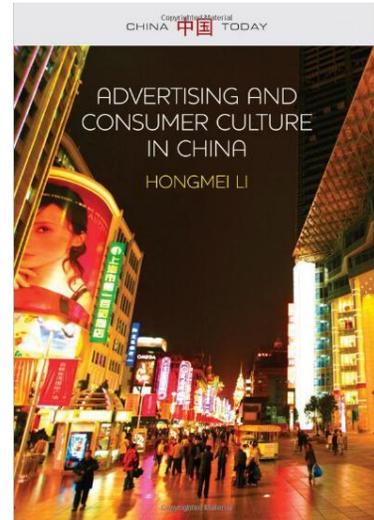


Hongmei Li, **Advertising and Consumer Culture in China (China Today)**, Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016, 297 pp., \$29.95 (paperback).

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Advertising and Consumer Culture in China is the culmination of Hongmei Li's 10 years of fieldwork, observation, and analysis on the cultural history of Chinese advertising, including Chinese ad agencies and brands, with a particular emphasis on advertising practices in the post-WTO (World Trade Organization) era. A historical examination of Chinese advertising always touches on key issues of contemporary markets, policy, culture, and technology in China, because the development of advertising "goes hand in hand with China's economic globalization, political liberalization, cultural transformations, and technological development" (p. 3). Li analyzed these vital factors thoroughly and comprehensively. As one of the first scholarly works in English that systematically analyzes Chinese advertising, the book serves a great variety of audiences, including students, scholars, policy makers, media workers, technologists, entrepreneurs, or anyone interested or involved in Chinese advertising, which has grown into a gigantic industry at an annual growth rate of 35% over the past three decades. As a book in the *China Today* series, it will also fascinate readers with an interest in modern Chinese history and culture.



Objective and Structure

This interdisciplinary book aims to provide 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) by providing a clear organizing framework. It has seven chapters. Chapter 1 situates the analysis of Chinese advertising in China's search for modernity and its historical relationship with the West. It highlights the country's ambivalent relationship with its own history and Western modernity by looking at issues such as nationalism and cosmopolitanism, Orientalism and Occidentalism, and China's desire for traditional revival as well as its strong desire to integrate with the capitalist system. A conceptual and analytical model for understanding advertising is introduced at the end of the chapter that takes into consideration the dialectic relations between local and global, state and media, and advertisers and consumers.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of advertising development and divides the history into three stages based on China's political liberalization, media commercialization, and economic globalization. It provides rich data about advertising history as well as typical advertising strategies. The development of foreign advertising, advertising professionalization, and the Chinese government's policies to support advertising

and domestic consumption are also discussed. Chapters 1 and 2 thus set the historical context and theoretical framework for further analysis.

Chapters 3 through 5 investigate the strained relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism and the convergence between these two discourses, focusing on specific advertising strategies, discourses, and general practices. These chapters not only study specific advertising campaigns through participant observations, interviews, and discourse analysis, but also emphasize that mediated local and global strategies—as we can also call it, “glocalization” (Roudometof, 2016)—have been applied by Chinese advertising agencies (chapter 3) in product branding and selling (chapter 4 and 5). Specifically, chapter 3 discusses how nationalism was constructed as a useful discourse and business strategy right before China joined the WTO in 2001 and during the grace period until 2005. It analyzes how leading ad professionals took different positions: While many of them touted Chineseness as a way to compete with the West, others attempted to balance nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Through an in-depth examination of TV commercials and print ads, chapter 4 investigates how contemporary Chinese advertisers sell nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Chapter 5 gives an elaborate analysis of Chinese sportswear brand Li-Ning’s marketing and advertising strategies, centering on the Beijing Olympics and beyond.

Chapter 6 looks at controversial advertising in China in the context of the country’s changing regulations and its sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and technological transformations. Chapter 7 analyzes how Chinese advertising has shifted from mass marketing to participatory engagement. The chapter compares and contrasts three distinctive ad practices: CCTV’s media auction, branded entertainment, and Chinese smartphone Xiaomi’s consumer-centric ad practices. In the book’s concluding chapter, Li reflects and discusses the impact of digital advertising practices on the relationship among the media, the advertiser, the consumer, and the ad agency. On all accounts, the book delivers on its promise of providing a comprehensive analysis of Chinese advertising entangled with contemporary market, policy, culture, and technology.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Besides a clear structure and objective, another strength of the book lies in its in-depth and detailed analysis. Intensive discussion appears not only in the argumentation but also in the case study and examples of evidence. Keywords like “Chineseness” and “dancing in chains” provide useful lenses through which to understand Chinese ad professionals’ dealings with their Western competitors and China’s global positioning and identity in the context of globalization. This book offers not only unique insights into Chinese advertising specifically and Chinese culture generally but also significant knowledge about the fundamental issues of Chinese history, culture, and society. Well-known and typical examples concerning Ye Maozhong, Li Guangdou, Youbang International Ad Firm (YIAF), Li-Ning, Naobaijin, Xiaomi, and CCTV are analyzed in such a careful way that they provide a refreshing perspective to understand Chinese advertising coupled with a specific consumer culture.

Li also presents a large quantity of references, data, notes, and links, and draws on materials from literature, advertising campaigns, trade journals, news reports, documentaries, and interviews over

more than 10 years. These are invaluable sources for research, studies, investigation, policy, and strategies. This is a particular strength compared with many other English works on Chinese advertising. However, because of the fast-paced changes in the Chinese advertising industry, some examples, data, and links may need to be updated.

According to Flath and Klein (2014), advertising research can be divided into three main areas: advertising as a form of communication, advertising as persuasion, and the relationship between advertising and culture. Covering these three areas, a rapidly emerging body of English literature that appeared in the 1990s (see Liang & Jacobs, 1993; Stross, 1990; Swanson, 1990; Zhou & Belk, 1993) and 2000s (see Bittner, 2007; Chan & McNeal, 2004; Cheng & Chan, 2009; Cochran, 2006; Li, 2008) contributes a great deal to the Chinese advertising research. Compared with the literature specific to cultural studies (see Cheng, 1997; Johansson, 1998; Keane & Spurgeon, 2004; Lee, 1993; Li, Li & Zhao, 2009), Li's book is more informational and offers a more comprehensive and holistic understanding. However, it would be helpful to gain more insights into the cross-culture comparison, especially in terms of the China–West advertising relationship, by engaging in a more thorough literature review.

Conclusion

Overall, Li's informative and insightful book gives us a window through which we can see a clear and multilayered developing history of modern Chinese advertising, interesting and changing consumer culture, and interactions between Chinese advertising and the economic, political, cultural, and technological transformations. In addition, the rich data about ad industries and agencies, vivid stories about advertisers and ad persons, and inspiring examples of Chinese brands add great fun to the reading. This book proves to be an excellent monograph for those interested in not only Chinese advertising and consumer culture but also modern China in general.

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