

(chapter three) and women (chapter four). While students during the Mao years were subject to plenty of ideological indoctrination and anti-Western propaganda, Lu also shows that they avidly consumed translated copies of foreign books. Some of these, of course, were works in harmony with Marxist ideologies, such as *How the Steel Was Tempered*, by Nikolai Ostrovsky; others that circulated, however, were copies of banned titles sourced from the shelves of used bookstores or homes ransacked during the height of the Cultural Revolution. Otherwise idle while schools were closed, students spent days furtively devouring whatever books they could obtain. As a result, Lu writes, “This generation of urban youth might be the most widely read in foreign literature in twentieth-century China” (p. 115).

The working women of Shanghai, by contrast, had no need to search for activities with which to fill their days. Prodded by the government to join “socialist construction,” by the late 1950s nearly 300,000 women in the city had responded by joining “alleyway production teams,” or small-scale neighbourhood-based manufacturing and service industries. Their employment was more than compliance with state propaganda, however: women sought out and fought to keep jobs that helped their family’s economic situation and offered flexible work close to their homes. Both the state and the individual benefitted and kept the alleyway production teams going.

In part three, “Under the French Parasol Trees,” Lu turns to qualities that have made Shanghai uniquely itself – its tree-lined streets (chapter five), foreign population (chapter six), and residents’ interest in stylish clothes and tasty food (chapter seven). Each of these elements lessened to some extent during the Mao years but never entirely disappeared: Lu sees glimpses of individuality and resistance in the cultivation of personal gardens and the fashionable cut of a collar worn underneath a standard Mao jacket. Small as they may seem, he argues, such expressions of personal tastes indicate “A powerful undercurrent beneath the surface of Communist asceticism” (p. 251).

Lu concedes that this undercurrent of resistance was not explicitly organized or planned. “At one level,” he explains, “it was a spontaneous struggle for survival; at another, it was a clever and persistent pursuit of comfort and pleasure” (p. 251). Lu posits that this small-scale endurance – though often muted or hidden – of older customs, objects and social status meant that after the deprivations of the Mao era Shanghai was able to bounce back quickly and reclaim its status as a cosmopolitan metropolis. The Mao years undoubtedly left their mark on the city and its people, but in *Shanghai Tai Chi* Hanchao Lu invites readers to regard these decades as an interruption, an extended but ultimately temporary flickering of the neon lights that once again illuminate its skyline.

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Beyond Citizenship: Literacy and Personhood in Everyday China, 1900–1945

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Readers matter. Reading matters to readers. And to be able to read, future readers have to gain literacy. Literary studies have taught us that texts only come into being and gain meaning when they are read by actual people. Yet, actual readers are ephemeral to researchers. While concrete readings may be crucial to them, even life-transforming, most reading acts go undocumented for posterity



and, thus, for the historian. Nonetheless, in her *Beyond Citizenship*, Di Luo is undertaking the seemingly impossible: she is tracing how the acquisition of literacy transformed the lives of many ordinary people in the first half of the 20th century in China, how various governments had their stakes in this project, and how readers were transformed, yet not necessarily in the ways the respective governments had anticipated. Based on large amounts of archival sources, reports in contemporary newspapers and books which are brought into a fruitful dialogue with extant scholarly literature, Di Luo has written a very readable social history of the early 20th century. She provides her readers not only with an overview of the policies and their repercussions at the grassroots level, but also with many stories of actual readers and how reading impacted on their lives.

The focus of the book is on literacy campaigns undertaken by both the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) targeting adult learners. Through this, Di Luo convincingly dismantles the “nation-building/modernization narrative”: since the late 19th century, this narrative had gained traction when reformists established a distinct correlation between the strength of a country and its levels of literacy and schooling – notwithstanding practical issues such as how to measure literacy. Literacy thus became a marker of modernization, not only for the individual, but for the entire country. This narrative reconfigured relations in Chinese society which were still dominated by Confucian values honouring the older generations: the young became “school-age children” and the hope for the future vis-à-vis “unschooled elders,” who were thus seen as hindering the modernization and prosperity of the country. Educators and politicians in both parties subscribed to the nation-building/modernization narrative and sought to employ it for their respective political agendas, even when they did not have clear standards for assessing and measuring literacy. Does it suffice if a person knows a few characters, and, if so, which ones? Does it suffice if a person attended a number of classes, and, if so, how many?

Di Luo’s analysis dismantles these challenges inscribed into the nation-building/modernization narrative and argues *beyond citizenship*: for individuals, being literate may have been less about being part of the nation than about everyday matters and their position as individuals within their immediate social group. Citizens had an incentive to learn how to read and write when this would help them in practical, legal or economic matters. Likewise, they could consciously choose to be (or at least pose as) illiterate when this would mean exemption from criminal prosecution. To would-be-readers, immediate social relations were more important than larger political and ideological aims. In 1920s Guangzhou under KMT rule, for example, attendance of literacy classes improved only when English classes became part of the curriculum, addressing the career aspirations of the factory workers for whom these classes were intended. Literacy thus turned out to be a tool for empowerment of the ordinary citizen, but not necessarily along the lines of those who devised and implemented literacy policies and programmes. The comparative success of the CCP’s literacy campaigns in Northern Shaanxi rested on the fact that it managed to reconcile the interests of the state with those of the individual: “[T]he relationship between strengthening the state (vis-à-vis local society) and strengthening the personal (vis-à-vis other members of society) was *compatible*, not contradictory” (p. 249).

The introduction of the book presents the conceptual framework of literacy, identity and its relationship to politics in China from 1900 to 1945. Chapter one is devoted to a discussion of the implications of the “nation-building/modernization narrative” ending on how this narrative intersects with daily practices. The following four chapters take their readers chronologically through the first half of the 20th century, putting centre stage key literacy campaigns of the KMT and the CCP. Chapter two presents campaigns by the KMT in Shanghai (1924) and in Guangzhou (1924–1926). Chapter three contrasts nationalist and communist literacy efforts during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Chapter four focuses on literacy efforts in wartime Chongqing and contrasts these with those in Hengshan, which was closer to the front, illuminating the multidimensionality of the social impact of these efforts: being a teacher and training both children and adults in literacy was as much a way of earning one’s livelihood as it was about one’s identity, despite the limited

success of adult literacy programmes. Chapter five demonstrates how from 1937–1945 the CCP in Shaanxi was relatively more successful than the KMT. While the overall success of the village winter schools still was limited, the exemplary cases that made it into the record demonstrate that for villagers becoming literate was not necessarily about becoming modern citizens, but more about redefining their relationship within their community. Moreover, these recorded cases of successful winter schools created a new narrative that would be relevant as it made its way through the political administration.

The book addresses scholars of 20th-century China and will be of interest to colleagues and students in cultural studies, book studies as well as intellectual history. *Beyond Citizenship* thus forms part of a growing body of literature that puts readers centre stage, demonstrating the impact of reading on individuals as well as on their larger social contexts, such as *The Cultural Sociology of Reading* (Thumala Olave [ed.], Palgrave, 2022), *The Edinburgh History of Reading* (Jonathan Rose [ed.], Edinburgh University Press, 2020), and the work of Joan Judge therein (“In search of the Chinese common reader: vernacular knowledge in an age of new media”). Written in a very accessible style, with concise summaries at the end of all chapters and a conclusion wrapping up the main points of the argument, the book, or its individual chapters, can easily be assigned as classroom reading.

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Scents of China: A Modern History of Smell

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During the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic, anosmia – the partial or total loss of smell – was one of the more common markers of the virus. For some patients, such as chefs and sommeliers, who can spend years honing their sense of smell, this outcome could be professionally devastating, while for others the result was more likely a sudden focus on a realm of sensory experience that previously they may have largely taken for granted. While entire academic disciplines are devoted to the study of visual and auditory culture, comparatively less formal attention has been given to olfaction – even though it is well recognized that smell is of critical importance to many basic human activities, ranging from courtship to cuisine. Xuelei Huang’s elegant study attempts to address this scholarly deficit by considering some of the ways that odour has been represented and imagined in China from the late imperial period to the present. Through an engaging analysis of sources ranging from the classic 18th-century Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* to relatively unknown Western travelogues, Huang details how odour has helped mediate shifting perceptions of Chinese society by foreigners and Chinese alike.

As Huang notes in her preface, she began this project while based in Taipei’s Academia Sinica and then continued her research in the European cities of Nantes, Vienna, Heidelberg and Edinburgh. She observes that each of these sites has its own distinct “smellscape,” and one of the themes that runs through her project similarly involves how olfactory connotations are shaped