

*The business of culture: Cultural entrepreneurs in China and Southeast Asia, 1900–65*

Edited by CHRISTOPHER REA and NICOLAI VOLLAND

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Culture is an important field for anthropologists as business is for economists and entrepreneurship for sociologists. *The business of culture* is a major collection of essays by literary scholars and cultural historians; it is neither about the anthropologists' notion of 'culture', nor sociologists' 'entrepreneurship', and certainly least related to the economist's 'business'. This collection does not even resemble Cultural Studies, with its typically interdisciplinary discourse on various major concerns such as power, ideology, class, ethnicity, gender, and identity. Instead, the contributors combine the ideas of culture as business and the culture business as entrepreneurship, as well as link China and Southeast Asia with Chinese studies. This volume looks at how cultural products and cultural producers became cultural agencies in the Sinophone world during the political, economic, and technological transitions between 1900 to 1965.

Chinese cultural entrepreneurs and enterprises operated in a region stretching from Beijing and Shanghai to Hong Kong and Singapore from the late Qing dynasty to Singapore's independence. The book's broad theoretical framework encompasses the transition from tradition to modernity and across transnational networks from China to Southeast Asia, in which Chinese intellectuals and overseas Chinese provide a significant linkage. Cultural entrepreneurship is defined as 'a particular form of cultural agency that arose in early-twentieth-century Asia' and 'a pluralistic approach to the art and business of culture [that was] characterized by active participation in multiple modes of cultural production' (p. 10). Broadly, the volume investigates 'how people, institutions, and products travel from one cultural field to another — and to explain the major implications that result' (p. 27).

In the introduction and epilogue, Christopher Rea and Nicolai Volland summarise the findings of the various studies and explore their wider implications. Rea identifies three models of Chinese cultural entrepreneurship: the cultural personality model, the cultural tycoon model, and the collective cultural enterprises model, which served as parameters to the study (chap. 1). The book has three divisions and nine chapters to encompass the three models of cultural entrepreneurship. Part 1 focuses on cultural personalities in Republican China, namely the woman educator Lü Bicheng (by Grace Fong); the writer and 'Butterfly Immortal' Chen Diexian (by Eugenia Lean); and the translator Lin Shu and English-teaching impresario Fong F. Sec. and their correspondence schools (by Michael Hill). Part 2 examines two cultural tycoons in Hong Kong and Singapore, namely Aw Boon Haw and his influential domains of journalism on the one hand (by Sin Yee Theng and Nicolai Volland) and Law Bun and his cultural empire as compared to Jin Yong on the other (by Sai-Shing Yung and Christopher Rea).

Part 3 moves from cultural individuals to collective cultural enterprises by focusing on the not-for-profit local civic printing and publishing organisations in Guangdong (by Robert Culp), the big cinema enterprises in pre-war Singapore such as Shaw Brothers and Cathay Cinema (by Chua Ai Lin), and the Shanghai Book Trade Association between 1945 and 1957 (by Nicolai Volland).

The book argues that fundamental to cultural entrepreneurship is not only its 'mobility between physical places and between occupations', but also its involvement in 'the investment of both talent and capital in new enterprises' (p. 10). Such cultural agency during the twentieth-century in China and Southeast Asia, along with a pluralistic approach to the business of culture, represented a major shift in Chinese attitudes towards cultural products and cultural production. The book concludes that the experience of Chinese cultural entrepreneurship has a global dimension beyond historical and geographical contexts as indicated by its post-1949 development.

A cluster of correlated concepts used throughout the book could do with more distinctions and explanations. First, in dealing with culture versus business, 'culture' is an undefined term and clearly refers to specific fields of literature, the arts, film, and print media as created by cultural personalities, and approached as cultural businesses. The business of culture is certainly about culture, both as products and production. It seems to the reviewer that, in the minds of the editors, however, 'culture' is not necessarily and deliberately seen as equivalent to 'commodity' ('social productivity' is a case in point as indicated). Although this is a study of 'the business of culture', the reviewer believes that it is not the intention of the editors to discuss the 'culture of business'. However, through detailed documentation of cultural personalities, tycoons, and enterprises, and by examining the meanings, implications, and dynamics of cultural entrepreneurship, the book undoubtedly engages in a range of wider issues, including the culture of cultural business. Readers may be left wondering whether the characterisation of cultural entrepreneurship as the business of culture could illustrate the culture of cultural business, and in turn how the culture of cultural business could help shape the unique characterisation of cultural entrepreneurship.

Secondly, there is the issue of cultural entrepreneurs versus cultural entrepreneurship. In the book, the concept of cultural entrepreneurs appears to refer to Chinese cultural entrepreneurs, while cultural entrepreneurship essentially refers to Chinese entrepreneurship. This distinction is not clearly made in the volume, although there is a *working* definition of 'entrepreneurial' and 'entrepreneur', and 'entrepreneurism' and 'entrepreneurship' (p. 16). This may not be an editorial oversight, but rather due to the preoccupation with the larger subject of cultural entrepreneurship. The book is in fact a more careful study, with case examples, of Chinese cultural entrepreneurs and Chinese cultural enterprises (in terms of biographical detail and story) rather than an in-depth exposition of cultural entrepreneurship. The empirical focus is on the individuals profiled, but these studies point to the wider implications of cultural entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. The key question is whether the cases of the Chinese entrepreneurs lead to a better understanding of global cultural entrepreneurship. The editors correctly assert that, 'a key goal of this book is to prompt new inquiries into its global dimensions' (p. 4). However, the contributors have not quite succeeded in using their findings to offer broader conclusions on the subject.

The third theme relates to the binaries of cultural agents versus personalities, and cultural agencies versus enterprises or entrepreneurship. Agents and agencies are concepts of brokerage in relation to power and business, while personalities are about personal attributes of behaviours and careers. The terms ‘cultural agents and cultural agencies’ are tools for better understanding of the analytical concepts of cultural entrepreneurs and cultural enterprises respectively. However, their connections and differences, and their mutual and complementary linkages, need to be clarified and elaborated.

‘Cultural entrepreneurship’ as a theoretical tool has until recently been neglected by cultural historians. Hence, this book, by exploring how various agents and agencies are involved in the creation, production, and transmission of culture as business, is a very good start and an invaluable scholarly contribution. It offers ‘valuable pointers to future developments’ in the field, to quote Wang Gungwu in his Foreword (p. xi). The editors’ joint intellectual contributions deserve special mention. Christopher Rea and Nicolai Volland have drawn out the various themes and integrated the discussions into a coherent and very readable volume.

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## Cambodia

### *Man or monster: The trial of a Khmer Rouge torturer*

By ALEXANDER LABAN HINTON

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Anyone who researches genocide and its perpetrators, has, at some point, tried to understand ‘[h]ow a person — [a] basically ordinary person — can be at the same time respectable and terrifying’ (p. 195). Through his examination of the trial of Duch (former Khmer Rouge cadre, Kaing Guek Eav), Alexander Laban Hinton’s book, *Man or monster*, addresses this paradox. However, in asking this question the book goes much further, to asking wider questions of how we come to understand others (and ourselves) at all, particularly within the frame of international justice and genocide.

Duch’s trial — Case 001 — was the test case for the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (the ECCC, or Khmer Rouge Tribunal), the hybrid court established in 2006 to try the leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime. In *Man or monster*, Hinton draws on court transcripts, participant-observation, extensive interviews, poetry and creative writing, and his own reflexive analysis, to construct a detailed ethnography of a court case, a person, and a historical moment. By depicting the trial in meticulous, but readable, detail, Hinton explores how we construct ideas of humanity/humanness, good and evil, perpetrator/victim, justice and reconciliation in the post-conflict context