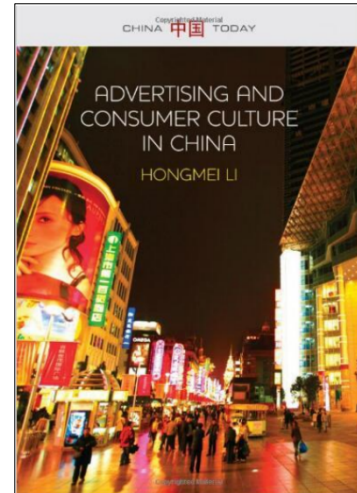


Hongmei Li, **Advertising and Consumer Culture in China (China Today Series)**, Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016, 297 pp., \$29.95 (paperback).

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Based on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and critical analysis, Hongmei Li's book, **Advertising and Consumer Culture in China**, provides a comprehensive analysis of Chinese advertising "as an industry, a profession, and a discourse in the circumstance of China's search for modernity and economic integration with global capitalism" (p. 3), with a focus on digital advertising practices in the post-WTO (World Trade Organization) era. This book is particularly useful for students and professionals who are interested in advertising, international business, and contemporary Chinese society. This interdisciplinary project may also offer valuable insights for Chinese historians and media scholars.



Li's book contains seven chapters, a concise introduction, and a conclusion. Chapters 1 and 2 first introduce the theoretical framework and historical context for analyzing Chinese advertising. Chapter 1 focuses on a conceptual framework, which emphasizes how policy, market, technology, and culture mutually influence the dialectic relations between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, Orientalism and Occidentalism, state and media, technology and ideology, and advertisers and Chinese consumers. Chapter 2 presents a historical review of Chinese advertising and demonstrates its three stages of development from 1978 to the post-WTO era. This longitudinal view of advertising in China also offers readers a clear picture on China's political liberalization, rising middle class, advertising professionalization, and media commercialization in past decades.

Chapters 3 through 5 continue to extend the discussion on Chinese advertising and consumer culture by presenting vivid case studies and local firms' stories. Chapter 3 focuses on "how neoliberal policies and the imagined West-China relations shaped advertising ideas and practices prior to China's entry into the WTO and during the subsequent grade period until 2005" (p. 5). This chapter introduces Maozhong Ye, the famous Chinese adman and his effective advertising strategies in several campaigns such as the one for Real Kung Fu, one of the top Chinese fast-food restaurants in 2004. Ye successfully promoted Chineseness in his ad campaigns and achieved an enormous success in the history of Chinese advertising. Li also conducts a case study of a private Beijing-based ad agency and illustrates how the local firm touted its local knowledge while emulating Western practices. On the one hand, this domestic ad agency applied heavily Chinese cultural symbols and highlighted its Chinese identity. On the other hand, its founder followed foreign business practices and management styles by emphasizing a standardized management in daily operations.

Chapter 4 investigates how Chinese advertisers and ad agencies sell nationalism and cosmopolitanism, through an in-depth examination of TV commercials and print ads. Li presents three main

types of advertisements in the rapidly changing Chinese market: (1) local commercials that desire Chineseness and emphasize the state of being Chinese; (2) local ads that reinforce Western priority through connecting products with Western symbols, images, and values; (3) advertisements that represent a blend of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Li notes that selling the hybridity of nationalism and cosmopolitanism provides "a solution to the tension, conflict, and anxiety caused by globalization" (p. 132) in China. On the one hand, the economic boom made many firms more confident of their products' national identities in the world. On the other hand, the low quality and less-fashionable design of products pushed local brands to connect themselves with Western modernity.

Chapter 5 elaborates on the marketing and advertising strategies of Li-Ning, a famous Chinese sportswear brand during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. This chapter shows that Li-Ning initially was very successful in both local and global markets. This brand embraced both nationalism and cosmopolitanism by integrating Chinese cultural symbols in its ads and hiring NBA players for endorsement. Facing fierce competition from both global sportswear brands in China and local firms, Li-Ning had to rebrand itself accordingly. However, it lost the leading role when top global brands also applied the element of "national pride" in their campaigns. Li suggests that Li-Ning's failure is mainly because of cultural imperialism, which privileges "certain positions, naturalizes cultural distinctions, and creates competitive hurdles for Chinese products" (p. 161).

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on controversial advertising and participatory marketing in China under the context of changing regulations and sociopolitical, economic, cultural and technological transformations. In chapter 6, Li examines how underdeveloped regulation of Chinese advertising, immoral media and business practices, and rapidly changing consumer cultures have created and influenced controversial advertising. For instance, a Japanese ad aroused heated discussions in China since historically consumers held strong negative sentiments toward Japanese militarism. Li also concludes that controversial advertising is globalized due to the rapid development of new technology. For instance, Citroën in Spain published an advertisement featuring the image of Zedong Mao with a twisted mouth. Numerous Chinese consumers expressed their anger toward this ad about their deceased leader. Finally, Citroën had to issue a public apology on *Global Times*.

Chapter 7 offers an updated explanation of participatory advertisement in contemporary China by presenting three main ad practices, including China Central Television (CCTV)'s annual action, Chinese smartphone Xiaomi's consumer-centric ad practices, and Unilever's branded entertainment. With the rapid development of new communication technology in China, Li suggests that the line between advertising and programming and user-generated and corporate-generated contents is blurring. Especially in China, consumers are highly active on the Internet, and they are eager to gain "cultural, symbolic, and material benefits" (p. 228). Xiaomi's participatory marketing case reflects a general shift from "mass marketing to precise targeting and consumer engagement" (p. 228).

Compared to other books such as Bittner (2007) and H. Cheng and Chan (2009), Li's book is more dedicated to providing important and updated coverage of advertising in post-Mao China. The contents on participatory advertising on digital media of mobile devices, in particular, can attract a large number of readers. As Y. Cheng and Chan (2015) confirmed, the online public opinion in China might form a competing

agenda to influence media and organizational agendas, so user-generated content must be paid attention by scholars and practitioners.

As the book provides an expert overview of Chinese advertising, its merits include exploring the complex associations between consumer cultures and economic, political, cultural, and technological transformations. Studies in the future may extend Li's book and explore the dialectic relationships between China and West, local and global, and new media and ideology in other fields of communication such as public relations and crisis communication (Huang, Wu, & Cheng, 2015). In sum, this book contains clear theoretical frameworks, interesting discussions on consumer culture, vivid stories on famous ad persons and agencies, and inspiring examples of local brands in China. This informative work is the best choice for those who are interested in modern China, consumer culture, and advertising.

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