

<BOOK REVIEWS>The English-language Press  
Networks of East Asia, 1918-1945, by Peter  
O'Connor

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*The English-language Press Networks of East Asia, 1918–1945*

Peter O'Connor

Global Oriental Ltd., 2009  
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During his long career of studying the history of the press, Peter O'Connor has become well versed in the history of the media in East Asia, particularly Japan. His object of interest in this study is the English-language press in East Asia. The result is a comprehensive study, which, together with its many appendices, is actually a handbook like treasure trove of information. The book gives the reader an entirely new perspective on the history of East Asia, as it examines the relationship and political rivalry between Western and Japanese cultures through the English-language press. The English-language press in East Asia has already been studied considerably, but there has not existed till now a comprehensive study of their mutual relationships.

The author's purpose is to indicate that the English-language press played an important role in shaping international conceptions of Japan and East Asia. O'Connor identifies three unofficial press networks, each with a substantially uniform stance in its articles. The networks comprised newspapers, magazines, news agencies and, naturally, people. O'Connor refers to the Japanese Foreign Ministry's network, the *Japan Advertiser* network and the *Japan Chronicle* network. At times he also brings up the Guomindang network. The main newspapers in the networks were the *Japan Times* (established in 1897), the *Japan Advertiser* (1890–1940), having an American background, and the *Japan Chronicle* (1891–1942) with a British background. All had their own connections to opinion shapers and official bodies in China, the U.S.A. and Britain. In addition, the networks included many publications that appeared especially in China. They were characterized by a pronounced multi-nationalism. The images of Japan's role in East Asia that were conveyed to the world from the beginning of the 1900s to the Pacific War held a central position in the rivalry between the networks.

The first chapter of the study covers the history of English-language publications that appeared in Japan, China and Korea. The next three chapters explore the networks and their publications, news agencies and people. The following four chapters then examine the actual rivalries between the networks as they developed over diverse commentaries on Japan and China and the mutual relationships that emerged between 1918 and 1945. The author actually threatens to overwhelm the reader with people, publications and details, making it difficult at times to piece them all together and connect them to the broader entity. On the other hand, this indicates that the study is based on thorough work, and the result is without a doubt a classic in its field.

From the beginning, the mutual relationships between the networks and with British and American officials in East Asia were confounded by personality clashes. For example, some of the British, American and Australian correspondents who worked within the Japanese Foreign Ministry's unofficial network enjoyed better relationships with local British and American officials than did the correspondents comprising the networks with American or British backgrounds.

Peter O'Connor demonstrates how, from the 1920s, the rivalry between the networks, which he even refers to as the "cold war," began to increase, and how for this reason the Japanese Foreign Ministry became even more distrustful and worried about the image of East Asia being conveyed to the leading Western newspapers. The most significant contrast existed between the Japanese Foreign Ministry's network and the *Japan Advertiser* network, while the *Japan Chronicle* network was more conducive to Japan's official views. The *Japan Advertiser* was noticeably more American than the *Japan Chronicle* was British. Yet, it must be noted that even quite contrary opinions were at times voiced within the same network. The situation was further muddled by certain publications' support for the emerging Communist movement in China.

In the 1930s, Japan's policy had a significant impact on the activity of the American and British networks. After the Manchurian Incident in 1931, it was more difficult for them to obtain information about what was actually happening under the Japanese flag. Journalists' work was hindered by both censure and general uncertainty about the authenticity of information available. As a result of Japan's aggressive policy, the networks were forced to merge with the Japanese Foreign Ministry's network, whereupon the information and image of East Asia conveyed by the English-language press became monotonous. Although the war ended in 1945 with Japan's defeat, the network that fared the best in the end was the Foreign Ministry's network, or rather its flagship, the *Nippon Times*.

As a whole, Peter O'Connor's study constitutes a thoroughgoing evaluation of the relationships between the English-language press networks in Japan and China. The author groups the publications into three networks, but in fact the stances taken by the publications and their correspondents did not often follow such strict boundaries. Indeed, in many instances, both the foreign networks collaborated quite closely with the Foreign Ministry. One must also remember that the *Japan Times*, as the Foreign Ministry's unofficial representative, did not always support the government, which often adopted an aggressive foreign policy and a domestic policy that favoured totalitarianism. For the sort of "image research" that concerns the author, this sort of press material offers excellent possibilities. Nevertheless, the material presented here has not permitted as deep an analysis as the reader might have hoped for.

Peter O'Connor's significant contribution to the field is also interesting because the results can be linked to broader entities when information networks are examined as promoters of globalization. The *Japan Advertiser* and the *Japan Chronicle* operated as opposite extremes of the American and British information networks built in the 1800s; at the same time, they provided additional resources for their promotion of globalization and their struggle for influence in East Asia. For its part, the *Japan Times*, as information channel, constituted an additional Japanese resource in Japan's struggle for control over international opinion, as well as the direction of globalization.

**Reviewed by Olavi K. Fält**