

the book, constantly invoked as backdrop but rarely if ever the focus of Rea's attention. Against and alongside these canonical names, Rea places the entertainment industrial complex, including for example the ha-ha mirror of Shanghai's The Great World amusement park and the fiction of Xu Zhuodai. These groups, so often understood separately in terms of canonicity/non-canoncity, are interlocked in Rea's discussion, both in terms of their practice of humorous writing and in their arguments concerning humor's purpose. I have not even broached the subject of Chinese-English or English-Chinese translation of humor that Rea discusses in some detail. There are any number of such contrasts and reshuffling of the standard groupings in our understanding of modern China, and especially in modern Chinese literature, that Rea enacts in his book. And these are the study's biggest contribution to our understanding of the dynamics involved in China's modernization.

What Rea does not give his readers, however, is any significant theorizing of the consequences that stem from regrouping the players in China's cultural modernization in the ways he does in this book. *The Age of Irreverence* clearly demonstrates that these discourses, in all their various forms, on laughter and humor existed in the period from the late Qing, through the early Republic, and on into the years leading up to the war. What conclusions to draw from the recognition of these discourses is largely left up to the reader. This begs an obvious question: how large or small was the impact of these discourses of humor and laughter on the trajectory of modern China's development, culturally, politically, aesthetically or in any other way? This question (or others) will have to wait for further analysis before we can address it.

As a side note, as I read the book (in late 2016 and into early 2017) I was reminded over and over of parallels to contemporary American society. Whether it be the alt-right insults of cuck or libtard, or the mockery and farce of liberal comedians such as Jon Stewart, we can find precedents in Rea's study. The dynamics of this contemporary discourse often seem to mirror that of China a century ago. A theorization of humor's social and political effects could prove most useful in this regard, so that these tools may be taken up strategically rather than merely haphazardly.

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TAIWAN'S IMPACT ON CHINA: Why Soft Power Matters More than Economic or Political Inputs. *The Nottingham China Policy Institute Series.* Editor, **Steve Tsang.** Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. xix, 276 pp. US\$129.00, cloth. ISBN 978-3-319-33749-4.

From the title, readers may be curious about what the editor and authors of this collection of papers had in mind. In 1949, the defeated remnants of the

nationalist army of the Republic of China retreated to Taiwan, and today the relationship of forces vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China appears more unequal than ever before.

Editor Steve Tsang sets the stage for the discussion by pointing to one aspect of the relationship that in fact is completely one-sided: as long as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintains its monopoly of power, there will never be even the consideration of the idea of Taiwan as separate from the PRC. To be clear, though the possibility is not imminent, invasion by the People's Liberation Army would be, strictly speaking, from their point of view, occupation of its own sovereign territory. Also for clarity, the editor reminds us that since the late 1970s, China is post-Mao, not North Korea, and that it would be a mistake to not recognize this fact: dictatorship of a single party, yes, but no longer an all-encompassing totalitarian police state. Around the same time, Taiwan also began to traverse a democratization that today exercises a strong attracting force on the citizens of China (a theme of this book). The most important difference lies in the completeness of the transition in Taiwan, a result that the CCP cannot ignore, and one that will continue to set an important part of the agenda in cross-Strait relations. All of the above is cause for guarded optimism, as reflected in the chapters to follow.

Chapter 2, by Brady, follows up with a revealing panorama of the sensitivities of the CCP in the realm of addressing their Taiwan problem, how (even seemingly every day) discourse must be politically filtered. The extensive catalogue of "suggestions on correct terminology" by the Central Propaganda Department reflects the seriousness of the Party's concern. A personal favourite of this reviewer is the strict prohibition on using the term "language" to refer to the *language* most people speak in Taiwan (it should always be called a "dialect"), or referring to the "indigenous *people*" of the nation (correct term "ethnic minorities"). "Nation" would be completely out of bounds, as would be the correct and proper title of Tsai Ing-wen. Interestingly, the powerful influence of how these boundaries are drawn reaches into the Taiwanese media itself, but then at the same time encounters pushback from Mainland journalists who need to preserve credibility.

Some of the chapters seem to have been written prior to the electoral victory of the Democratic Progressive Party in 2016, which may give the impression of being slightly outdated, but to the contrary, this actually lends a measure of objectivity to the analysis. In the case of chapter 3, by Lin, it allows the chapter to stand above, so to speak, the recent turn of relations and growing tension between the governments of Taiwan and the People's Republic of China.

Despite the implication of the subtitle, the chapters (5 and 6) on the impact on the economy of the PRC are important to study: how the Taiwanese free market economy participated in one of the most important transformations, and not just in terms of scale, of the late twentieth century. With China today on the verge of becoming the world's leading economic

power, it is easy to forget the role played by Taiwan, along with Japan and South Korea, in the infusion of investment capital. In particular, the Chinese-speaking entrepreneurs taught the Mainland enterprises modern business practices, models of efficiency (a bedrock of productivity), and how to transition to a market economy. China can thank Taiwan for a large part of its success with its emerging international supply chains. Applying the so-called “developmental state model” proved to be essential in avoiding the shock and disruption of overthrowing a state-owned economy. It is no coincidence that with the opening of the economy came a gradual reform of the totalitarian political system, despite the continued frustration with its pace and the violent relapses of repression, as in June 1989. For understandable reasons (the frustration, perhaps), many commentators deny this historical link, one that the editor and contributors, to their credit, do not.

Another example can be found in the realm of culture, how China opened the door toward the east, first to Taiwan. The compelling story of how Taiwanese writers and artists found an audience in China beginning with the period of opening under Deng Xiaoping is told in chapters 7 and 8. Parallel to the participation in the liberalization of the economy, they intervened in the literary renaissance, emerging from the dark ages of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. Simple novels and love poems, others sung by Deng Lijun, were a sensation because they weren't about the model New Man and New Woman, but rather the decadent and ordinary relationship between two individuals. On a related note, see the interesting study by Michelle Yeh of the 1980s Mainland Misty Poets (in this case a minority genre, but not unconnected to the interest in popular literature): “Light a lamp in a rock” (*Modern China*, vol. 18 [1992]).

The book leaves us with a contradiction. On the one hand, given impulse with the passing of the dictators (Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong in 1975 and 1976, respectively), the impact of democratic Taiwan now appears remarkable. The extent of material repercussions such influence might have on PRC society, leading to broad-based questioning of CCP authority, is very hard to gauge. It may turn out to be minimal considering the present conditions of the CCP's lock on internal political discussion. As Tsang concludes, it's the soft power, as limited as this turns out to be, that provides for some measure of leverage in cross-Strait interactions and exchanges, keeping these as open as possible.

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