish to have it both ways, since on p. 245, they translate the term *feibu tiangang* 飛步天綱 as “Ascent for Pacing the Celestial Guideline,” whereas on p. 271, they render the term *Xuangang* 玄綱 as “Dark Mainstay.” Translation is, of course, always a matter of interpretation, but this understanding, in my opinion, does not absolve the translator from aiming to be *consistent*—whenever this is possible.

Other than that, I salute the authors of the present book for their great effort. It is a great book, and a timely one—especially as it offers a revision of our basic concept of a Daoist text.

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***Iconographies of Occupation: Visual Cultures in Wang Jingwei’s China, 1939–1945.*** By Jeremy E. Taylor. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2021. Pp. x + 229. \$68.00 hardback, \$28.00 paperback.

Wang Jingwei’s Reorganized National Government (RNG), founded in Nanjing in March 1940, faced long odds as it sought to establish its credibility as China’s government. It was handicapped by the existence of two rival claimants who had long mastered the art of propaganda warfare: the Nationalists based in Chongqing and the Communists in Yan’an. The RNG certainly could and did draw on the expertise of Japanese propagandists, but only at the cost of highlighting its dependency on Japan.

In this interesting analysis of the RNG’s efforts to create a national brand, Taylor argues that the regime demonstrated considerable initiative in crafting images intended to bolster its legitimacy. He shows in convincing detail that RNG propagandists made use of techniques and allusions that had emerged in China before the war, as well as newer practices that circulated globally. Given the relatively narrow range of political action available to Wang Jingwei’s regime, Taylor suggests that it sensibly devoted much of its energy and resources to symbolism, in effect creating a “theater state.” He aims to show how its symbolic

representations—or, in his preferred term, iconographies—of the nation, the leader, and the people were formed and changed over time. In this, he is successful.

Why study the symbolic imagery of this short-lived “puppet” regime? As Timothy Brook did in his history of local government in eastern China during the Japanese occupation,<sup>1</sup> Taylor points to the literature on France’s Vichy regime for examples of how research on occupation politics can produce insights into the experience of war and the nature of community and “collaboration” under wartime conditions. Taylor also argues that the history of RNG propaganda constitutes a particularly valuable field in which to explore how changing political conditions are made visible in shifting iconography. He identifies several turning points in the RNG’s relations with Japan and the rest of the world that required adjustments to the ways the regime presented itself and its vision of China. Wang Jingwei’s long pre-war career in the Nationalist Party was devoted in large part to propaganda work, and his interest in it ensured that the RNG left a rich legacy of images.

In the introduction, Taylor reviews the scholarship on the Wang Jingwei regime and discusses the usefulness of the “visual cultures” approach to studying political history. He introduces the concept of the “occupied gaze,” the subordinated but not entirely subservient counterpart of the imperialist gaze. As in other parts of the book, he reflects candidly on the limitations of the study, such as the scarcity of evidence that would document the reception of RNG propaganda among its target audiences. Above all he highlights the relative lack of coherence to be found in the messages disseminated by RNG partisans, which he attributes to two main factors: the diversity of views among the actors who created and distributed these messages and “a constantly evolving relationship between Wang Jingwei’s administration and its Japanese protectors, between the RNG and those areas of China beyond Japanese control, and (though this is often overlooked) Nanjing’s relationship with other parts of the ‘Axis world’” (p. 18).

Chapters one and two are devoted to detailed discussions of these two factors. Chapter one provides an overview of the events that shaped the RNG’s self-conception.<sup>2</sup> Wang Jingwei’s regime presented itself as the product of the Peace

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Among other recent work on the RNG, Taylor cites the Francophone publications of David Serfass, “Occupation japonaise et collaboration chinoise: Tendances historiographiques récentes” [The Japanese occupation and Chinese collaboration: Recent historiographical tendencies], *Revue historique* 680 (Apr. 2016): 941–66; see also David Serfass, “Résister ou négocier face

Movement that formed in 1938 as Chiang Kai-shek's forces retreated to Chongqing from Wuhan. Advocating peaceful resolution of the conflict with Japan, Wang Jingwei's government aimed at first to reflect civilian values. It criticized Chiang Kai-shek as a "military dictator." It highlighted Wang Jingwei's ties to Sun Yat-sen to justify his leadership and competed with Chiang's government to pay homage to Sun. The Nanjing base of the RNG allowed it to make much use of Sun's mausoleum on Purple Mountain. Taylor also argues in chapter one that the RNG constituted a "riparian regime," stressing life and commerce along the Yangtze and other rivers and featuring its navy and ports in propaganda images.

In 1943, the peaceful civilian imagery was jettisoned, for the most part, as the RNG associated itself with the worldwide struggle of the Axis powers. Even before that, though, the Japanese had called on the RNG to take charge of "rural pacification" work, which required a stronger anti-Communist strain to the propaganda. And in 1942 the regime launched the New Citizens Movement, which echoed the fascist tone of the Chiang regime's New Life Movement. Wang Jingwei began wearing military uniforms and speaking in front of youth groups and military units arrayed in orderly rows.

Chapter two describes the institutions and some of the individuals charged with developing the regime's brand. Taylor shows that experienced propagandists from Manchukuo were recruited to work for Wang Jingwei. Many artists and businessmen who remained in East China after 1937 pitched in, too. Central University established a propaganda institute to train writers and artists, and a new Central News Agency cooperated with Japanese counterparts to shape opinion about the war and the regime itself. Taylor notes that Japanese photographers initially dominated the scene, but that Chinese photographers played a growing role during the Rural Pacification campaigns. Representatives of other cultural realms also were drawn into cooperation with the regime, although often not completely or effectively. Taylor examines the associations set up to corral the efforts of woodcut artists and film-makers, in addition to cartoonists and journalists. Commercial

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(Note 2—*Continued*)

au Japon: La genèse du gouvernement de collaboration de Nankin (janvier 1938–avril 1939)" [Resistance against or negotiation with Japan: The origins of the Nanjing collaborationist government (January 1938–April 1939)], *Vingtième siècle: Revue d'histoire* 125 (Jan.–Mar. 2015): 121–32. For an English-language essay by Serfass on the history of occupied China, see "Collaboration and State Making in China: Defining the Occupation State, 1937–1945," in Xavier Paulès and David Serfass, eds., "State Building through Political Disunity in Republican China," special issue, *Twentieth-Century China* 47.1 (Jan. 2022): 71–80.

advertisers, especially those working for Japanese pharmaceutical companies, also wove political messages into their expertly crafted visuals.

Chapters three, four, and five explore RNG iconography relating to different themes: representations of Wang Jingwei himself, representations of gender, and representations of the nation, respectively. Wang Jingwei's image shifted from humble civilian peacemaker to militant Axis leader over the years from 1940 to 1944, although in the aftermath of the defeat in 1945, his widow Chen Bijun 陳璧君 attempted to reverse the shift, depicting him at her trial as a martyr who sacrificed himself to save lives. Taylor has published elsewhere on the elevation of Chiang Kai-shek to a cult figure with the help of Nationalist propaganda.<sup>3</sup> Here he shows that just as much effort was put into the Wang Jingwei cult by RNG propagandists. This chapter gives rise to reflections on the precarity of personality cults. Reading about the total collapse of Wang's reputation after 1945, I could not help but recall the destruction of the giant concrete bust of Ferdinand Marcos in the wake of his fall from grace, as well as the removal of countless statues of formerly revered political figures around the world in recent decades. Regrettably, the fate of Wang Jingwei, Marcos, and many others seems not to have discouraged the formation of personality cults in today's world.

Gender imagery emanating from the RNG, examined in chapter four, also shifted over the years from 1940 to 1945, Taylor argues. In the regime's early years, use was made of female celebrities associated with the individualistic, sexualized "modern girl" image. Photos of the famous Manchukuo actress, Li Xianglan 李香蘭, were ubiquitous in the cities of eastern China in the early 1940s, along with those of "Mulan" actress Nancy Chan (Chen Yunshang 陳雲裳) and Li Huizhen 李惠珍, a beauty from southern China. After the New Citizens Movement started, Taylor argues, more austere images of patriotic women took centre stage. Women were also featured in "pan-Asian" groupings. The topic of visual depictions of women has produced a rich historiography in recent years. Compared to work on earlier periods by Louise Edwards and Joan Judge, Taylor's work in this chapter devotes less attention to the details of the imagery.<sup>4</sup> It would be interesting to learn, for example, if features other than clothing and hairstyle differentiated Chinese, Manchukuo, and Japanese women in the RNG's pan-Asian imagery. Did artists

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremy E. Taylor, "The Production of the Chiang Kai-shek Personality Cult, 1929–1975," *The China Quarterly* 185 (Mar. 2006): 96–110.

<sup>4</sup> Louise Edwards, *Citizens of Beauty: Drawing Democratic Dreams in Republican China* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2020); Joan Judge, *Republican Lens: Gender, Visuality, and Experience in the Early Chinese Periodical Press* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015).

make corporeal distinctions between women of different nationalities within the pan-Asian framework?

Chapter four also analyses representations of masculinity created by the organs of the RNG. Imagery associated with Sergei Tret'iakov's 1920s play "Roar, China!", which had earlier inspired a famous woodcut by Li Hua 李桦, was borrowed to depict the hatred supposedly felt by ordinary Chinese men for British imperialism and its allies. Youth were also represented as enthusiastic participants in anti-imperialist rallies during the New Citizens Movement. The earlier May Fourth Movement, Taylor notes, was interpreted positively by the RNG for its role in cultivating the spirit of anti-imperialism.

In chapter four, Taylor points out that, despite its efforts, the regime was unable to achieve coherent representations of gender at any point in its short history. It seems to me, though, that this begs the question of how important it was for the regime to achieve such a coherent vision. Compared to the image of the leader, surely there was much more room for diverse takes on gender norms in political imagery. Good wives and wise mothers can coexist ideologically with sexy patriotic actresses and serious student activists. Other questions arise in this context. How did representations of class intersect with gender representations? To what extent did the "occupied gaze" result in comment on the occupiers' gender norms? In the book's conclusion, Taylor discusses a newsreel in which Chen Bijun turns around to photograph the videographer who is recording her at a public event, and notes that the photo she took would not have been made accessible to anyone outside her immediate circle. That is an interesting reflection, and it made me want to learn more about how Chen Bijun's role as female embodiment of the regime compared with that of Soong Mei-ling 宋美齡 in Chongqing. The latter's representation of feminine norms was not at all one-dimensional, and yet it cannot be considered incoherent.

Chapter five analyses the most important challenge the regime faced: how to present a compelling vision of the nation when it controlled so little of it. Taylor observes that the RNG addressed this challenge above all by refusing to depict the space of the nation very clearly. It preferred to highlight places, like the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum and East China river ports, that contributed to its conception of itself. In this chapter, Taylor discusses the elevation of landscape painting as the supreme national art, as well as government-sponsored tours for journalists who then produced travelogues narrating the national landscape.<sup>5</sup> Nanjing, the

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<sup>5</sup> On earlier such efforts undertaken by Chiang Kai-shek's government, see Pedith Chan, "In Search of the Southeast: Tourism, Nationalism, and Scenic Landscape in Republican China," *Twentieth-Century China* 43.3 (Oct. 2018): 207–31.

capital, also featured in visual representations of the regime, its destruction by the Japanese in late 1937 elided in accounts of its rebirth as a political capital with modern high-rises and Sun Yat-sen statues. Shanghai, Taylor shows, was harder to accommodate in propaganda messaging. The reversion of the foreign concessions to Chinese control in 1943 was considered the highpoint of RNG achievements, but the RNG and Japanese authorities had different approaches to dealing with the legacy of the cityscape constructed by British and other “Western” imperialists. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the RNG’s imagery of rural development and industrialization, which competed with the preferred Japanese focus on agricultural production, a common theme across Japanese-occupied Asia.

In chapter five, Taylor writes:

With the exception of stylized maps advertising the Yangtze-hugging routes of the Central China Railways . . . and the maps reproduced to demonstrate the success of specific campaigns (e.g., Rural Pacification), very few cartographic depictions were ever created by the RNG. And on the few occasions when RNG agencies did deploy maps of China in print media, they did so in such a way as to obscure China’s borders. (p. 120)

This argument that the RNG avoided clear claims about the nation’s geo-body, to borrow a term from Thongchai Winichakul,<sup>6</sup> is significant and convincing to an extent. I wonder, though, if the regime produced geography textbooks, which presumably would not have been able to avoid such claims. Did the training centres for the RNG’s army, which Taylor notes constituted 900,000 soldiers at its height, not include maps of the nation in its military textbooks? The images that Taylor examines were produced mostly for civilian or general audiences; how would the picture change if materials produced for more specialized audiences, such as soldiers, were examined?

Taylor’s conclusion deftly summarizes the arguments presented in earlier chapters and suggests avenues for future research. The book as a whole is concise and well written. The illustrations are excellent, although not as numerous as expected, given the topic. Happily, Taylor has launched a project to document “Cultures of Occupation in Twentieth Century Asia” (COTCA). As of November 2021, the COTCA website ([cotca.org](http://cotca.org)) includes many if not all of the illustrations in this book, as well as additional material. More is promised.

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<sup>6</sup> Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994).

The COTCA website and the book itself will be useful for teachers. With support from the European Research Council, the publisher has made the book available in an open access edition. An excellent resource on this topic, which complements Taylor's work well, has just been published: a collection of English-language translations of material from Manchukuo and occupied China. Craig A. Smith, one of that volume's editors, and several other experts on the Wang Jingwei regime contributed translations of speeches and essays by RNG figures, along with useful introductions that contextualize the translated material.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, Taylor's stimulating book offers one more sign that the study of Japan's imperial expansion in the 1930s and 1940s and particularly Chinese involvement in it is pushing past the political constraints that hampered it in the decades after the empire collapsed.

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Henshaw, Craig A. Smith, and Norman Smith, eds., *Translating the Occupation: The Japanese Invasion of China, 1931–45* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021).