

## BOOK REVIEW

Antti LEPPÄNEN. *Neighborhood Shopkeepers in Contemporary South Korea: Household, Work, and Locality*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2007, 268 pages. ISBN 978-952-10-3899-0 (Available online).

This book is about the cultural concepts, categories, and classifications related to the capitalism of small shopkeepers in Seoul in the late 1990s. It is based on field-work that was conducted when Korea was facing a major economic crisis, commonly called the “IMF crisis” there, referring to the International Monetary Fund that imposed stringent conditions on the nations in Southeast and East Asia that sought its help. This book indicates how the economic and social consequences of the crisis was not limited to the salaried middle class, but also heavily affected small business and the self-employed, and shows how the measures of “recovery” did not reach the “ordinary people,” the *sŏmin*, at the level of the neighborhood. This book is based on intensive ethnographic research concerning the ways the crisis was perceived and faced by small shopkeepers in their daily life, investigating how they adjusted their lives according to social and economic ups and downs. These shopkeepers were the owners of small individual business establishments, like restaurants, rice-mills, hairdressing salons, garment mending shops, laundries and *syupŏ*, that is, grocery stores.

From the ethnographic data, Leppänen picks up the shopkeepers' voices on the cultural conceptualization, categorization, and classifications of capitalism, extracting them from the shopkeepers' daily conversations and their daily practices. At the same time through a comparative analysis, he brings out the differences in the contextual usage of terminology and its semantic values as it is used by scholars, politicians, journalists, and shopkeepers.

Leppänen introduces the reader to the realm of the daily life of shopkeepers from the very first pages, describing what happens during a “normal” day of his fieldwork, which consisted of participant observation in the small shops of the ordinary neighborhood he selected as the domain of his investigations. Clients come and go, they chat with shopkeepers, a neighbor comes in and whiles away some time with the shopkeepers, the wife of the shop owner pays a visit to another shopkeeper, the ethnographer is asked to keep an eye on the shop while the owners go for lunch, he receives phone calls, takes notes, the shopkeeper's children return from school and drop in at the shop before going home...

The first two chapters introduce about thirty individual people as representatives of the category of neighborhood shopkeepers. From the outset the reader can immediately feel *chŏng* (“affection”) in the sense used by a professor to Leppänen when commenting on the topic the author had chosen, by saying that the *sŏmin* have a lot of *chŏng*. *Chŏng* is a determinant cultural aspect that is always present in the engaging reports of conversations or the descriptions of speech events the ethnographer provides. In the third chapter “Four Portraits

of Shopkeepers” the reader can grasp the personality of each shopkeeper, and their life stories tell us how they have changed from life as salary men to life as shopkeepers, adapting to social circumstances. It is in the fourth chapter “Neighborhood Shopkeeper” that “the complex relationship” between household and family and shopkeeping is explored. The main point here is that Leppänen finds the application of the notion of “family business” in the sense of “generational hierarchy, authority, and continuity of the family” to the neighborhood shopkeeper inadequate. His field work data indicate the difficulty of drawing conclusions, but also that the Confucian ideology based on a generational and gendered hierarchy and genealogical continuity is applied only partially in small business. Parents feel obliged to support the education of their children even if they do not help in the shop, and the ambition of the parents is not to pass their business to their offspring, as it is conceived as temporary work performed to achieve a goal (money needed for the education of the children, or the acquisition of a bigger business).

The issue of gender is a sensitive and recurrent *topos* in the whole book. After all, most of those interviewed were women and not their husbands, who almost disappear behind their wives. The simple reason for this might be that the ethnographer was in contact more with these talkative women than their more reticent husbands. The fifth chapter “Women as Shop Proprietors: Exercising ‘Life Energy’” is an excursus on how shopkeeper women see themselves, with their sense of identity based on high self-esteem and pride in the choices they have made. Particularly meaningful here is the concept of “Life Energy” (*saenghwallyök*), that is economic capability, which emerges in specific contexts in a way that is both gendered and stratified. Leppänen gives details of three women who apply this term to men when they lack the economic capacity to provide for the household and to women “when they exercise it.” Very interesting are also the final three chapters on the cultural concepts of “money,” “leisure (*nolda*),” and “categories of identification” in the light of notions formulated in daily life by the shopkeepers. Leppänen provides a penetrating analysis of the various semantic values of these terms from a sociolinguistic point of view, giving examples of their contextualization which show that their cultural conceptualization is different from the definitions given in the dictionaries.

The book is very well structured and Leppänen has also used the data he has collected in his fieldwork for a cross-cultural analysis in comparison with the work of researchers who have done work in other places in Asia. Each chapter introduces a theoretical background against which he places his own fieldwork data. One of the results of this approach is that he is able to demonstrate that in the case of neighborhood shopkeepers, the meanings of “class,” “family business,” and “life energy” possess specific cultural content.

One weak point is that when reading the book many questions arise, some of which are answered in the following chapters while others are not. The reader might also feel uncomfortable because of the fact that the voices of the males or husbands are overshadowed by that of the women. Whenever the women deal with topics regarding the management of household, economic capability (*saenghwallyök*), leisure, and money in terms of gender distinction, one is made to wonder what

BOOK REVIEW

men think about the same topics, and it would have been interesting to hear, for example, how they conceptualize *saenghwallyŏk* in comparison with the way it is defined by their wives or other women.

Antonetta L. BRUNO  
*University of Rome "La Sapienza"*  
antonetta.bruno@uniroma1.it

## BOOK REVIEW

Leigh K. JENCO, *Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 282 pages. ISBN: 9780521760607 (Hardcover). 100 USD.

Like many Chinese political figures of the early twentieth century, the life of Zhang Shizhao 章士釗 (1881-1973) is full of controversies and twists and turns. In the 1900s, he was a revolutionary determined to bring down the Qing dynasty. In the 1910s, he was an eloquent political thinker giving thoughtful suggestions for building a new Chinese Republic. But in the 1920s, as a high-ranking official of the Beiyang government, he used his power to suppress student protests. After 1949, he managed to win the trust of Mao Zedong, who protected him during the Cultural Revolution when all conservatives—inside or outside the Chinese Communist Party—were brutally attacked. Due to his complex life and alleged conservatism, Zhang Shizhao seldom appears in mainstream accounts of modern Chinese history. If he does appear, he is often portrayed as a heavy-handed official (nicknamed “the tiger minister”) who was out of touch with his times.

Breaking the long silence, Leigh Jenco’s *Making the Political* is the first full-length monograph about Zhang Shizhao in a Western language. It is also the first attempt in any language that carefully examines Zhang’s political theory and thoughtfully compares it to contemporary Western political philosophy. In Jenco’s words, her book is written with a “dual commitment to area-based and theoretical scholarship” (ix). As regards area-based scholarship, she treats Zhang as an innovative political theorist who developed a unique perspective on republicanism in response to the disintegration in China after the 1911 Revolution. She argues that Zhang promoted an individualistic approach to political intervention, even though the majority of his contemporaries were interested in forming a powerful and elitist government. With respect to theoretical scholarship, she uses Zhang’s individualistic approach to political intervention to raise a series of questions that are central to contemporary political philosophy, namely: “How can our shared, humanly created environment be effectively transformed—to make it better, less confining, more tractable to our control? Is it even possible to change, in a spontaneous and non-coerced way, the social and political world we inhabit? ... Can ordinary individuals act for change, even if no one has enough already in common to make those actions effective or legitimate?” (1). Although Zhang was responding to a political environment substantially different from that of today’s mature democracies, Jenco finds that his ideas are stunningly similar to those of Hannah Arendt, William Connolly, Sheldon Wolin, Bonnie Honig, and Hanna Pitkin.

For Jenco, what links Zhang Shizhao to contemporary Western political philosophy is the question of founding (and hence, the title of the book “making the political”). For Zhang, “founding” meant the establishment of a new polity—

the political structure, legal system, social practices, and human relationships—that would transform China from an imperial regime to a republic of citizens. Its goal was to create an environment wherein individuals would freely and voluntarily participate in politics. To encourage active participation, Zhang saw “founding” not as a single event of creating a political entity, but as daily, unplanned, and self-initiated actions at the local and personal levels.

Similarly, contemporary theorists of democratic politics also see “founding” as a daily practice of recreating citizenship and democratic governance. Instead of relying on political structure, legal system, and mass movements to sustain a democracy, they emphasize individual initiative and personal commitment. For them, true democracy must be renewed and reinvigorated by each citizen on a daily basis. Thus, as Bonnie Honig points out, “[e]veryday, democracies resocialize, capture, or reinterpellate citizens into their political institutions and culture in ways those citizens do not freely will, nor could they” (quoted on pages 13-14 of *Making the Political*).

In the book, Jenco identifies the three sources of Zhang’s thought: British liberalism, democratic theory, and late imperial Confucianism. By showing the eclectic origins of Zhang’s thought, Jenco achieves three goals. First, she demonstrates that Zhang’s individualistic approach to political intervention was a product of his time. In her words, Zhang’s political theory was “informed by contemporary liberal values, conditioned by the new attempts at republican rule in [early twentieth-century] China, and yet deeply indebted to notions of political agency and institutional structure that developed under China’s late imperial government” (27). She argues that by drawing from a variety of sources, Zhang created a unique approach to political intervention that was Western in principle and Chinese in practice.

Second, by emphasizing the eclectic origins of Zhang’s thought, Jenco highlights the importance of Zhang’s views even though many of them seemed preposterous to his contemporaries. A case in point was his unwavering support for “rule by law” (*fazhi*) when many of his contemporaries considered “rule by man” (*renzhi*) as more likely to be accepted by the Chinese. To explain Zhang’s view, Jenco devotes a whole chapter to the debate. After a careful comparison of both sides’ arguments, she points out that Zhang “is less concerned with promoting either men or institutions than he is with finding a non-coercive path to social and political change” (99).

Third, by underlining the multiple origins of Zhang’s view, Jenco questions the bias of some Western scholars who see non-European thought as an imperfect or incomplete replica of European philosophy. Through a discussion of Zhang’s thought, Jenco shows that the political debates in early twentieth-century China are not only *historically* significant but also *theoretically* inspiring, because they address the question of what constitutes a democracy. As demonstrated in Zhang’s approach to political intervention, Western political theorists will benefit from a study of modern Chinese political debates where “some forms of Confucianism can accommodate egalitarian impulses, some forms of liberalism can be focused on personal effort as much as on institutions, and some forms of democracy can

harbor individualistic strains” (27).

Though insightful and inspiring, *Making the Political* suffers at times from its ambitious goals. Speaking to both historians of modern China and theorists of democratic politics, the book shifts back and forth between historical narratives and theoretical discussions. Certainly this constant movement between history and theory can yield fruitful results, such as the brilliant discussion of the debate on “rule by man” and “rule by law” in Chapter 4. At the same time, it can create confusion and gaps, such as the long theoretical discussion of Zhang’s notions of self-awareness, the self-use of action, and accommodation in Chapters 6-8, which seem to stand apart from the rest of the book.

Occasionally Jenco appears to be aware of the danger of reaching two different audiences. To historians of modern China, she admits that her decision to focus on Zhang’s thought from 1911 to 1919 “entails sacrificing historical breadth to gain theoretical depth” (41). Although Jenco does not specify what she means by historical breadth, she is probably referring to Zhang’s checkered life, especially his harsh treatment of student protesters who seemed to share his individualistic approach to political invention. To theorists of democratic politics, she asks them to keep in mind the historical context when assessing Zhang’s political vision (ix). By emphasizing the historical context, she avoids discussing some of Zhang’s ideas that do not fully match Western liberalism, such as Zhang’s notion of the self being a member of complex networks that are historically, culturally, and socially constituted.

While both groups of readers will probably find problems in Jenco’s book, they will certainly gain new insights from it. By focusing on the question of founding, Jenco demonstrates that the quest for democracy is not limited to the peoples in Europe and North America. It has also been the goal of many Chinese since the early twentieth century.

Tze-ki HON  
 State University of New York, Geneseo  
 hon@geneseo.edu

## BOOK REVIEW

Guy PODOLER. *Monuments, Memory, and Identity: Constructing the Colonial Past in South Korea*. Worlds of East Asia Series No. 18. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2011. 272 pages. ISBN-13: 978-3034306607 (Hardcover). 79.95 USD.

This work, based upon the author's doctoral thesis, sets out to examine South Korea's "commemorative landscape" in the form of key memorial structures of that country's physical landscape (what the author also calls "mnemonic sites"), such as cemeteries, memorial halls/museums, and monuments, seeking evidence of South Korea's official construction of history and national identity. These physical sites constitute what the author terms "tangible history," a physical rendering of a particular view of the past, in most cases the "official view" promoted by the state. Thus, the "constructing" of the title carries the dual meaning of "manufacturing" the past through a selective choice of historical examples and the construction of physical memorial sites in which to encapsulate these stories. Such physical, mnemonic sites serve official history particularly well for they carry the aura of permanence, speak to the masses and to the emotions, and are able to override the ambiguities that tend to undermine orthodoxy and thereby to present a more simplified version of events.

Prof. Podoler (currently of the University of Haifa, Israel) divides his study into four thematic chapters in which he examines by turns South Korea's construction of Korean roots (Chapter 1), its official rendering of the years of colonial domination (Chapters 2 and 3), and finally its construction of the notion of patriotism (Chapter 4). These are followed by a short summing up in the form of a conclusion. The author admits up front that the problem of defining the "collective" historical consciousness of the South Korean nation is problematic, for in the end he cannot get inside people's heads. What he is left with is an admission that his study is of the way the South Korean government has attempted to construct national identity (rather than how that "construction" has been perceived and accepted/rejected on the popular level). He does this by making a close and critical inspection of both the physical layout and accompanying narrative of a few major memorial sites, prime among these being the Independence Hall (Tongnip kinyömgwan), the National Cemeteries in Seoul and Taejön, the War Memorial in Seoul (Chönjaeng kinyömgwan), Södaemun Prison History Hall (Södaemun hyöngmuso yöksagwan), and the memorial hall to An Chung-gün.

Podoler's task is really twofold. While his primary task is to examine how these physical memorial sites in South Korea seek to depict the country's past (i.e., their "tangible history"), in the process he also sets himself a second task of delineating the history of the sites themselves. Not surprisingly, the two are intimately connected. As the author points out, the construction of elaborate memorial sites began in earnest in the 1980s and reached into the 1990s, in great part in response to the rising *minjung* movement that was effectively rolling back

the blanket of authoritarianism in South Korea (and in so doing threatening to rewrite official history). By the construction of such grandiose sites the government in part hoped to appropriate the *minjung* message.

Though the author's focus is South Korea—and thus ostensibly restricted to the years post 1948—he still treats of ancient and premodern Korea insofar as South Korea's official depiction of those periods speaks to how it seeks to situate itself in the present. In the first chapter, for instance, Podoler examines South Korea's official rendering of the Tan'gun myth, Paektusan, and other "heroic" aspects of premodern Korean history. In the treatment of the Tan'gun story at the Independence Hall and elsewhere, the author sees a sort of fulcrum by which was erected a renewed national consciousness, something further evidenced by South Korea's establishment of a National Foundation Day (commemorating the establishment of the Korean nation by Tan'gun) and the adoption of the Tan'gun calendar (Tan'gi) by the infant South Korean government.

In the subsequent two chapters Podoler makes an equal effort to examine how selected South Korean memorial sites treat the colonial period. In their depictions Podoler discerns two major tropes: that of the brutal occupier and the (anti-colonial) struggle of the occupied. The constant in the author's view is that official history in South Korea (as in North Korea) is an attempt to forge a nation—strong, of single will, and more legitimate than its counterpart on the peninsula. To take one example presented by the author: official sites in South Korea marginalize the 1926 June 10 Manse Movement (Yuksip manse undong) and the 1929 Kwangju Student Movement (Kwangju haksang undong) because of their leftist connotations (150). Indeed, it is very hard to make an assessment of South Korea's depiction of its past—and the rationale behind such depictions—in a vacuum, that is, without full consideration of how its rival to the north is attempting the same thing. To be fair, Podoler does on several occasions sidetrack into a discussion of North Korean historiography (notably in discussing the colonial era and the Tan'gun myth). But the very fact that these sections read as digressions speaks to the need to study the two in tandem.

The final chapter is an insightful examination of South Korea's construction of patriotism. Here the author studies how the colonial period in particular has served as a focal point of South Korea's official construction of patriotism through a close look at the memorial sites related to An Chung-gün, Yun Pong-gil, and Ryu Kwan-sun, among others. That Korea's colonial era should serve such an end need hardly be surprising. Nearly all such notions of patriotic sentiment are born of a struggle with a would-be or actual outside oppressor. In South Korea's case, however, one has that added dimension of legitimacy vis-à-vis North Korea.

There is little to criticize in terms of the author's presentation. Podoler has been meticulous about the gadfly of Romanization and the book benefits by a thorough indexing. The images are plentiful, though not of the quality one would like. One minor point: the Korean king did not assume the title of emperor in 1907 (27) but in 1897. The book's title is somewhat misleading in that the author is not solely examining South Korea's view of the "colonial past." Though the colonial period does dominate the discussion, it seems rather that the author is examining



the official “construction” of national identity in South Korea through tangible monuments, an identity that encompasses more than simply the colonial period, as the chapters of the work indicate.

Prof. Podoler has written an admirably thorough and well-structured treatise on a cumbersome and multi-layered subject. In many ways his subject is a moving target, for official views of the past are constantly in flux. This presents the danger that his treatise may not hold true tomorrow, as South Korea continues to reexamine and reassess the past and as competing views of that past assail official orthodoxy. The author, of course, is fully conscious of this, for as he notes, sites of memory and mourning are both built and razed, signaling shifts in official attitudes. Thus, a mnemonic site’s demolition (or renovation) is as revealing as its construction, for both signify an attempt to alter the landscape of memory. Podoler rightly notes that complexities of view pose a dominant threat to “official history,” and one may question the dominance of the official narrative as presented by the author. Indeed, deciding upon what that dominant narrative is is itself an attempt to establish some sort of orthodoxy, be it only academic. Another area of debate: in the course of providing historical background and context and of telling the history of the sites themselves, the author is perforce required to describe the “objective” history of the Korean peninsula. At times this seems an almost paradoxical process: on the one hand positing that history is a matter of presentation (the postmodernist stance wherein history is an ideological conflict between competing “narratives” or “discourses”) and yet to describe the memorial sites and their narratives, Podoler must confess to the existence of a more or less “objective” history to which such narratives are to be juxtaposed. Finally, in attempting to delineate the origins of national identity and patriotic sentiment in South Korea there is always the danger of putting the cart before the horse. For instance, at times the description of the monuments to patriotic heroes (and heroines) almost suggests that patriotism was something constructed by the state rather than a spontaneous popular sentiment that arose out of the tribulations and humiliation of colonization. This is not to suggest that the author believes patriotism in South Korea is something wholly manufactured by the state, only that the line between spontaneous and manufactured sentiment is an indistinct, perhaps hopelessly indistinct, one. Despite such issues—and indeed because of them, and the intellectual debate they may foster—Podoler’s text would provide insight and incitement to any graduate seminar. Two promising companions might be Hyung Il Pai’s *Constructing Korean Origins* (2000) and Sheila Miyoshi Jager’s *Narrative of Nation Building in Korea* (2003).

Like Benjamin Disraeli’s prototypical traveler, who has seen more than he remembers and remembers more than he has seen, so historiography in South Korea—as everywhere—is both more and less than the history it putatively portrays. Prof. Podoler’s text ably illustrates his own insight that “usually it is what we want to be that shapes what we make of the ancestors” (67).

Daniel C. KANE  
Vancouver, Canada  
danielkane@gmail.com