

the early 2000s. In a country with such a vast black market, these levels of ethnographic detail are, quite literally, gold.

Beyond Borders is a must-read for any scholar of the history, geography, economy, or ethnography of the so-called Golden Triangle region of upland Southeast Asia. Its nuanced attention to the historical relationship between the Kuomintang, civilian traders, the Shan insurgencies, and the Burmese government is compelling, especially since the information deals with firsthand accounts. The accessibility of the book would make it a good companion to undergraduate courses about Southeast Asian and/or transnational approaches to history and ethnography. Although the author could very easily bog the reader down with acronyms, dates, and events in military or political history, the priority placed on the subjects' lives allows the reader to assimilate the context inductively, rather than with a preemptive roadmap of sorts. In this way, it would also be instructive for students new to the region, or in thinking about doing multi-sited ethnography. Overall, the book is quite an accomplishment, and an engaging read.

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VISUAL CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA: Paradigms and Shifts. By *Xiaobing Tang*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xii, 276 pp. (Illustrations.) US\$34.99, cloth. ISBN 978-1-107-44637-3.

In this richly illustrated full-colour study, Xiaobing Tang chronicles the development of the visual culture that has been produced from the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949) to the (almost) present. As the author forcefully explains in the concluding chapter (250–258), devoted to an exhibition of Chinese woodcuts created between 2000 and 2010 that he curated in 2011 at the University of Michigan Museum of Art in Ann Arbor, USA, his goal is to break through the simplistic way of seeing Chinese visual culture as either mind-numbing government propaganda or barricade-breaching dissident art. His main aims are to make clear that Chinese visual culture in itself is complex and recognizably Chinese (2), a “reflection of the turbulent history of revolution” (65), yet of global and historical importance; that its practitioners are no dupes employed by a non-democratic regime but deeply committed to taking part in and being part of “a ‘cultural reorientation’ in China’s search for modernity” (26); and that Chinese cultural products should be evaluated and merited for their own qualities, in their own right, and not for what non-Chinese spectators might read into them, for whatever (political) reasons.

To accomplish these aims, the author looks at the creation, blossoming, and perseverance of the socialist visual culture that emerged as “a collective

and deeply inspiring project in the 1950s, the period of socialist collectivization and construction,” as an expression of the “critical awareness of the relations between the visual and social transformation” (10). The author proves that contemporary Chinese art is the logical outcome of the revolutionary past, not in the sense of “a political mandate or paradigm” but rather as “a source of collective memory and cultural identity” (15). The author provides a comprehensive view of this evolution by analyzing paradigmatic works of different visual genres, such as printmaking; history paintings; rural films; the visuals of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and their influence on contemporary artists; historical cinematographic productions; and the vagaries that prints and their creators face in the present.

In close readings of defining cultural expressions, the author provides valuable insights into the artistic climate and productive processes that inspired and helped create the works he unpacks. The first chapter, devoted to printmaking, vividly shows how woodcut artists, after joining the revolution while the Party was in hiding in Yan’an, scrambled to respond to the rapidly changing demands and conditions after 1949. Once the People’s Republic was founded, the styles they had worked in and the themes they had addressed proved less popular in the cities than they had been in the countryside. Thus, artists were faced with questions pertaining to their artistic identity, the relevance of their art, and their active participation in the exciting developments around them.

The second chapter focuses on *The Bloodstained Shirt* (Wang Shikuo, 1959), a large-sized pencil drawing that served as a study for an oil painting that was never made (62, 90). The work depicts the public trial of a landlord during the Land Reform Campaign (1950–1951) and is a “successful example of revolutionary realist art” (65). Beyond an analysis of the drawing, one of the finest and most comprehensive I have encountered, the chapter provides an informative discussion of the conditions and demands artists worked under, the considerations they had to deal with while engaged in the creative process, and the ways in which their works were evaluated, appreciated, or criticized.

In the third chapter, the focus is on movies that were filmed in the countryside or made with a rural audience in mind; in particular, movies dealing with the more active role that women took on in society. The analysis starts with *Li Shuangshuang* (1962), representing the “new collective life in a people’s commune” (106), and moves to *In the Wild Mountains* (1985), a film devoted to the early years of the Reform Era, and subsequently to *Ermo* (1994), when the socialist market economy started to take root. The main aim of the analysis is to show how past visions of a future continue to influence our view of the present.

Cultural Revolution visual culture is discussed in chapter 4 in a fruitful juxtaposition with Wang Guangyi’s acclaimed series of *Great Criticism* paintings. Wang’s works, which combine Red Guard aesthetics with logos representing contemporary global consumer culture, employ the “socialist

turn” (144) to revisit the “socialist visual experience” (167), again indicating that what once was cannot be glossed over in the present.

The analysis of the blockbuster movie *The Founding of the Republic* (chapter 5) makes clear that what non-Chinese audiences (or critics) immediately perceive of as irrelevant or boring propaganda actually resonates with the intended Chinese audience. The much more problematized, orientalist art house films are embraced by Western audiences, while the development of the Chinese (entertainment) movie industry is neglected or disparaged.

The final chapter deals with the neglect that printmaking faced and still faces after the Reform period started. No longer used to educate the people, nor a medium that attracts critical acclaim or huge interest, printmakers look for relevance while experimenting with techniques, subject matter, and marketing schemes.

In conclusion, in this very readable history of the development of visual culture in contemporary China, Tang has succeeded in bringing together a number of vastly different topics and artistic styles and developments. In a historical overview through the lens of the art world, he singles out specific styles to forcefully illustrate the larger historical picture. In doing so, he approaches his subjects with sympathy and understanding. At the same time, he succeeds in opposing the Western tendency to write off Chinese visual culture and the various media and styles it encompasses as either propagandistic or dissident.

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FIERY CINEMA: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915–1945. By *Weihong Bao*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. 479 pp. (Figures.) US\$30.00, paper. ISBN 978-0-8166-8134-1.

Weihong Bao's *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915–1945* is a groundbreaking work that sets a new bar for scholarship in the field. Combining bold theoretical arguments, sharp critical observations, and meticulous archival research, this is the single most important book to be published in the field of pre-1949 Chinese film studies since Zhang Zhen's *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1986–1937*, a decade earlier.

Like many great books, it is hard to boil down *Fiery Cinema* to a single theme or argument as this is a complex, multi-faceted work that simultaneously engages with several important theoretical questions, and does so from a variety of perspectives. At its heart is the concept of “fiery cinema,” which Bao plays with in a variety of ways—from the fire scenes that come at the climax of numerous martial arts films to the fiery emotions that films and stage dramas incite in viewers—as a thematic hub to tie the chapters