

HEVIA, James. *The Imperial Security State: British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-building in Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 304 p. ISBN 978-0-521-89608-5.

Looking at Asia through a foreigner's eyes, it is hardly possible to disregard the role international relations play in the way we see each other and communicate. Mostly due to distinct political, social and religious conditions, we may be enticed by the new possibilities these Oriental countries offer. However, there may be a worrisome aspect to what their 'otherness' represents for 'our' world order. Thus the question of how to transform the potentially weakening effect of the other and the new into a beneficial mutual interaction, possibly to the advantage of each state's interests, is asked. In this regard, and especially when military intervention seems to be the best choice in the increasingly globalized, postcolonial world, when power relations between rising countries and the rest are changing, it is very important to learn that the restructuring of the military and the construction of security states are closely linked with knowledge and intelligence systems.

Professor Hevia's *The Imperial Security State* is a rewarding read for anybody involved in studying international relation strategies, intelligence studies, military tactics as well as regional studies. It provides readers with a novel perspective that sees the creation of state security structures as dependent on acquired intelligence and technology via military units. Also, the book is a welcome contribution to our knowledge of the colonial period. Notably, this theme is indeed close to the author's heart. In addition to his *Cherishing Men from Afar*, which won the Joseph Levenson Prize in 1997, a notable previous publication on 19th century Britain and China is *English Lessons*, which was immediately published in Chinese and offered a post-colonialist point of view.¹ It is likely thanks to these works that James Hevia has become a renowned Professor of International History at the University of Chicago. He focuses on international relations and conflicts as well as on imperialism in Eastern and Central Asia. In general, his works present bases for further research on the organization of governance and the use of communication channels in Qing imperial China at the turn of the 19th century.

The present book under review has an introductory and elusive character, while covering a wide frame of reference from the 1820s to the current century. It was published in 2012 as one of five books in the Cambridge University Press 'Critical Perspectives on Empire' series. Thus it naturally aims to offer a historical approach different from the 'triumphalist history narratives' of the West. But more importantly and contrary to the author's earlier works, it is meant to emphasize the need of understanding British activities in the wider context of the empire's strategic possibilities. The author introduces Asian states in respect to the role they play in the international sphere. This is also showcased by how the author treats the nature of military intelligence only marginally and concerns himself with its importance in its formation and influence on international and security affairs. However, while the

¹ HEVIA, James. *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1995. From the same author see also *English Lessons: the Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-century China*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2004.

formation of intelligence and the redefinition of military activities comprise the main theme of the work, Hevia's argumentation is based on the relation of diplomacy and military. This is because when the rhetoric of diplomatic agents is not enough to secure a country's interests and safeguard peaceful relations, closer communication between military and diplomatic structures based on knowledge of a region is priceless.

In order to evaluate this work we may apply various standards and questions, but the crucial ones are those concerned with the author's use of information sources. Professor Hevia does indeed emphasize the scientific gathering of knowledge rather than the romanticized concepts of spies commonly associated with intelligence. He proves this also through the used literature. *The Imperial Security State* does not forget to provide a comprehensive index and bibliography of manuscripts, parliamentary papers, archival documents, official printed sources and of course diverse books and articles as well as original maps. The author bases his research on this wide array of primary and secondary sources, which are all in the English language due to his research objectives and topics. Nevertheless, in this context it should be noted that his translations of original documents in Chinese and interpretations have been put into question in the past, and not just a few Sinologists would find them to be "too liberal".² So, even in the light of the high quality and quantity of on the materials used, the author's interpretations require cautious reading.

Furthermore, in drawing from a rich material source, the thematic scope of the present work was considerably broadened in comparison to earlier books by the author. At the beginning of this nine-chapter work the reader is provided with a bigger perspective on industrial changes resulting in the transformation of military governance in Prussia, France, Russia, Austria and the British Empire. After detecting the shortcomings of the armies, restructuring and innovative educational and training techniques, rationalization as well as the boosting of mobilization effectiveness was aspired to. In the course of the book a rather introductory and descriptive passage changes into a more analytical narration that illuminates the process of intelligence units' formation, their role and functioning. However, for a more specialized readership probably the most useful part of the book comes only in the fourth chapter. In this section, we learn further details about the literary sources analyzed, such as route books, reconnaissance and handbooks on the research of topography. All these original documents are presented in the context of British imperial activities.

Clearly, the title of *The Imperial Security State* is just a simple abstraction of the richness of information that one may find in the book. And in spite of this thematic complexity, through his writing style the author offers both a comprehensive knowledge and breathtaking erudition. Moreover, his succinct narrative voice is made even more understandable via the employment of practical examples from 'military field work' in Afghanistan, India and China. We even dare to say that this book is a well-balanced consideration of the intended readership as it makes the importance of intelligence units in imperial security development fairly easy to comprehend. It is not until later in the work, precisely in the most voluminous Chapters 6 to 8, that development in British military branches in Asian regions and its implications for governance in Great Britain

² ESHERICK, Joseph W. "Traduttore, Traditore: A Reply to James Hevia". In *Modern China*, 1998, Vol. 24, No. 3, p. 330.

is described. The acquired information about these regions, contained mostly in the form of military reports, certainly played a considerably influential role when it came to an overall picture of Asia in the minds of leaders, officers and statesmen.

Moreover, we may find many resemblances with James Hevia's work in the publications of other authors. For instance, a senior British intelligence officer, Michael Herman, stresses the formation of committees and intelligence units during 19th century Britain as well, but he then concentrates on the Cold War and post-Second World War period.³ Professor Hevia himself views intelligence as a crucial element in security state formation. However, more importantly he concentrates on the military security theme as not only a government tool but also as a factor influencing the implementation of policies. Moreover, in the case of China and in an attempt to illustrate the situation in Asian countries, many publications concern themselves with Robert Hart's journals and letters. Although such books emphasize the transformation of China in the context of British interests like Hevia's does, they are mostly based on literary analysis.⁴

Thus, as for Professor Hevia's latest book, we cannot speak about a work analyzing literature, concerning itself only with intelligence, only China, or being Western-oriented. His specific approach and choice of research subject provide readers with a novel perspective, but also facilitate the orientation of readers in the field of study. If the author does not base theoretical terminology on the models of Foucault or Said, he makes reference to and interprets his contemporaries and predecessors. Such is the case of Christopher Allan Bayly and his work *Empire and Information* published in 1996, where intelligence is explored. However, Bayly's chosen research topic does not go as deeply into the field of international affairs or interpretations of the intelligence units' processes as Hevia's does.⁵

Despite the broad reach of Professor Hevia's subject, in the last chapter readers' attention is directed back towards Great Britain and the impact which newly established intelligence projects in Asian countries had. Popular culture (but more importantly social changes taking place in 19th century Britain) proves to some extent the ideological influence of "*British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-building in Asia*". Further, in the last part of his book the author's intentions are clearly elucidated. He points out the resemblance which officers and politicians unable to see the limitations of their technologies and structures in the 19th century bear to those who are not able to "see beyond their technologies of knowledge" now.

To sum up, there is no doubt that Professor Hevia's book will be celebrated as a highly valuable contribution to research in international studies. The author himself deserves praise for having brought about a well-informed and comprehensive perspective on the balancing of power relations between two worlds with his concluding words: "There are no differential equations or metrics for life without life."

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³ HERMAN, Michael. *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*. Cambridge: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996.

⁴ HART, Robert. *Robert Hart and China's Early Modernization: His Journals, 1863 – 1866*. Richard J. Smith (Ed.) Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991.

⁵ BAYLY, C. A. *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780 – 1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.