



THE RISING ASIA REVIEW OF BOOKS

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CHALLENGING THE TRADITIONAL MODEL OF U.S. CULTURAL HEGEMONY

**By disrupting the dichotomy of the provider
versus receiver of knowledge**

Knowledge Production in Cold War Asia: US Hegemony and Local Agency.
Edited by Yuka Tsuchiya Moriguchi, Shin Kawashima, and Somei Kobayashi. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2025, 348 pages, paperback US\$50.00; hardback US\$110.00; ebook US\$44.99.

This book mainly examines the complex relationship between U.S. hegemony and Asian local agency in the production of knowledge during the Cold War. Existing studies of the Cultural Cold War have mainly focused on traditional concerns such as propaganda, cultural diplomacy, and ideological competition. By contrast, this book offers a new research perspective by bringing academic, scientific, and practical knowledge production in Asia into the analytical scope of the Asian Cultural Cold War. More importantly, the questions of knowledge production discussed in this book do not belong only to Cold War history; they also provide an important historical reference for rethinking the unequal structures that continue to shape global knowledge flows today.

The volume develops this argument through case studies of area studies, nuclear science, biology, and journalism education in Asia, tracing the relationships among governmental and nongovernmental actors, funding organizations, East Asian scholars, and local institutions. It shows that knowledge production in Cold War Asia took place in some of the “most contested fields,” where scholars, students, and professionals were entangled in local struggles over the “legitimacy and ownership of knowledge,” and where U.S. and East Asian governments and private organizations attempted to assert control through “funding aids and training programs” (p. 2). The volume therefore links knowledge production to “structural power,” “monetary aid,” and the “penetration of knowledge” (pp. 2, 4). However, neither the editors nor the chapter authors assume that the more powerful side could fully dominate the production and circulation of knowledge. Rather, they seek to challenge the traditional model of cultural hegemony by disrupting “the dichotomy of the provider versus receiver of knowledge” (p. 4). The cases in the volume focus not only on U.S. influence in knowledge production but also on “the agency of the East Asian nations and regions,” through which U.S. influence was sometimes “creatively adapted, counteracted, diluted, or even neutralized” (p. 3).

The book is organized into three parts: “Area Studies,” “Scientific Knowledge,” and “Practicing Knowledge.” Across eleven case studies, the volume develops the central argument outlined above.

American “Lone Hero” Scholars On A Two-Way Street

Part I, “Area Studies,” grounds the volume’s claim that knowledge production was not a one-directional flow in the formation of area studies as a field. Its four chapters examine Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies, U.S.-Japanese debates over modernization theory, and Korean Studies. Taken together, they show that area studies did not emerge



solely from within American universities as an internally generated discipline, but took shape through transnational negotiation, debate, and collaboration among American and local scholars and institutions. Shin Kawashima's chapter (Chapter 1) on the Ford Foundation's support for the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, argues that this support "did much to lay the foundation for Taiwanese sinology" (p. 35). Yet this process was also "part of a bilateral set of influence activities" (p. 34). Against the specific background of the Republic of Taiwan's (ROC) competition with the People's Republic of China (PRC) over the representation of "China," Taiwanese scholars also sought to influence American sinology and to shift American scholars' understanding of "China." Masaki Fujioka's (Chapter 3) analysis of debates over modernization theory at the 1960 Hakone Conference presents another form of interaction. American scholars attempted to turn Japan's experience of modernization into a general model for other non-Western countries, whereas Japanese scholars questioned a highly abstract theory that failed to account adequately for Japan's particular historical experiences, including prewar history, militarism, defeat, and the problem of democracy. By comparison, Miriam Kingsberg Kadia's chapter (Chapter 2) on Japanese studies in the United States and Somei Kobayashi's chapter (Chapter 4) on Korean Studies examine related forms of knowledge production from different national contexts. Kadia revises the conventional account that portrays American scholars of Japan as "intrepid explorers of an intellectual terra incognita" and "lone heroes" by highlighting the role of Japanese translators, local experts, and coordinators in the development of postwar Japanese studies in the United States (pp. 47–48). Kobayashi, meanwhile, shows that the formation of Korean Studies was closely tied to wartime intelligence needs, especially through George M. McCune's work for the Coordinator

of Information (COI) and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), as well as to the Rockefeller Foundation's postwar support for Korean Studies.

U.S. Use Of Science In Cold War Diplomacy Faced Strong Local Agency

Part II shifts the discussion to the field of scientific knowledge. Through three chapters on China's nuclear research, U.S. nuclear technological aid to Taiwan, and the ecological survey of the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), this section shows that science was both "an effective tool of Cold War diplomacy" and "an inherently uncontrollable entity" (p. 14). Yuko Sato's chapter (Chapter 5) examines how both the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the GMD (Guomindang) sought to recruit Chinese scientists trained overseas, suggesting that the movement of scientific knowledge did not depend solely on formal state-to-state aid, but also took place through the transnational mobility of individual scientists. Yuka Tsuchiya Moriguchi's chapter (Chapter 6) presents the tension between U.S. scientific hegemony and Taiwanese local agency in a more direct way. The Michigan Memorial Phoenix Project was originally an internal nuclear research program at a U.S. public university, but it was later incorporated into the U.S. system of technological aid to Taiwan, showing how scientific knowledge could serve Cold War diplomacy. At the same time, the different goals of Chinese American scientists, ROC officials, and younger engineers made this process impossible to reduce to a one-way transmission of knowledge from the United States to Taiwan. Manyong Moon's chapter (Chapter 7) turns to the ecological survey of the Korean DMZ. In this case, networks connected to the Smithsonian Institution and South Korean biologists sought to transform the DMZ from a military boundary into an object of ecological research. Yet the two sides could not fully

agree on research leadership, funding arrangements, and the value of local knowledge. North Korea, moreover, rejected this ecological understanding of the DMZ and continued to view it as a symbol of national division and military confrontation.

“Invited” U.S. Influence And Local Resistance

Part III turns to “Practicing Knowledge,” focusing on journalism education, journalist training, communication education, and military civic action. In Chapter 8, Mike Shichi Lan shows that the United States and the ROC sought to train Chinese-speaking journalists who could serve their shared anti-Communist propaganda goals. Yet, participants in these programs did not simply follow the agenda set by the United States and its allies. Some later became critical of the ROC government, while others became important scholars in journalism education in Singapore and Hong Kong. Lan argues that the project produced unintended consequences that were “occasionally politically counterproductive and at other times very productive educationally” (p. 245). Yang Zhang’s chapter (Chapter 9) on the Department of Journalism at the Chinese University of Hong Kong shows that the United States did attempt to disseminate journalism and communication knowledge through Hong Kong. Yet this support also corresponded to the needs of local intellectuals who sought to improve journalism education and train more capable journalists for Hong Kong society. For Zhang, U.S. influence in this case was better understood as “invited influence” rather than straightforward cultural domination (p. 270). Jae Young Cha’s chapter (Chapter 10) examines U.S. educational exchange programs for South Korean journalists. The United States hoped to train pro-American Korean journalists and to promote American-style journalistic professionalism. However, this goal was limited by Korea’s own

journalistic traditions and authoritarian political environment (p. 297). Eun Heo's chapter (Chapter 11) extends the volume's discussion of practicing knowledge into the military sphere through the case of the U.S. Armed Forces Assistance to Korea (AFAK). The chapter shows how the United States and the South Korean military transformed the experience of civil assistance in South Korea into a more general model of civic action and later applied it to other Cold War settings, including Vietnam. Yet this strategy of winning "hearts and minds" had fundamental limits, because this body of knowledge contained blind spots concerning foreign intervention, nation building, and sovereignty in areas shaped by colonial rule (p. 323).

Understanding A War Not Entirely "Cold," But Often Under War's Shadow

One of the book's most significant contributions lies in its use of knowledge production as its central analytical lens. This perspective expands the objects of study in the Asian Cultural Cold War and opens up a new direction for this field. Much existing scholarship on Asia's Cultural Cold War has followed the lines of cultural diplomacy, cultural propaganda, and U.S. hegemony, examining how U.S. state agencies and nongovernmental organizations, such as the U.S. Information Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Asia Foundation, used books, magazines, films, and other media to circulate anti-Communist ideology and free-world values in Asia.¹ In this body of scholarship,

¹ Po-Shek Fu, *Hong Kong Media and Asia's Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023); Shuang Shen, "Empire of Information: The Asia Foundation's Network and Chinese-Language Cultural Production in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (2017): 589–610; and Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu, and Michael Szonyi, eds., *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).



culture is often understood primarily as a medium of propaganda, public diplomacy, and ideological struggle. By shifting the focus to knowledge production, this volume moves beyond the question of how the United States exported culture and ideology to Asia. It asks how Cold War knowledge itself was formed within the tension between U.S. hegemony and local agency in Asia. This perspective brings Asian scholars, educators, scientists, and professional institutions more fully into view. It also shows that knowledge that appeared to be produced by the United States was, in practice, shaped through interaction with local actors. As a result, some individuals trained within U.S.-backed and anti-Communist systems later produced outcomes that diverged sharply from, and even worked against, American anti-Communist goals.

The book's use of archival sources also deserves particular attention. By combining U.S. archives with local Asian archives, newspapers, and other local sources, the contributors avoid presenting knowledge production as a one-way process driven solely by the United States. For example, the chapter on Taiwanese Sinology draws not only on Ford Foundation records and U.S. archival materials, but also on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives housed at the Academia Historica, particularly the files of the Research Group on International Academic and Cultural Activities, together with diplomatic correspondence from the ROC Embassy in the United States and reports from meetings of ROC consular officials. These materials demonstrate how Taiwanese academic institutions responded to and reinterpreted Ford Foundation assistance. Similarly, Mike Shichi Lan's chapter on journalism education in Taiwan (Chapter 8) combines the history of National Chengchi University, graduation yearbooks, materials on overseas Chinese education, ROC diplomatic archives, Chinese-language newspapers, and interviews to trace the subsequent careers and transregional mobility of

Chinese-language journalists trained in Taiwan. Although most chapters successfully integrate U.S. archival sources with local materials, some chapters still rely more heavily on U.S. archives, perhaps because of the uneven availability of archival sources.

Despite these strengths, the book also leaves room for further discussion. Although its title frames the subject as “Cold War Asia,” the case studies are concentrated primarily in East Asia, especially Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea. This geographical emphasis is understandable, since the book’s central concerns are closely tied to the specific conditions of the East Asian Cold War: the collapse of the Japanese empire and the ensuing political and intellectual vacuum, the division of China, Korea, and Vietnam, the reconstruction of academic and scientific institutions under U.S. influence, and the fact that the Cold War in East Asia was never entirely “cold,” but unfolded under the shadow of armed conflict (pp.5–7). Nevertheless, because the volume frames its discussion in terms of “Asia” as a whole, readers may reasonably expect to see more case studies from Southeast Asia, South Asia, and other parts of the continent. Extending this analytical perspective to a broader range of Asian regions would further illuminate the diversity of knowledge production across Cold War Asia.

This book will be especially useful for scholars of the Cultural Cold War, particularly those working on Asia’s Cultural Cold War and cultural diplomacy. It also points to a productive direction for Cold War studies of Southeast Asia and South Asia, where similar cases may still await further exploration. More broadly, the volume will be of interest to readers concerned with cultural exchange, international politics, and the relationship between knowledge and power.

Note on the Reviewer

Liu Jinxingqi is a PhD student in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta. Her research focuses on the Cultural Cold War, U.S. cultural diplomacy, Chinese-language periodicals, translation, and the transnational circulation of knowledge in East Asia. Her current project examines Taiwanese modernism and Chinese-language literary journals in relation to U.S.-linked cultural Cold War networks in postwar East Asia. More broadly, she is interested in how literary knowledge, publishing institutions, and cultural networks shape the circulation of modernism across Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese communities. Her work brings together periodical studies, book history, translation studies, and archival research.