

The Shanghai-Hong Kong-Singapore Network and Maritime Cultural Production^{*}

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Abstract

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company developed book distribution networks that spread throughout China. This article demonstrates that they also extended those distribution networks internationally to Southeast Asia to sell books to overseas Chinese communities there. They first set up branch offices and affiliated retail centers in Singapore; from there, they disseminated books to cities and towns throughout the region. Both publishers also set up printing factories in Hong Kong, which facilitated the supply of books to the Southeast Asia market. These companies developed a transnational publishing strategy through which they gathered market information about demand in Southeast Asia, distilled it into a basis for compiling new products in Shanghai, used a

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flexible production system to print texts either in Shanghai or Hong Kong, and then distributed them through the regional marketing center of Singapore. This system took advantage of a semi-colonial/colonial urban network linking Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore. The transnational approach of the Chinese publishers paralleled that of the older English-language publishing company, Kelly & Walsh, Ltd., which had branches in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Yokohama. The publishers differed, however, in the structure of their transnational/trans-colonial production and distribution systems. Kelly & Walsh diversified their publications by recruiting potential authors in each of their locations and selling books locally. Each branch was thus a center for both publishing and distribution, creating an acephalous, or “headless,” network. By contrast, because textbooks, which were labor- and capital-intensive, were the leading commodities for the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company, both publishers developed a hub-and-spoke system of centralized production and regional and international distribution. Through these distribution networks, these companies circulated books that contributed in distinctive ways to British and Chinese colonial projects.

Keywords: publishing, distribution, overseas Chinese, Southeast Asia, colonialism

The story of Shanghai’s modern publishers has often been told as a narrative of national expansion of distribution networks. A fundamental part of the account of the growth of leading publishers such as the Commercial Press, Zhonghua Book Company, and the World Book Company has been the description of their establishment of branch offices and retail stores in cities and towns throughout China.¹ Development of those branches created a distribution system across

¹ Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), chap. 1; Robert Culp, “Building a National Print Market: A Preliminary Analysis of Book Distribution in Late Qing and Republican China,” in Huang Dan 黃旦, ed., *Chengshi chuanbo: Jiyu Zhongguo chengshi de lishi yu xianshi* (Urban dissemination: Based on the history and reality of China’s cities) 城市傳播：基於中國城市的歷史與現實 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 2015), pp. 194–222; Dai Ren (Jean-Pierre Drège) 戴仁, *Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan 1897-1949* (Shanghai Commercial Press, 1897–1949) 上海商務印書館 1897-1949, trans. Li Tongshi 李桐實 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1996); Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).

China's macroregions, allowing for nationwide circulation of a range of publications, especially textbooks and journals, as well as reference books, major series collections of all kinds, and ordinary books. Extensive distribution within or across China, through the levels of William Skinner's (1925–2008) standard marketing networks, contributed to a form of national communication and integration that had been impossible or uncommon during the late imperial period, despite its robust pre-industrial publishing system.²

However, the story of Shanghai's publishers is also a transnational or trans-colonial narrative of overseas distribution and production. As this article will show, the major publishers Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company extended their distribution networks outside of China and into Southeast Asia to cater to overseas Chinese communities primarily in the Straits Settlements, British Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies but also in Thailand, Burma, French Indochina, and the Philippines. The companies were transnational because their systems of production and distribution extended beyond China's borders; they were trans-colonial because their marketing and distribution systems ranged across a number of colonies in Southeast Asia. Through this strategy, they gathered market information about demand in Southeast Asia, distilled it into a basis for compiling

² Skinner emphasized circulation of goods within rather than across macrosystems. G. William Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977). William Rowe has argued that a national market in certain commodities formed by at least the Qing period. William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796–1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), pp. 52–89. While acknowledging Rowe's point, one can also recognize the validity of Skinner's argument that transportation across macroregional boundaries was significantly more expensive than transportation within regions. Because woodblock technology was relatively cheap and mobile, it created an incentive to produce standard texts in proximity to known markets, rather than ship finished products over long distances. As a result, during the late imperial period, there were multiple publishing centers in Nanjing, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Jianyang, Huizhou, Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Guangzhou, Foshan, Xuwan, and Sibao, each of which catered to regionally bounded markets. Cynthia J. Brokaw, "On the History of the Book in China," in Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, eds., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 27–30; Joseph P. McDermott, *A Social History of the Chinese Book: Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), pp. 99–102.

new products in Shanghai, and then used a flexible production system to print and distribute texts either from Shanghai or Hong Kong, depending on political and economic conditions.

This system took advantage of a colonial urban network linking Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Even though Shanghai was somewhat distinct in its “semi-colonialism,”³ with at least partial Chinese sovereignty, Jürgen Osterhammel characterizes all three cities as “maritime enclaves” that involved “indirect commercial penetration of a hinterland.”⁴ The operative commercial hinterlands for Singapore were what Osterhammel calls the “exploitation colonies” of Southeast Asia, especially British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, which will be the primary foci of discussion in this article. Mainland China was the hinterland for Shanghai and Hong Kong, with key foci, respectively, in the lower Yangzi region and the Pearl River Delta. The free trade system that developed across British and Dutch colonies from the mid-nineteenth century into the 1930s provided the infrastructure (harbors, postal services, and telegraph) and institutions (banks, courts, and legal systems) that allowed both Chinese and European commercial agents to pursue profits and grow their businesses.⁵

Publishing companies were one kind of business that operated in these trans-colonial commercial networks. The primarily English-language publisher Kelly & Walsh, for instance, developed branches in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Yokohama beginning in the 1870s and 1880s, and sustained a robust business into the 1930s. Starting in the 1910s, the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company used the shipping and postal networks between Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore that allowed for the fluid movement of

³ On the evolving dynamics of Shanghai’s semi-colonialism, see Bryna Goodman, “Improvisations on a Semicolonial Theme, or, How to Read a Celebration of Transnational Urban Community,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 59:4 (November 2000), pp. 889–926.

⁴ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, trans. Shelley L. Frisch, with a forward by Robert L. Tignor (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2005), p. 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 72–73.

people, information, and goods to compile and print books in Shanghai and later Hong Kong, and to then distribute them through Singapore into Southeast Asia. Though all these companies were trans-colonial, their corporate structures differed significantly. Because Kelly & Walsh's offices in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore were all simultaneously sites of production and distribution, they operated as what I will call an acephalous, or "headless," network. By contrast, the Commercial Press and Zhonghua, which used Shanghai and then Hong Kong as publication centers and Singapore as a distribution node, developed a hub-and-spoke structure of transnational commercialization.

Both structures were distinctive in terms of the typology of corporations operating in China during the early twentieth century. In *Encountering Chinese Networks*, Sherman Cochran describes how business historians have drawn a normative contrast between more centralized "European" and "Japanese" corporations, which were structured hierarchically, and "Chinese" corporations, which were organized more as networks built on family and native place ties.⁶ In his own analysis of six corporations, Cochran demonstrates that each of the Chinese-owned and foreign corporations he studied integrated both hierarchies and networks into their business practices.⁷ Going somewhat against type, the British firm Kelly & Walsh was organized horizontally and operated more on a network basis, where each branch was both a producer and distributor for the others. However, the social networks it mobilized were a product of the social and cultural dynamics in the colonial expatriate society in which the publisher operated. Their authors were mostly local colonial agents, such as officials, merchants, and missionaries. Moreover, an Anglophone expatriate readership was their primary market in the enclave colonial cities of East and Southeast Asia, so they did not

⁶ Sherman Cochran, *Encountering Chinese Networks: Western, Japanese, and Chinese Corporations in China, 1880–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 2–6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, conclusion.

need to access the Chinese native place networks required to penetrate Chinese markets as did many other foreign businesses.

By contrast, the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company were both highly centralized and vertically integrated, with corporate centers for compilation and printing in Shanghai that stood at the middle of an expansive network of regional and international branch offices for marketing and distribution.⁸ The importance of textbooks to both companies' businesses shaped this corporate structure that appeared highly Westernized. Mobilization of intellectual labor in editing departments to compile new series of textbooks encouraged centralization, while distribution to local schools throughout China and among overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia required extensive networks of branch stores. As they expanded into Southeast Asia, though, both companies also benefited from two kinds of Chinese native place networks: networks of literati from the lower Yangzi region cultural core who served as both publishing agents and local schoolteachers in Southeast Asia; and the Cantonese and Fujianese native place networks that organized life in overseas Chinese communities.

The organizational structures and business dynamics of these publishing companies had important implications for their relationship to colonialism as a political, commercial, and cultural system. Kelly & Walsh, the Commercial Press, and Zhonghua Book Company were all private companies that were not directly tied to state institutions. In this regard, they differed significantly from contemporaneous German news agencies and Japanese telecommunications companies that were entangled with state institutions and focused more on

⁸ Moreover, as Chris Reed has shown, both companies also adopted the Western-style joint-stock, limited liability corporation model from early in their operations. Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937*, pp. 185–188.

extending imperial power than generating profits, which were frequently sacrificed for political priorities.⁹ None of these companies were direct agents of the state.

As profit-oriented companies, though, Kelly & Walsh as well as the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company operated in distinctive ways in the colonial commercial systems of East and Southeast Asia. As noted above, Kelly & Walsh served primarily an Anglophone expatriate readership and was not geared toward tapping into the large Chinese consumer market, even from its bases in Shanghai and Hong Kong. It was one foreign business, at least, that did not seek to profit from the large domestic Chinese market. Like other corporations run by Chinese merchants, the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company sought to take advantage of the infrastructure and institutions of colonial maritime enclaves to earn profits. However, prominent Chinese-owned transnational concerns such as Aw Boon-haw's (1882–1954) Tiger Balm business, which built up its own publication network of newspapers throughout Southeast Asia and China for commercial advertising purposes, and Chaozhou (Teochew) family companies trading in rice, sugar, and opium used the colonies' advantages of mobility, protection, and access to diverse resource bases to expand their penetration of the China market.¹⁰ By contrast, the Commercial Press and Zhonghua both first fully elaborated their markets throughout mainland China. Then they used the colonial maritime enclaves to further extend their distribution networks into the European exploitation colonies of Southeast Asia, developing a new iteration of longstanding

⁹ Heidi J. S. Tworek, *News from Germany: The Competition to Control World Communications, 1900–1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2019); Daqing Yang, *Technology of Empire: Telecommunications and Japanese Expansion in Asia, 1883–1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010).

¹⁰ Sherman Cochran, *Chinese Medicine Men: Consumer Culture in China and Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), chap. 6; Melissa Macauley, *Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China's Maritime Frontier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), chaps. 6, 9.

Chinese economic neo-colonialism there, as Shanghai-based publishers came to dominate overseas Chinese book markets.¹¹

Because the commodities they sold were books, the systems of product distribution of these companies also had significant cultural impacts. Scholars such as Paul Cohen have emphasized how the urban networks of the coastal littoral served as a space of interface with global economic and cultural systems as well as the entry point for new forms of thought and social and political institutions within China.¹² While acknowledging this dynamic, the circulation of books produced in Shanghai to overseas Chinese readers across Southeast Asia also provided a vital textual infrastructure for building and sustaining a transnational, Sinophone reading public abroad. Those books, especially textbooks for overseas Chinese schools built by growing numbers of overseas Chinese migrants, were a fundamental medium for the process that Jing Tsu characterizes as linguistic “governance.” Through the material production and circulation of texts, Sinophone writing produced in China was extended to readers abroad.¹³ Not until the end of the 1940s did overseas Chinese publishers in Southeast Asia produce the majority of textbooks used by the schools in their own communities. At the same time, Kelly & Walsh’s publications provided colonial elites with linguistic, commercial, and cultural resources that facilitated the European colonial project in both China and Southeast Asia in several different ways.

¹¹ Macauley, for instance, demonstrates how China-based firms and overseas Chinese merchant communities came to dominate key sectors of the Southeast and East Asian colonial economies, despite European political control. Melissa Macauley, *Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China's Maritime Frontier*, chaps. 2, 6, 9.

¹² Paul A. Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang T'ao and Reform in Late Ch'ing China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), part IV.

¹³ Jing Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 12. In other sections of this project, I demonstrate that this “governance” was not a one-way process directed only from Shanghai (even less from Nanjing or Beijing). Rather, overseas Chinese expectations about textbook content shaped the production of those texts, and *huaqiao* 華僑 journals produced overseas circulated back into China, joining a domestic textual landscape.

I. Pioneer of the Colonial Publishing Network: Kelly & Walsh, Ltd.

Kelly & Walsh, Ltd., was the first publisher to take full advantage of the colonial commercial networks that developed among the port cities of East and Southeast Asia during the second half of the nineteenth century. By the 1880s, Kelly & Walsh formed a publishing and distribution system that connected Shanghai, Hong Kong, Yokohama, and Singapore to deliver English-language books to readers across the region. Two main features distinguished the company's transnational and trans-colonial corporate structure. First, the British colonial publisher's branches each engaged in both publishing and distribution. As a result of those independent publishing efforts, the relations between the company's branches were organized along the lines of an acephalous network. As the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company developed their own transnational and trans-colonial corporate structures during the early twentieth century, they diverged from Kelly & Walsh's model in ways that reflected their own corporate histories and goals.

Kelly and Company opened in Shanghai, probably during the late 1860s, to sell English-language books. In 1876 Kelly's proprietor, J. M. Kelly, partnered with F. & C. Walsh's Arthur Walsh to form Kelly & Walsh, which operated as a printer, publisher, and bookseller that also traded in other commercial products, ticketed for entertainment venues, and even ran the lucrative Luzon lottery for a time.¹⁴ The company's seven initial shareholders were all English stationary

¹⁴ Quek See Ling, Shawn Pang, Kiew Li Lian, and Daryl Li, comps., *Passage of Time: Singapore Bookstores, 1881–2016* (Singapore: Chou Sing Chu Foundation, 2016), pp. 83–84; Sun Yimin 孫軼旻, “Biefa yinshuguan yu jindai Zhong Xi wenhua jiaoliu” (Kelly & Walsh, Ltd., and cultural exchange in modern China) 別發印書館與近代中西文化交流, *Xueshu yuekan* 學術月刊, no. 7 (2008), pp. 103–104; *The Chronicle & Directory for China, Japan, and the Philippines* (Hong Kong: Daily Press Office, 1877), pp. 122, 186, 302.

merchants.¹⁵ One of them, Thomas Brown, who had served at Kelly & Walsh as a clerk from its earliest days in the 1870s, held a significant majority of the shares (1,114 of 1,350) and served as director based in Shanghai from the 1880s to 1895.¹⁶ Besides publishing books, the company also printed periodicals, such as the *Journal of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. The company was incorporated in Hong Kong in 1885 and integrated a branch distributor there that had a storefront at 19 Queen's Road.¹⁷ By 1881 the company set up a branch store at 5 Battery Road in Singapore.¹⁸ During the 1890s the Singapore storefront relocated to a central position at 32 Raffles Place, eventually in 1935 occupying its own building there.¹⁹ By 1905 it had also set up a print shop in Singapore on Orchard Road.²⁰

¹⁵ Sun Yimin, "Biefa yinshuguan yu jindai Zhong Xi wenhua jiaoliu," pp. 104–105.

¹⁶ For the distribution of shares, see *ibid.*, pp. 104–105. For Brown's roles at Kelly & Walsh, see *The Chronicle & Directory for China, Japan, and the Philippines* (1877), pp. 73, 302; *ibid.* (1882), pp. 242, 362; *The Chronicle & Directory for China, Corea, Japan, the Philippines, Indo-China, Straits Settlements, Siam, Borneo, Malay States, &c.* (Hong Kong: Daily Press Office, 1892), pp. 123, 229, 335.

¹⁷ "Kelly & Walsh," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 9 (1969), pp. 163–164.

¹⁸ *The Chronicle & Directory for China, Corea, Japan, the Philippines, Cochinchina, Annam, Tonquin, Siam, Borneo, Straits Settlements, Malay States, &c.* (Hong Kong: Daily Press Office, 1889), p. 695; *The Chronicle & Directory for China, Corea, Japan, the Philippines, Indo-China, Straits Settlements, Siam, Borneo, Malay States, &c.* (1892), p. 335.

¹⁹ *The Chronicle and Directory for China, Japan, Corea, Indo-China, Straits Settlements, Malay States, Siam, Netherlands India, Borneo, The Philippines, &c.* (Hong Kong: Daily Press Office, 1899), p. 440.

²⁰ Quek See Ling, Shawn Pang, Kiew Li Lian, and Daryl Li, comps., *Passage of Time: Singapore Bookstores, 1881–2016*, p. 85; Sun Yimin, "Biefa yinshuguan yu jindai Zhong Xi wenhua jiaoliu," p. 104; *The Directory & Chronicle for China, Japan, Corea, Indo-China, Straits Settlements, Malay States, Siam, Netherlands India, Borneo, the Philippines, &c.* (Hong Kong: Daily Press Office, 1904), p. 619; *ibid.* (1905), p. 626. Ling et al. and Sun both date the Orchard Road print factory from 1905, but Kelly & Walsh undoubtedly operated a printing shop in Singapore from an earlier date. For one, there is a reference to the print shop in the 1904 edition of *The Directory & Chronicle*. Moreover, there are multiple earlier references in the press. See, for instance, "A Handsome Souvenir," *The Straits Budget* [Singapore], November 24, 1900, p. 14; *The Straits Times* [Singapore], February 7, 1902, p. 4; *The Straits Times*, February 10, 1902, p. 4. In addition, a report in *The Straits Times* on the retirement of Kelly & Walsh Singapore's printing department manager J. E. Tyler in 1905 claimed that he had been working there for some eight years, going back to 1897. See "A Workmen's Gift," *The Straits Times*, June 23, 1905, p. 5.

With its flagship store in Shanghai and regional branches in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Yokohama, at first glance, Kelly & Walsh's publishing and distribution system seems to resemble the hub-and-spoke structure that the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company would later adopt. Moreover, Sun Yimin demonstrates that the company's board of directors operated out of Shanghai, in a pattern that also resembled the leading Chinese commercial publishers.²¹ Closer consideration of the company's coordination of publishing, distribution, and retail marketing, however, reveals that Kelly & Walsh developed more of an acephalous network among its multiple locations. Shanghai was not the sole printing and publishing center for Kelly & Walsh; rather, all four regional branches originated publications, and the Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore branches all had print shops.²² Review of an extensive database of Kelly & Walsh publications that ranges from the 1870s into the post-World War II period, for instance, reveals that all four of Kelly & Walsh's regional offices in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Yokohama published their own books.²³ These books were then marketed through book catalogs and newspaper advertisements, and sold across the network of branches and internationally.²⁴

²¹ Sun Yimin, "Biefa yinshuguan yu jindai Zhong Xi wenhua jiaoliu," pp. 103–104.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 104. The Yokohama branch did not have a print shop or factory, yet still published its own books, most likely contracting with printers in Japan. For records of print shops at the Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore branches, see *The Chronicle and Directory for China, Japan, Corea, Indo-China, Straits Settlements, Malay States, Siam, Netherlands India, Borneo, The Philippines, &c.* (1899), pp. 172, 312, 440; *The Directory & Chronicle for China, Japan, Corea, Indo-China, Straits Settlements, Malay States, Siam, Netherlands India, Borneo, the Philippines, &c.* (1905), pp. 246, 448, 626; *ibid.* (1908), pp. 783, 1025, 1209; *ibid.*, (1922), pp. 799, 1046, 1238. Note that directory entries going back to the start of the company in the 1870s list "printers" as one of the firm's occupations.

²³ "Early Kelly & Walsh Publications," The Old China Hands Project, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131213234326/http://www.oldchinahands.org/kellywalsh.htm> (accessed June 8, 2024). Advertisements and articles from Singapore newspapers indicate that many more books were published at Kelly & Walsh Singapore than have been captured in this database. See below. That might have been the case for the other branches as well.

²⁴ *Catalogue of Books and Maps Relating to China, Japan, and the Far East on Sale by Kelly & Walsh, Ltd.* (Shanghai-Hongkong-Yokohama-Singapore, August 1909); *Third Annual Supplement to*

The Singapore branch of Kelly & Walsh marketed and sold books from the other branches of the publisher as well as from major book dealers in London, such as Macmillan, T. Fisher Unwin, and others, serving as a general distributor of English-language books. For example, in the winter of 1899–1900, Kelly & Walsh Singapore struggled to keep up with demand for Reid Arnot’s very popular *From Peking to Petersburg*, which was published in London by E. Arnold.²⁵ In the early 1900s, the branch marketed MacMillan’s *Atlas for China, Japan, and the Straits Settlements*, C. D. Tenney’s *Geography of Asia*, as well as volumes from Macmillan’s Colonial Library series.²⁶ In addition, Kelly & Walsh was the Singapore marketing agent for the leading Japanese publisher, Kinkôdô.²⁷ At the same time, it marketed and sold many volumes from other Kelly & Walsh branches and publishers across the region. For instance, in 1900 it marketed William Stanton’s book on the Triads published by Kelly & Walsh in Hong Kong and several years later Hong Kong civil servant Dyer Ball’s *Cantonese Made Easy*, his problematically titled *Five Thousand Years of John Chinaman*, and Herbert Giles’s *Chinese-English Dictionary* as well as Giles’s translation of Pu Songling’s stories.²⁸ On an annual basis, Kelly & Walsh Singapore marketed the Hong Kong

Catalogue of Books and Maps Relating to China, Japan, and the Far East on Sale by Kelly & Walsh, Ltd. (Shanghai-Hongkong-Yokohama-Singapore, October 1912); *Fourth Annual Supplement to Catalogue of Books and Maps Relating to China, Japan, and the Far East on Sale by Kelly & Walsh, Ltd.* (Shanghai-Hongkong-Yokohama-Singapore, September 1913).

²⁵ *The Straits Times*, February 7, 1900, p. 2; *The Straits Times*, April 12, 1900, p. 2; *The Straits Times*, May 9, 1900, p. 2. For an example of the London-originated publications that Kelly & Walsh mixed in with their own publications, see *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* [Singapore], January 10, 1900, p. 4.

²⁶ *The Straits Times*, May 1, 1901, p. 2; “A Geography of Asia,” *The Straits Times*, March 11, 1905, p. 5; *The Straits Times*, December 9, 1902, p. 3; “Three New Books,” *The Straits Budget*, November 30, 1904, p. 8.

²⁷ “A War Book,” *The Straits Times*, May 19, 1904, p. 5.

²⁸ “Books Received,” *The Straits Budget*, September 15, 1900, p. 9; “Cantonese Made Easy,” *The Straits Times*, November 26, 1908, p. 6; “Giles’ Chinese-English Dictionary,” *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, September 24, 1909, p. 5; “Chinese Arabian Nights,” *The Straits Times*, February 18, 1909, p. 2. See also promotional stories about books published in Shanghai by T. R. Jernigan and F. L. Hawks Pott. “Two Timely Books,” *The Straits Times*, March 24, 1904, p. 5.

Daily Press's *The Chronicle & Directory* (sometimes titled *The Directory & Chronicle*).²⁹ They also marketed and sold what could be called colonial novelty fiction and reportage published by other branches, such as *The Islanders of Hongkong*, which it advertised with the tag line "A Sister Colony Seen Through a Woman's Eyes," Lise Boehm's *China Coast Tales*, James Dalziel's *Stories of High Life in the East*, and stories and verse about contemporary Hong Kong authored by a foreign resident writing under the pen name "Dolly."³⁰

Yet Kelly & Walsh Singapore also published a considerable amount of material on its own account. The books published locally were usually either the writings of local authors or of institutions or books whose content had particular regional salience. For example, in 1900 Kelly & Walsh Singapore published a pamphlet entitled "The Roman Catholic Church of Singapore and the South African War Relief Funds" that related that church's relief efforts during the Boer War as well as a volume of verse by *Singapore Free Press* staff member Joss Chinchinjoss entitled *Friend Tommy*.³¹ But a key category of local publications focused on introducing local languages and cultures in Southeast Asia. Starting in 1900 and extending to 1903, for example, Kelly & Walsh Singapore published the three-volume set of R. J. Wilkinson's *A Malay English Dictionary*.³² The

²⁹ *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, February 21, 1901, p. 3; "The Far Eastern Directory," *The Straits Times*, March 13, 1903, p. 5; "Directory for China, Japan, and the Straits," *The Straits Times*, February 18, 1905, p. 5; "Directory and Chronicle for the Far East," *The Straits Times*, February 22, 1907, p. 11. See also the list of the "Higher Metropolitan and Provincial Authorities of China, with Genealogical Table of the Imperial Family" compiled by British legation staff in Beijing and published by Kelly & Walsh Shanghai. *The Straits Times*, November 20, 1908, p. 6.

³⁰ "The Islanders of Hongkong," *The Straits Times*, May 16, 1908, p. 8; *The Straits Times*, February 24, 1903, p. 4; "Literary Notes," *The Straits Times*, January 5, 1909, p. 2; *The Straits Times*, November 28, 1902, p. 4.

³¹ *The Straits Times*, February 24, 1900, p. 2; "Friend Tommy," *The Straits Times*, May 22, 1900, p. 3; "Friend Tommy," *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, May 23, 1900, p. 3.

³² *The Straits Times*, December 4, 1900, p. 2; "A Malay-English Dictionary," *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle* [Singapore], January 3, 1901, p. 2; "Mr. Wilkinson's New Malay Dictionary," *The Straits Times*, January 3, 1901, p. 3; "Mr. Wilkinson's Dictionary," *The Straits Times*, January 16, 1903, p. 5; *The Straits Times*, July 21, 1903, p. 2.

following year, the Singapore branch published Raffles School Headmaster C. M. Phillips's *Text-book of the Malay Peninsula*, which "combines within itself all the advantages of a history, geography and commercial intelligencer of Malaya."³³ And in 1905 they published Frank Swettenham's *Malay Vocabulary* and Dr. P. N. Gerrard's *Vocabulary of Malay Medical Terms*.³⁴ Annually they produced the *Imperial English-Malay Chinese Diary and Almanac* which was "replete with all the necessary information in connection with telegrams, post, savings banks, foreign money, stamps, duties, time table, *ghari* [i.e., carriage] and rikisha fares, distance tables, municipal rates, &c., customs holidays, ecclesiastical anniversaries &c."³⁵ These kinds of texts facilitated Europeans' linguistic and cultural understanding to aid commercial penetration and political control in Southeast Asia, especially the Malay peninsula.

Kelly & Walsh Singapore also published a number of novelty books, print collections, and administrative or legal resources that catered to the tastes or needs of foreign expatriates or that could be sent home as souvenirs. For example, in November 1900, just in time for Christmas, they produced "an extremely handsome book of Singapore views" under the title *The Gate of the Far East*.³⁶ In 1901 they offered photographic views of a recent royal visit.³⁷ And in 1902 they published colored prints of picture postcards of views in Singapore.³⁸ They also printed and distributed local travel guides, such as an illustrated booklet and

³³ "Text-book of Malaya," *The Straits Times*, May 10, 1904, p. 5.

³⁴ "Swettenham's Malay Vocabulary," *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, November 23, 1905, p. 13; *The Straits Budget*, November 23, 1905, p. 11; "Malay Medical Vocabulary," *The Straits Times*, January 13, 1906, p. 5.

³⁵ *The Straits Times*, January 8, 1902, p. 4; "Kelly and Walsh's Diary," *The Straits Times*, October 10, 1906, p. 6; *The Straits Times*, February 27, 1907, p. 6; *ibid.*, November 24, 1908, p. 6.

³⁶ "A Handsome Souvenir," *The Straits Budget*, November 24, 1900, p. 14. The collection was reprised in 1908. "The Gate of the Far East," *The Straits Times*, May 28, 1908, p. 8.

³⁷ *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, May 9, 1901, p. 285.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, July 10, 1902, p. 11.

pamphlet for travel in Java sponsored by the Tourist Office there.³⁹ Kelly & Walsh Singapore also published books about local society, such as Lillie (“Bini”) Evans’s fantasy of Chinese family life, *Banana Blossom*, a pseudonymous author’s *The Flight of an Arrow, and Other Stories*, and F. A. Rickard’s account of *Freemasonry in Singapore*.⁴⁰ It also offered as a public service very practical publications such as “an alphabetical index to the acts and ordinances in force in the Straits Settlements,” Rickard’s parity tables to assist with trade in Singapore, and articles on trade and shipping in Singapore published in “a neat pamphlet form.”⁴¹

But the Singapore branch did not just publish books of local or regional concern. Rather, it also co-published a number of general interest books that were issued by leading publishers in London. For instance, in 1907 Kelly & Walsh Singapore published a pair of books by Sir Francis Piggott, *Extraterritoriality and Nationality*, that were both simultaneously published in London by William Clowes and Sons.⁴² They also co-published George Boxall’s *History of Australian Bushrangers*, which was simultaneously published by T. Fisher Unwin in London.⁴³ But the company’s most fruitful collaboration seems to have been with Macmillan & Co., London, for whom Kelly & Walsh Singapore co-published books by a number of authors popular at the time, such as H. G. Wells, Winston Churchill, and F. Marion Crawford.⁴⁴ The publisher’s production and distribution networks, then, did not only span the region but also incorporated the major

³⁹ “Java Illustrated,” *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, August 21, 1908, p. 5; *The Straits Times*, September 7, 1908, p. 6.

⁴⁰ “The Swallow’s Nest,” *The Straits Times*, December 20, 1906, p. 8; “Current Literature,” *The Straits Times*, November 12, 1908, p. 3; *The Straits Times*, January 7, 1907, p. 6; “Books Received,” *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle*, January 15, 1907, p. 5.

⁴¹ “Saturday, Dec. 21, 1907,” *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, December 26, 1907, p. 7; “Exchange Tables,” *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, April 9, 1908, p. 232; *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, September 17, 1908, p. 4.

⁴² “Law Books Reviewed,” *The Straits Times*, November 1, 1907, p. 8.

⁴³ “Current Literature,” *The Straits Times*, April 8, 1909, p. 3.

⁴⁴ “Books Received for Review,” *The Straits Times*, November 29, 1906, p. 8.

metropolitan center of London. As such, they participated in maintaining a shared Anglophone print library that bridged between colonies and the metropole.

Consequently, Kelly & Walsh constructed publishing and distribution networks that ranged between China and Southeast Asia and that had several distinctive features. While all of Kelly & Walsh's branches marketed and distributed books from the others, each also operated as its own production center, compiling and publishing books, journals, and pamphlets written by local authors and for which there were discrete local markets, even though the Shanghai branch had some priority in terms of seniority, locus of the board of directors, and bulk of publications. Rather than a hub-and-spoke structure, Kelly & Walsh operated more like an acephalous network.⁴⁵

For their contributing authors, each Kelly & Walsh branch tapped into local networks of colonial expatriates, a group that included colonial officials, merchants, and missionaries, as well as their family members. One way the firm accessed those networks was through active participation in the social and academic organizations that provided a vital infrastructure for expatriate life in British colonial society. For instance, longtime company director Thomas Brown was a member of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in Shanghai from 1885 and served for many years as the group's treasurer.⁴⁶ Brown was later succeeded as treasurer in the Shanghai Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society by Kelly & Walsh director John West, with another director, Charles Grant, also becoming a member during the 1890s.⁴⁷ Subsequently, long-time Kelly & Walsh

⁴⁵ Yet network it was, with coordination across the branches rather than each operating independently. We see this clearly with the fluid transfer of managerial staff from one location to another, such as when the Hong Kong branch's W. J. Mayson stood in for Singapore manager George Brinkworth when he returned to England for home leave in 1900. See *The Straits Times*, May 3, 1900, p. 2; *ibid.*, November 27, 1900, p. 2; *ibid.*, December 1, 1900, p. 2; *ibid.*, December 3, 1900, p. 2.

⁴⁶ *Journal of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, ser. 2, vol. 26 (1891–1892), pp. 237, 240.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, n.s., vol. 33 (1900–1901), p. 332; *ibid.*, n.s., vol. 36 (1905), pp. 162–165, 167; *ibid.*, n.s., vol. 37 (1906), pp. 228–230, 240; *ibid.*, n.s., vol. 40 (1909), pp. x, 131.

staff member A. J. Waller joined the society in 1916 and continued to participate into the 1920s.⁴⁸ By maintaining active membership in the Royal Asiatic Society from the 1880s into the 1920s, Kelly & Walsh continued to tap into the networks of colonial expatriate officials, merchants, missionaries, and scholars who filled the ranks of their authors. Similarly, the long-time manager of Kelly & Walsh Singapore, George Brinkworth, was a “keen Free Mason” and a member of the Straits Photographic Society.⁴⁹

The community of colonial expatriates also constituted the publisher’s main reading public, although the company also marketed its products in metropolitan cores, such as London and New York. Moreover, as co-publishers and distributors of books published in London, Kelly & Walsh’s business network also incorporated the European metropolitan core rather than being regionally bounded. Significantly, almost all Kelly & Walsh’s books were either technical or general interest publications, whereas for the Commercial Press and Zhonghua, textbooks were the leading products, as we shall see. Even though the publisher had no direct, formal connections with any colonial state, many of those publications nonetheless served the colonial project. They provided knowledge necessary for the commercial and political penetration of Chinese and Southeast Asian society, facilitated the self-representation of colonial expatriate communities, and sustained colonial elites’ cultural connection to metropolitan society.

II. Shanghai-Centered Distribution Networks

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Shanghai’s leading commercial publishers, the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, n.s., vol. 47 (1916), p. xvi.; *ibid.*, n.s. vol. 55 (1924), p. 288.

⁴⁹ “Death of Mr. G. Brinkworth,” *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle*, November 26, 1924, p. 7; “Death of Mr. George Brinkworth,” *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, November 26, 1924, p. 8.

developed rapidly according to a distinctive model. First, they created powerful central offices for compilation and editing, printing, and distribution in Shanghai. Then they built up expansive networks of regional distributors in cities and towns throughout China.⁵⁰ By the 1910s the Commercial Press and Zhonghua each had more than two dozen regional distributors and many more affiliated retailers, for which Shanghai served as the main center for production and supply. This process of growth and expansion utilized a hub-and-spoke distribution system, where products originated in Shanghai were shipped to distributors and retail outlets all over the country.

Starting in the 1910s, the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company extended spokes of their distribution networks into Southeast Asia, seeking to reach the market of Chinese readers there.⁵¹ Prior to 1916 the Commercial Press had a commercial arrangement with Caowanfeng National Products Company (Caowanfeng guohuo gongsi 曹萬豐國貨公司) on Singapore's South Bridge Road to act as its general distributor.⁵² In December 1915, the Commercial Press

⁵⁰ Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912–1940*, chap. 1; Robert Culp, “Building a National Print Market: A Preliminary Analysis of Book Distribution in Late Qing and Republican China,” in *Chengshi chuanbo: Jiyu Zhongguo chengshi de lishi yu xianshi*, pp. 194–222; Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937*.

⁵¹ Some material in this section and the one that follows was previously published in the following book chapter: Robert Culp, “Transnational Book Markets, the Export of Translated Books, and the Sinicization of Foreign Knowledge,” in Song Gang 宋剛, ed., *Yangzi yu Huawen: Jindai Xianggang yu Shanghai de Xi shu Zhong yi he chuban* (Chinese translations and publications of Western books in Hong Kong and Shanghai in the modern era) 洋字與華文：近代香港與上海的西書中譯和出版 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2024), pp. 249–278. That chapter focuses on the cultural significance of the circulation of translated Western texts to readers in Southeast Asia. Limited discussion there of Chinese publishers’ transnational business networks serves only to provide general background on the distribution of translated publications.

⁵² Quek See Ling, Shawn Pang, Kiew Li Lian, and Daryl Li, comps., *Passage of Time: Singapore Bookstores, 1881–2016*, p. 33; “Xinjiapo xin she Shanghai Shangwu yinshu fenguan kaimu zhi guanggao” (Advertisement of the opening of the newly established Commercial Press branch in Singapore) 新加坡新設上海商務印書分館開幕之廣告, *Zhennan ribao* 振南日報 [Singapore], March 22, 1916, p. 6; “Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan guanggao” (Advertisement for Shanghai’s Commercial Press) 上海商務印書館廣告, *Zhennan ribao*, November 16, 1915, p. 2. *Passage of*

discontinued its relationship with Caowanfeng, and in March 1916, it established a full branch (*fenguan* 分館) at 172 South Bridge Road.⁵³ Later Zhao Tingbi 趙廷璧 managed the Singapore branch of the Commercial Press for 11 years until 1932.⁵⁴ Zhonghua similarly listed a Singapore branch in its promotional materials from as early as 1916.⁵⁵ The Zhonghua branch was formally established and duly registered with the government by 1923.⁵⁶ Starting in the 1910s and 1920s, Singapore thus became the distribution node for both publishers in Southeast Asia. Subsequently, the Commercial Press in 1924 and Zhonghua Book Company in 1934 also built printing factories in Hong Kong, which came to serve as a secondary hub for production.⁵⁷ While compilation and publishing were generally still centered in Shanghai, printing in Hong Kong allowed both major publishers to supply the Southeast Asian market more quickly and directly.

Time dates the start of the Commercial Press's distribution relationship with Caowanfeng to 1912, but the evidence for that date is not clear.

- 53 “Xinjiapo xin she Shanghai Shangwu yinshu fenguan kaimu zhi guanggao,” *Zhennan ribao*, March 22, 1916, p. 6; “Zhuyi” (Attention) 注意, *Zhennan ribao*, March 23, 1916, p. 9; Gao Song 高崧, ed., *Shangwu yinshuguan jiu shi wu nian: Wo he Shangwu yinshuguan, 1897-1992* (Ninety-five years of the Commercial Press: Me and the Commercial Press, 1897-1992) 商務印書館九十五年——我和商務印書館·1897-1992 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1992), p. 685; Dai Ren, *Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan 1897-1949*, p. 53; Wang Yunwu 王雲五, *Shangwu yinshuguan yu xin jiaoyu nianpu* (Yearly record of the Commercial Press and of new education) 商務印書館與新教育年譜 (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1973), p. 90.
- 54 “Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan guanyebu zhuanyuan Zhao Tingbi nan lai shicha yewu” (Shanghai Commercial Press's business department professional staff member Zhao Tingbi came south to check on business) 上海商務印書館管業部專員趙廷璧南來視察業務, *Nanyang Siang Pau* 南洋商報 [Singapore], December 31, 1935, p. 6.
- 55 *Zhonghua shuju wu nian gaikuang* (Zhonghua Book Company's situation in 1916) 中華書局五年概況 (N.p.: [Zhonghua shuju], [1916]), p. 8. See also Qian Binghuan 錢炳寰, ed., *Zhonghua shuju dashi jiyao* (Essential record of the great events at Zhonghua Book Company) 中華書局大事紀要 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), p. 28.
- 56 Shi Yinzuo 施寅佐, “Xingjiapo fenju shilue” (A brief history of the branch office in Singapore) 星加坡分局史略, in *Zhonghua shuju bianjibu* 中華書局編輯部, ed., *Huiyi zhonghua shuju* (Remembering Zhonghua Book Company) 回憶中華書局 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), vol. 1, p. 183.
- 57 Gao Song, ed., *Shangwu yinshuguan jiu shi wu nian: Wo he Shangwu yinshuguan, 1897-1992*, p. 693; Wang Yunwu, *Shangwu yinshuguan yu xin jiaoyu nianpu*, p. 144; *Shangwu yinshuguan zhilue* (A general outline of the Commercial Press) 商務印書館志略 ([Shanghai]: n.p., 1926), p. 6; Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937*, p. 239.

Singapore was an obvious site for a distribution node for Shanghai's publishers. By the early twentieth century there were well established networks of transport and communication between Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai that could facilitate market communication and shipment of goods.⁵⁸ Singapore itself had a large overseas Chinese population, numbering 317,491 out of an overall population of 425,912 in 1921 and rising to 569,280 of Singapore's total population of 738,559 in 1939.⁵⁹ The rapid expansion of Chinese-medium schools for overseas Chinese there from the 1910s into the 1930s also created a growing immediate market for textbooks in Singapore itself. As of 1929 there were 204 Chinese schools with 14,531 students, and by 1938 there were 329 schools accommodating 28,411 overseas Chinese students.⁶⁰ The city also had easy proximity to the large overseas Chinese communities in British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. A corresponding growth of overseas Chinese schooling in British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies created an immediately accessible and expanding regional market for textbooks by the 1920s. As of 1924 there were 564 Chinese-run schools with 27,476 students in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. By 1938 that number had grown to 1,015 schools and 91,534 students.⁶¹ In both cases, most of the schools were at the primary level. In the Dutch East Indies, Ming Govaars counts 399 schools with 17,200 students as of 1914.⁶² By 1926 there were just 313 Chinese schools in the Dutch colonies but

⁵⁸ Robert Bickers, *China Bound: John Swire & Sons and Its World, 1816–1980* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), chap. 7; Melissa Macauley, *Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China's Maritime Frontier*.

⁵⁹ Zhang Liqian 張禮千, "Xinjiapo renkou zhi yanjin" (Development of Singapore's population) 新加坡人口之演進, *Nanyang xuebao* 南洋學報, 2:1 (March 1941), pp. 123, 127.

⁶⁰ Xu Suwu 許甦吾, ed., *Xinjiapo huaqiao jiaoyu quanmao* (The overall picture of overseas Chinese education in Singapore) 新加坡華僑教育全貌 (Singapore: Nanyang shuju, 1950), pp. 9–10.

⁶¹ Tan Liok Ee, *The Politics of Chinese Education in Malaya, 1945–1961* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 26.

⁶² Ming Govaars, *Dutch Colonial Education: The Chinese Experience in Indonesia, 1900–1942*, trans. Lorre Lynn Trytten (Singapore: Chinese Heritage Center, 2005), p. 255.

with 31,440 students overall.⁶³ These schools and their students provided a ready market for Shanghai's textbook publishers.

The Commercial Press's main editing and printing facilities in Shanghai were destroyed by Japanese bombing in January 1932. In response, it shifted its printing operations to Beijing and Hong Kong to supply textbooks for the fall semester.⁶⁴ At the same time, the Commercial Press closed its directly administered branch store in Singapore and arranged for Singapore's Shanghai Book Company to be its affiliated retailer.⁶⁵ To accommodate the increased business on behalf of the Commercial Press after 1932, Shanghai Book Company expanded its original location in Singapore to include a second floor.⁶⁶ Zhao Tingbi, who had managed the Commercial Press's Singapore branch, was withdrawn initially to Hong Kong and then to Shanghai and the Chinese interior after the bombing in 1932.⁶⁷ Instead, the Commercial Press also sent Wang Nianci 汪念慈 to Shanghai Book

⁶³ Lin Zhiguang 林之光 and Zhu Huayu 朱化雨, *Nanyang huaqiao jiaoyu diaocha yanjiu* (Survey research into South Seas overseas Chinese education) 南洋華僑教育調查研究 (Guangzhou: Guoli zhongshan daxue chubanshu, 1936), pp. 53–54.

⁶⁴ “Sanshiwu nian zhili yu wenhua shiye zhi Shangwu yinshuguan canzao guonan hou Xinjiapo gai fenguan zuori tingye” (Commercial Press that had exerted itself for the cultural enterprise for thirty-five years after cruelly encountering the national disaster closed its Singapore branch office yesterday) 三十五年致力於文化事業之商務印書館慘遭國難後新加坡該分館昨日停業, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, June 2, 1932, p. 7.

⁶⁵ “Guonan zaojie hou zhi Shangwu yinshuguan ji tu huifu” (After meeting with the crisis of the national disaster, the Commercial Press does its utmost to plan for recovery) 國難遭劫後之商務印書館極圖恢復, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, August 9, 1932, p. 6; “Shanghai shuju daili Shangwu yinshuguan teyue faxingsuo jinri kaimu” (Shanghai Book Company opens today as special distributor for the Commercial Press) 上海書局代理商務印書館特約發行所今日開幕, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, August 15, 1932, p. 6; “Shanghai shuju Shangwu yinshuguan teyue zong faxingsuo zuori kaimu laibin jiji” (Shanghai Book Company, Commercial Press's special agreement general distributor, opened yesterday to numerous customers) 上海書局商務印書館特約總發行所昨日開幕來賓濟濟, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, August 16, 1932, p. 7. Cf. “Er san nian lai shuye zhi gaikuang” (The book industry's general situation in the last two or three years) 二三年來書業之概況, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, February 5, 1934, p. 5.

⁶⁶ “Shanghai shuju Shangwu yinshuguan teyue zong faxingsuo zuori kaimu laibin jiji,” *Nanyang Siang Pau*, August 16, 1932, p. 7.

⁶⁷ “Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan guanyebu zhuan yuan Zhao Tingbi nan lai shicha yewu,” *Nanyang Siang Pau*, December 31, 1935, p. 6.

Company to serve as manager and to facilitate the relationship between the two companies.⁶⁸

As its business grew through the distribution of Commercial Press products, Shanghai Book Company extended its own distribution network throughout the region. In November 1933, for instance, company founder Chen Yueshu 陳岳書 and two other investors established a Shanghai Book Company branch in Batavia with an initial capitalization of 7,500 guilders. One of the partners, Chen Wenqiao 陳問樵, served as branch manager.⁶⁹ Expansion of the distribution network from Singapore into other areas of Southeast Asia continued through the 1930s and into the 1940s. Long-time manager Wen Ping 溫平 in his memoir counted no fewer than six branch stores (*fendian* 分店 and *zhidian* 支店) in Malaya, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, and Hong Kong and as many as 100 affiliated retailers (*daili shang* 代理商) across Southeast Asia, reaching Thailand, Burma, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines.⁷⁰ On a routine basis, Shanghai Book Company handled correspondence and direct marketing for Commercial Press in Singapore, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies. For example, when they learned that overseas Chinese schools in Kluang on the Malay peninsula decided to purchase only rival Zhonghua Book Company publications for its local schools in 1934, Shanghai

⁶⁸ Wen Ping 溫平, “Nanwang de peiyu he guli: Jinian Xinjiapo Shanghai shuju chuangujian liushiwu zhounian” (Difficult to forget cultivation and encouragement: Commemorating the 65th anniversary of the Singapore Shanghai Book Company’s founding) 難忘的培育和鼓勵——紀念新加坡上海書局創建六十五週年, in Shanghai shuju 上海書局, ed., *Yuanyuan liuchang: Shanghai shuju 65 zhounian jiniankan* (A distant origin and long development: Shanghai Book Company’s 65th anniversary commemorative volume) 源遠流長——上海書局 65 週年紀念刊 (Singapore: Shanghai shuju, [1990]), p. 44; Chen Mengzhi 陳蒙志, “Shanghai shuju lishi zhong de shidai yinji” (Shanghai Book Company’s epochal imprint in history) 上海書局歷史中的時代印記, *Xuewen* 學文, no. 2 (October 2012), p. 62.

⁶⁹ “Bacheng Shanghai shuju hegu zhengyue” (Partnership agreement for Batavia Shanghai Book Company) 吧城上海書局合股正約, November 3, 1933, National Library of Singapore, B20123973E.

⁷⁰ Wen Ping, “Nanwang de peiyu he guli: Jinian Xinjiapo Shanghai shuju chuangujian liushiwu zhounian,” in *Yuanyuan liuchang: Shanghai shuju 65 zhounian jiniankan*, pp. 44–45; “Cong 30 niandai dao 50 niandai de daili shang” (Affiliated retailers from the 1930s through the 1950s) 從 30 年代到 50 年代的代理商, in *Yuanyuan liuchang: Shanghai shuju 65 zhounian jiniankan*, p. 50.

Book Company corresponded directly with the Overseas Chinese Corporation (Huaqiao gongsuo 華僑公所) there to remonstrate, having previously supplied a full set of sample textbooks and teaching manuals for the organization to choose from.⁷¹

As the Commercial Press struggled to sustain its operations after the Japanese bombing, Zhonghua Book Company actively sought to expand its market share in Southeast Asia during the 1930s. For instance, in 1933 Zhonghua sent special representative Zheng Jianlu 鄭健廬 to Singapore to investigate the Southeast Asia market.⁷² Zheng was Zhonghua's regional supervisor for branches in Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. During his trip, Zheng "toured each school and factory, as well as doing on-the-spot investigations of local customs and practices in order to expand that book company's business in the future as well as publish more books and magazines having to do with South Seas culture."⁷³ Starting in 1935, the Commercial Press sought to rebuild its business in Southeast Asia by sending Zhao Tingbi to Singapore, Java, Sumatra, Thailand, and Rangoon to publicize the company's revival and visit bookstores and schools throughout the region to get feedback on the company's textbooks.⁷⁴ The Commercial Press continued to maintain direct contact with the local market even after the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, sending, for instance,

⁷¹ "Shangwu yinshuguan teyue suo zhi Juluan huaqiao gongsuo han" (Commercial Press special distributor's letter to the Overseas Chinese Corporation in Kluang) 商務印書館特約所致居鑾華僑公所函, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, November 15, 1934, p. 5.

⁷² "Zhonghua shuju tepai zhuan yuan Zheng Jianlu xiansheng di Xing" (Zhonghua Book Company's specially sent staff member Mr. Zheng Jianlu arrived in Singapore) 中華書局特派專員鄭健廬先生抵星, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, June 5, 1933, p. 7.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷⁴ "Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan guanyebu zhuan yuan Zhao Tingbi nan lai shicha yewu," *Nanyang Siang Pau*, December 31, 1935, p. 6; "Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan tepai yuan Zhao Tingbi yi dida Taiping" (Shanghai Commercial Press's specially sent staff member Zhao Tingbi has already arrived in Taiping) 上海商務印書館特派員趙廷璧已抵達太平, *Sin Chew Jit Poh* 星洲日報 [Straights Settlements], April 11, 1936, p. 11; "Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan pai yuan lai Le kuozhan yewu" (Shanghai's Commercial Press sent a staff member to Singapore to expand business) 上海商務印書館派員來叻擴展業務, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, July 10, 1936, p. 6.

Hong Kong-based staff member Cheng Xuemen 程雪門 to Singapore, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies to check on local market conditions in 1940.⁷⁵

In 1936 the Commercial Press also concluded an agreement with Nanyang Book Company for it to be a distribution agent.⁷⁶ The close relationship between the Commercial Press and Nanyang is suggested by the fact that Commercial Press agent Zhao Tingbi was present at the opening of Nanyang's new storefront and received visitors alongside Nanyang's general manager and managers.⁷⁷ Nanyang Book Company's arrangement as a local sales agent for the Commercial Press lasted through the start of the war.⁷⁸ In fact, Nanyang Book Company seems to have thrived in the early wartime context. During the 1938–1939 fiscal year, Nanyang earned profits of 5,790 yuan, which allowed it to pay dividends to its shareholders and bonuses to board members and employees.⁷⁹ It also concluded a contract with the Commercial Press to continue to serve as a local sales agent for

⁷⁵ “Shangwu yinshuguan ri chu xin shu kangzhan hou weichang jianduan” (Commercial Press's putting out one new book each day has not been interrupted during the War of Resistance) 商務印書館日出新書抗戰後未嘗間斷, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, July 3, 1940, p. 7.

⁷⁶ “Zuori Shangwu yinshuguan daili fenzhuang zhi Nanyang shuju qiaoqian yingye” (Yesterday the Commercial Press's sales agent branch store Nanyang Book Company moved to a new location and opened for business) 昨日商務印書館代理分莊之南洋書局喬遷營業, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, September 21, 1936, p. 7. Cf. “Nanyang shuju kuozhan yingye jiang qian zhi Dapo” (Nanyang Book Company to expand business will move to Dapo) 南洋書局擴展營業將遷至大坡, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, September 17, 1936, p. 7.

⁷⁷ The close relationship between Nanyang Book Company and the Commercial Press was also signaled by the banquet Nanyang held to see off Zhao Tingbi before he returned to Shanghai in October 1936. “Shangwu yinshuguan Zhao tepai yuan rijian fan Hu zuowan Nanyang shuju sheyan jianbie” (Commercial Press's specially sent staff member Zhao today will return to Shanghai [so] last night Nanyang Book Company held a banquet to see him off) 商務印書館趙特派員日間返滬昨晚南洋書局設宴餞別, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, October 8, 1936, p. 6.

⁷⁸ “Songhu Zhong Ri zhanshi yingxiang Ma Hua wenhua shiye” (The Sino-Japanese Battle of Shanghai influences Malaya's Chinese cultural enterprise) 松湖中日戰事影響馬華文化事業, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, September 4, 1937, p. 8; “Zhizhang fasheng wenti yunshu yi gan kunnan” (There are problems with paper and shipping also is difficult) 紙張發生問題運輸亦感困難, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, November 11, 1937, p. 7.

⁷⁹ “Nanyang shuju qunian shi deli wuqian yu yuan paihuan guxi san baxian” (Nanyang Book Company last year obtained real profits of more than 5,000 yuan and issued dividends of 3%) 南洋書局去年實得利五千餘元派還股息三巴仙, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, July 10, 1939, p. 6.

four additional years. That early wartime expansion and growth of the textbook market in Southeast Asia, though, seems to have been substantial enough to convince the Commercial Press to reestablish its own branch office and store in Singapore, which it did in December 1940, just one year before the Japanese invasion.⁸⁰

The infrastructure and institutions of colonial and semi-colonial cities could facilitate corporate expansion and the distribution of products. Colonial authorities, however, could also restrict the circulation of books they viewed as a threat to colonial power. Specifically, during the late 1920s and the early 1930s, colonial governments in British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies prohibited sale of a range of Chinese textbooks that incorporated anti-imperialist themes from Sun Yat-sen's ideology, the Three Principles of the People. In October 1929, for instance, authorities in the Dutch East Indies banned Three Principles of the People textbooks.⁸¹ Then in 1932 the government of the Straits Settlements prohibited use of a number of Three Principles of the People textbooks as well as the New Era (Xin shidai 新時代) textbook series.⁸² Such restrictions almost certainly reinforced the initiative by both the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company to develop new lines of textbooks pitched directly to overseas Chinese students starting in 1932. Another round of restrictions started in 1937, during the

⁸⁰ “Shangwu yinshuguan benpo fu sheli fenguan” (Commercial Press in this city again sets up a branch office) 商務印書館本坡復設立分館, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, December 2, 1940, p. 8; “Shangwu yinshuguan Xinjiapo fenguan jinri fuye” (Commercial Press's Singapore branch reopens today) 商務印書館新加坡分館今日復業, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, December 9, 1940, p. 7.

⁸¹ “He yin qudi dangyi jiaokeshu” (Dutch East Indies has banned party doctrine textbooks) 荷印取締黨義教科書, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, October 31, 1929, p. 18. See also Lin Zhiguang and Zhu Huayu, *Nanyang huaqiao jiaoyu diaocha yanjiu*, p. 157.

⁸² “Haixia zhimindi jinyong sanmin zhuyi ji xin shidai jiaokeshu” (The Straits Settlements ban use of Three Principles of the People and New Era textbooks) 海峽殖民地禁用三民主義及新時代教科書, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, January 13, 1932, p. 7; Lin Zhiguang and Zhu Huayu, *Nanyang huaqiao jiaoyu diaocha yanjiu*, pp. 157–158.

opening phase of the War of Resistance.⁸³ Such bans reveal the tenuousness of Chinese corporate expansion into Southeast Asia, which was always exposed to arbitrary policy-making on the part of colonial authorities.

Still, the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company built robust and durable distribution systems extending into Southeast Asia that lasted from the 1910s into the 1940s. Following their patterns of market expansion in China proper, the companies set up distribution centers or concluded contracts with affiliated retailers that in Southeast Asia were centered in Singapore. Yet despite paralleling Kelly & Walsh in having offices in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore, the Commercial Press's and Zhonghua Book Company's corporate strategies differed from that of the colonial publisher. The Commercial Press and Zhonghua both maintained a hub-and-spoke structure of production and distribution, with their main publishing center in Shanghai, later supplemented by a secondary production center in Hong Kong, and then used dozens of branches exclusively as regional distribution nodes. The companies' respective Singapore branches were solely points for regional distribution of books produced elsewhere, not independent production centers, as was Kelly & Walsh's Singapore branch. Moreover, texts were not distributed from the Singapore branches back to Hong Kong or Shanghai, as was often true in Kelly & Walsh's acephalous network.

Although the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company's overall production and distribution systems were centralized and hierarchical according to what Cochran has characterized as a Western model, they did utilize native place networks to extend their distribution systems. According to the memoir by long-time Singapore cultural figure Xu Yunqiao 許雲樵 (1905–1981), himself a Suzhou native, many of the staff in the Commercial Press's and Zhonghua Book

⁸³ “Zhonghua Shangwu deng shuju chuban zhi jiaokeshu cheng baizhong bei jinyong” (As many as one hundred textbooks published by Zhonghua, the Commercial Press, and other book companies are banned) 中華商務等書局出版之教科書成百種被禁用, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, November 20, 1937, p. 5.

Company's branches were from the lower Yangzi region.⁸⁴ For the Commercial Press, for instance, one-time branch manager Bao Chuanxian 包傳賢 was a Ningbo native; Cheng Xuemen was from Changshu; and the post-war branch manager was the Shanghainese Chen Yunqing 陳雲卿. Zhonghua's long-time branch manager Shi Bomo 施伯謨 was from the Shanghai area (Chongming).⁸⁵ Lower Yangzi roots also characterized the leading figures in some of Singapore's bookstores, such as Shanghai Book Company whose founders Chen Yueshu and Wang Shuyang 王叔暘 were both Wenzhou natives.⁸⁶

Because of their connections to Shanghai, the publishers' Singapore branches became recruiting centers for teachers in overseas Chinese schools across Southeast Asia.⁸⁷ Many of these teachers in turn hailed from the so-called "Three Rivers" (*sanjiang* 三江) region in China, originally connoting Jiangnan, Jiangbei, and Jiangxi, later coming to signify Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Jiangxi, and eventually meaning anywhere outside of the predominant South Seas migrant-sending provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. Xu recounts how the publishers' branches in Singapore became gathering places for lower Yangzi region teachers who would congregate there during school breaks to exchange news and hunt for new work opportunities. The publishers would facilitate the process by setting up reception rooms with tables of food to welcome the teachers. By placing their stores at the center of educators' cultural networks as both recruiters and gathering places, the Commercial Press, Zhonghua, and their sales agents gained direct access to the education market in Southeast Asia that was central to their business there.

From their regional distribution nodes in Singapore, the Commercial Press's and Zhonghua's branches and affiliated retailers further extended their distribution

⁸⁴ Xu Yunqiao 許雲樵, "Sishi nian qian de shuye" (The book industry of forty years ago) 四十年前的書業, *Silat Weekly* 石叻週報, new number, 6 (November 23, 1974), pp. 18–20.

⁸⁵ See Lap Lam, *Cultural Transplantation: The Writing of Classical Chinese Poetry in Colonial Singapore (1887-1945)* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), p. 171, note 91.

⁸⁶ Chen Mengzhi, "Shanghai shuju lishi zhong de shidai yinji," p. 60.

⁸⁷ Xu Yunqiao, "Sishi nian qian de shuye," *Silat Weekly*, new number, 6, pp. 18–20.

networks to smaller cities and towns throughout the region, which in turn developed their own book markets. The downward extension of these distribution networks was necessary, in part, to deliver textbooks, both publishers' key moneymakers, to local overseas Chinese schools throughout the region. As early as 1925, for example, we see bookstores in Penang such as Tongwen 同文 Book Company carrying large inventories of Commercial Press products.⁸⁸ As of 1934 in Penang there were eight Chinese-run bookstores as well as bookstalls on the street.⁸⁹ The major product lines for the bookstores were mostly textbooks and newly published magazines and literary works while the street-side bookstalls, like their counterparts in China, sold mostly old fiction. Similar dynamics developed in Malacca. Until the mid-1920s the city had no Chinese bookstores, and schools would purchase textbooks directly from bookstores in Singapore. By the late 1920s, though, bookstores focused on selling textbooks opened there and competed with one another. In this competition Shenmei 審美 Book Company took advantage of manager Zheng Siwei's 鄭四維 contacts in the Fujianese native place community, which ran most of the local schools, to seize market share for textbooks from 1929 to 1934.⁹⁰ This example suggests how at the local level, Fujian and Guangdong native place networks could also play a part in the publishers' market expansion.⁹¹ A follow-up report on Penang's book market from 1936 illuminates how marketing networks developed between bookstores in

88 "Xingjiapo Shangwu yinshuguan konggao Bincheng mou shuju" (Singapore Commercial Press accuses a certain book company in Penang) 星加坡商務印書館控告檳城某書局, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, April 28, 1925, p. 3.

89 Nanguo 南郭, "Bincheng huaren shudianye de zhuangkuang" (The situation of Chinese people's bookstore industry in Penang) 檳城華人書店業的狀況, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, February 12, 1934, p. 9.

90 Shuanghuan 雙環, "Maliujia shudian yingye zhi guoqu ji xianzai" (The past and present of the bookstore business in Malacca) 馬六甲書店營業之過去及現在, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, June 6, 1934, p. 10.

91 Elsewhere in my book project, I show how local overseas Chinese corporations administering schools, which were organized on the basis of native-place affiliation, coordinated local textbook purchases by determining the syllabus for local school graduation exams.

regional cities and major publishers' branch stores as well as sales agents in Singapore to supply textbooks to local schools.

If the price is reasonable, each kind of stationery and book is purchased from Singapore's sales agents for Shanghai's large book companies. Generally, magazines and pictorial journals are said to be completely purchased from Singapore. Previously, in northern Malaya, each town rarely had bookstores, and in all cases, schools in each town in Kedah and Perak come to Penang to buy [textbooks]. Each school in this city naturally also mostly buys from Penang.⁹²

A Hong Kong-Singapore-local city commercial network supplied overseas Chinese schools throughout British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies with textbooks originally produced in Shanghai and often printed in Hong Kong.

The local bookstores in these cities, and even in Singapore itself, were primarily retail establishments, selling textbooks, trade books (mostly contemporary fiction), and magazines. In the words of one report on Singapore's book trade in 1933, "Moreover, this city's book industry circles are mostly sales and distribution institutions, and we still do not have in this city an independent printing and publishing company. Their source is mostly from the homeland's Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangdong, with books published in Shanghai being most numerous."⁹³ In the early 1930s Singapore had about sixty printing companies using a range of technologies (woodblock, lithograph, and moveable type), but they all seem to have been capitalized at relatively low levels.⁹⁴ The Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company also provided printing services, but they did so through their factories in Shanghai and Hong Kong, not through their own local

⁹² "Bincheng ge shuju yingye gaikuang" (The business situation of each bookstore in Penang) 檳城各書局營業概況, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, February 3, 1936, p. 9.

⁹³ "Xinjiapo shuji wenju ye" (Singapore's book and stationary industry) 新加坡書籍文具業, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, February 25, 1933, p. 6.

⁹⁴ "Benpo yinshuaye xiankuang" (Current circumstances of this city's printing industry) 本坡印刷業現況, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, June 18, 1932, p. 6.

establishments. Production capacity for books and magazines in Southeast Asia itself seems to have been limited.

The fact that textbooks occupied a large proportion of the Chinese book market in both China and Southeast Asia indicates a key reason why the Shanghai publishers' hub-and-spoke production and distribution model persisted from the 1910s into the 1940s. Textbooks required concentration of cultural capital in the form of a large, well-educated editorial staff that could compile massive amounts of material quickly when curriculum standards changed.⁹⁵ Producing multiple series of textbooks for a number of school subjects quickly also required concentrated printing capacity. Having mobilized those resources in their production and distribution center of Shanghai enabled the Commercial Press and Zhonghua to use their branches primarily to distribute standardized, ready-made products for schools throughout China and overseas Chinese communities abroad. Focusing first on the textbook market made it logical for the Commercial Press and Zhonghua to centralize production and extend distribution rather than localizing and diversifying production as Kelly & Walsh did in their four main branch locations. Further, as Chinese-language schools formed in most overseas Chinese communities across Southeast Asia between the 1910s and the 1930s, demand for textbooks was localized in smaller cities and towns across the region, compelling the publishers to extend their distribution nodes out from Singapore to places like Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Surabaya, and Batavia. By contrast, Kelly & Walsh's expatriate Anglophone readers tended to concentrate primarily in the colonial commercial ports of Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Yokohama, where their books were produced as well as marketed and sold.

⁹⁵ Robert Culp, *The Power of Print in Modern China: Intellectuals and Industrial Publishing from the End of Empire to Maoist State Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

III. Wartime Markets: Opportunities and Obstacles

The onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War could have been disastrous for the Chinese book trade in Southeast Asia, given the hub-and-spoke approach to production and distribution that developed over the course of the 1920s and 1930s. Yet the fact that the Commercial Press's and Zhonghua Book Company's Southeast Asian distribution systems operated through maritime enclaves, which were protected for a time by the mantle of British colonialism, allowed both publishers to produce and distribute products through the first phase of the war. In particular, printing facilities in Hong Kong enabled both publishers to continue to provide textbooks to overseas Chinese schools in Southeast Asia after the Japanese invasion of China proper.⁹⁶ This dynamic continued through the first few years of the war, as the Commercial Press and Zhonghua sought to meet demand in Southeast Asia for roughly 7–8 million textbooks annually by printing most primary textbooks in Hong Kong.⁹⁷

Despite the success of this initial pivot, over time the war presented multiple challenges to the Shanghai-based publishers who were operating with a diversified, international business model. One persistent challenge during the war was paper supply, for which the major Chinese publishers had historically depended at least in part on the international market. As early as November 1937 an increase in paper and shipping costs compelled the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company to increase their textbook prices by 30%.⁹⁸ Two years later, in September 1939, paper costs again forced the Commercial Press and Zhonghua to

⁹⁶ "Songhu Zhong Ri zhanshi yingxiang Ma Hua wenhua shiye," *Nanyang Siang Pau*, September 4, 1937, p. 8.

⁹⁷ "Shangwu yinshuguan ri chu xin shu kangzhan hou weichang jianduan," *Nanyang Siang Pau*, July 3, 1940, p. 7.

⁹⁸ "Zhizhang fasheng wenti yunshu yi gan kunnan," *Nanyang Siang Pau*, November 11, 1937, p. 7.

raise primary textbook prices by as much as 80%.⁹⁹ At the same time, the persistent growth of the Southeast Asian textbook market, made Shanghai's publishers more susceptible than ever to book pirating, a perennial problem in the domestic book market.¹⁰⁰ For example, in March 1938 a local bookstore in Singapore was caught with 48 bundles, some 50,000 copies, of pirated Zhonghua Book Company books.¹⁰¹ The reporter indicated that similar pirating cases had occurred in Penang and Selangor as well.

An even bigger challenge, though, arose starting in 1940, as the colonial authorities in the Straits Settlements launched a regime of import bans to control flow of the pound out of British colonial trade networks. The semi-colonial and colonial urban nodes that had served to protect the Commercial Press's and Zhonghua Book Company's business from Japanese occupation now threatened to limit or constrain it. The policy targeted twenty some household-use products and included books, immediately imperiling the textbook supply of more than 1,000 Chinese schools in British Malaya.¹⁰² The ban prompted Singapore's book industry representatives to remonstrate with the government to lift the bans and allow free imports of books or at the very least to permit imports at the level permitted the previous year.¹⁰³ A provision that products with at least 25% Hong

⁹⁹ "Shuji jiage tigao xiaoxue jiaokeshu zeng bashi baxian" (Book prices rise with primary school textbooks increasing 80%) 書籍價格提高小學教科書增八十巴仙, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, September 22, 1939, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ See Fei-hsien Wang, *Pirates and Publishers: A Social History of Copyright in Modern China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), chaps. 5–6.

¹⁰¹ "OK shuju bei kong cang jiamao keben" (OK Book Company is accused of storing counterfeit textbooks) OK 書局被控藏假冒課本, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, March 10, 1938, p. 30; "Zhonghua shuju bei fanyin ge shu zai mou shuzhuang huocang chahuo" (Books that were pirated from Zhonghua Book Company were discovered in the warehouse of a certain bookstore) 中華書局被翻印各書在某書莊貨倉查獲, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, March 24, 1938, p. 7. The story suggests that the books were textbooks, alluding to the robust sales of the company's South Seas textbook series. Textbooks were usually the only kinds of books that sold on this scale in the overseas Chinese market.

¹⁰² "Shuji bei jin rukou jiaokeshu zui shou yingxiang" (Books are restricted from being imported with textbooks being most affected) 書籍被禁入口教科書最受影響, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, April 25, 1940, p. 6.

¹⁰³ "Shuye daibiao jinchen yejian fu tixuesi qing shefa xu yu shuji jinkou" (Book industry representatives this morning had an audience with the assistant education inspector, asking him to find a way to continue allowing book imports) 書業代表今晨謁見副提學司請設法續予書籍進口,

Kong-produced content were not subject to the ban (Hong Kong falling within the pound zone) provided a loophole for publishers such as the Commercial Press and Zhonghua, with their Hong Kong-based factories, to import their books. But Singapore's book trade representatives' February 1941 petition to the Control Bureau to issue a permit for book imports made clear that books "printed and published in Hong Kong really are not enough to supply Malaya's needs. We find that just the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company have branch factories in Hong Kong to print a portion of those two companies' books. The rest are all printed in China."¹⁰⁴ Nearly three decades of transnational book production and circulation had made Southeast Asia's bookstores dependent on Chinese domestic producers. Books compiled and printed in China circulated to schools and readers throughout the region through tiered networks of distributors between Singapore and countless other cities and towns. Increasing restrictions on international trade cast a shadow over this regionally diversified book market.

As the Pacific War started, disruption of Chinese education and Chinese publishing in Southeast Asia turned into complete suspension. With Japanese occupation of Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore after December 1941, the transnational maritime network that had facilitated that production and distribution of books was fractured. Further, within occupied Southeast Asia, the bookstores and affiliated retailers that had marketed and sold Chinese-language books were targeted for closure by the Japanese. Stores were shut down or destroyed, and staff were forced to flee to Nationalist-controlled areas of the mainland or to go into

Nanyang Siang Pau, May 16, 1940, p. 31; "Ge shuju jue zai chengqing tongzhisi zhun Zhongguo chupin shuji jixu ziyou rukou" (Each book company decides to again petition the Control Office to allow books manufactured in China to continue to be freely imported) 各書局決再呈請統治司准中國出品書籍繼續自由入口, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, May 29, 1940, p. 7; "Wei qingqiu fa rukou zheng shi shuye juxing tanhuahui" (Book industry holds a discussion meeting in order to request issuing an import permit) 爲請求發入口證事書業舉行談話會, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, February 20, 1941, p. 31.

¹⁰⁴ "Benpo shuye jie zuori kaihui jue ding xiang Shangwu fenguan tichu shengbian" (This city's book industry circles met yesterday, deciding to raise arguments with the Commercial Press branch) 本坡書業界昨日開會決定向商務分館提出聲辯, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, February 26 1941, p. 10.

hiding in remote areas of Southeast Asia. The wartime experience of Nanyang Book Company is telling:

When the Japanese enemy invaded, this company was the first to bear the brunt of it. The Kedah branch was destroyed by the enemy's vanguard forces. The Penang branch manager died for his country. The Rangoon branch was completely ransacked. At the Kuala Lumpur branch, two of the employees were slain. The branch in Batavia was confiscated by the enemy, and the manager and employees were imprisoned. All that was left was the main office in Singapore and the shop houses in Penang and Malacca. All the books stored there were burned and destroyed [...].¹⁰⁵

At Shanghai Book Company, staff who had been involved in War of Resistance publications and anti-Japanese mobilization, including founders Chen Yueshu and Wang Shuyang, as well as manager Wen Ping and leftist intellectual Hu Yuzhi 胡愈之 and his wife, who had fled to Singapore in 1940, went into hiding in Sumatra, with some being detained and others killed during the war.¹⁰⁶ Shanghai Book Company's branch stores in other occupied areas were managed during the three years of occupation by a skeleton staff. The company's main office on 351 North Bridge Road in Singapore had most of its inventory destroyed in the initial Japanese attacks, and the premises were confiscated and rented to a coffee shop during the occupation period.¹⁰⁷ By occupying and controlling the colonial and semi-colonial cities that served as the key nodes of Chinese publishers' production and distribution networks, the Japanese military fundamentally disrupted the transnational and trans-colonial publishing system that had persisted since the 1910s.

¹⁰⁵ *Nanyang shuju shiwu zhounian jinian teken* (Nanyang Book Co., Ltd., fifteen-year anniversary special publication, 1935–1950) 南洋書局十五週年紀念特刊 ([Singapore: Nanyang shuju, 1950]).

¹⁰⁶ Wen Ping, "Nanwang de peiyu he guli: Jinian Xinjiapo Shanghai shuju chuangujian liushiwu zhounian," in *Yuanyuan liuchang: Shanghai shuju 65 zhounian jiniankan*, pp. 46–47; Chen Mengzhi, "Shanghai shuju lishi zhong de shidai yinji," p. 63.

¹⁰⁷ Reply to "Premises at 351 North Bridge Road Singapore," April 20, 1946, Chen Yueshu to Loke Wan Tho, National Library of Singapore, B20123963D; Reply to "351 North Bridge Road, Singapore," March 25, 1946, Chen Yueshu to Khoo Teck Ee, National Library of Singapore, B20123962C.

Conclusion

From the 1910s into the 1940s publishing companies took advantage of the free trade system of British and Dutch maritime enclaves and exploitation colonies to develop a robust book trade in Chinese and English-language books. As we have seen, English-language publisher Kelly & Walsh and primarily Chinese-language publishers like the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company developed successful transnational and trans-colonial corporate structures that in some ways went against type. These publishers strategically fostered those systems to maximize production of key categories of publications geared toward their main markets.

Rather than being centralized and hierarchical, like many Western and Japanese corporations, Kelly & Walsh developed an acephalous network of branches in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore, each of which both produced and circulated publications. They did so by tapping into the colonial expatriate social networks that enabled them to draft authors and solicit manuscripts from those maritime enclaves that in turn provided their main markets. Many of the texts they produced, such as dictionaries, grammars, geographies, cultural studies, tariff tables, and travel guides facilitated European colonial political and economic expansion in concrete ways. Further, by publishing the *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* along with books and translations by authors such as J. J. M. De Groot, Herbert Giles, James Legge, W. A. P. Martin, F. F. von Richthofen, and Arthur Smith, Kelly & Walsh also provided some of the core texts of the first-generation of Anglophone Sinology. These texts served, in turn, as part of the system of knowledge that sought to make Chinese culture legible for

Euro-American colonial expansion.¹⁰⁸ Corresponding publications about Southeast Asia, with a special focus on Malay language and culture, similarly served to enrich colonial knowledge systems. In this way, even though Kelly & Walsh was a private publisher, with no formal economic or institutional links to colonial states, it nonetheless facilitated the colonial project at a cultural and epistemological level.

To dominate the textbook market in China proper, the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company had early on developed a hub-and-spoke corporate structure, with book production centered in Shanghai and a network of distribution nodes spread throughout China. As the number of overseas Chinese schools grew in Southeast Asia from the 1910s into the 1930s, both publishers found they could extend that corporate system to make Singapore a key node for textbook distribution to overseas Chinese schools in British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. The hub-and-spoke corporate model made sense for both publishers because their leading products were textbooks, which required concentration of intellectual labor and printing capacity to produce the textbooks and far-flung distribution networks to circulate them to thousands of local schools. This highly centralized and hierarchical corporate system looks, in its formal structure, to be very Westernized, but both companies also depended for marketing on the lower Yangzi region native place networks developed between publishers' agents and local schoolteachers throughout Southeast Asia. Moreover, in some local areas, Fujianese and Cantonese native place networks also shaped dynamics of marketing and distribution. In addition, wartime contingencies, colonial networks, and the logic of distance all contributed to Hong Kong emerging as secondary production center for both publishers over the course of the 1930s and 1940s. In this way, both

¹⁰⁸ For one take on this relationship between cultural knowledge and colonial power, see Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), chap. 2.

the Commercial Press and Zhonghua flexibly adapted their corporate structures to meet the needs of production and distribution rather than sticking to a strictly centralized system.

This flexible hub-and-spoke system enabled the Commercial Press and Zhonghua Book Company to dominate the Chinese book market in Southeast Asia from the 1920s into the early 1940s. Like other Chinese-run businesses, they took advantage of the infrastructural and institutional benefits of the colonial maritime enclaves to profit. But unlike many of those other businesses that primarily drew on resources in Southeast Asia to exploit the massive mainland Chinese market, the Commercial Press and Zhonghua extended their commercial networks out from China into overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. Because their products were books that transmitted cultural content and carried symbolic meanings, that outward expansion had major cultural implications by providing the textual infrastructure that underpinned the development of the largest single Sinophone community abroad. By earning profits abroad and spreading Chinese culture, both companies participated in a neo-colonial dynamic. But they did so as private companies, not as agents of the Chinese state, and they pursued profit more than political influence. In other dimensions of my research, I track the messages these books transmitted to overseas Chinese students and other readers and assess how those readers responded to those messages.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ In my manuscript in progress, which has the working title “Circuits of Meaning: Chinese Publishing and the Sinophone Reader in Southeast Asia, 1900-1950,” I also explore how both publishers responded to colonial governments’ bans of Three Principles of the People textbooks during the late 1920s and early 1930s by developing textbooks geared toward overseas Chinese readers in Southeast Asia starting in 1932 that muted their overtly political content while still transmitting subtle neo-colonial messages.

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上海——香港——新加坡的都市網絡 與南洋文化生產

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摘 要

二十世紀初至 1930 年代，商務印書館與中華書局的發行網絡已遍及全中國。本文則揭示，同時期這兩家出版商也將發行網絡拓展到了東南亞的海外華人社群。從 1916 年開始，兩家公司都在新加坡建立分部及零售中心，將書籍行銷到南洋各地城鎮。兩家書商不只在上海、後來也在香港建立了印刷廠，以利供應東南亞市場。它們的跨國生意策略是：在南洋收集市場資訊，在上海編輯新書刊，在上海或香港印刷，然後再運到新加坡進一步銷售發行。這套營運系統連結了上海、香港與新加坡，可謂善加利用了南洋殖民地、半殖民地的都市網絡。這兩家中國大出版商跨國、跨殖民地的經營方式，類似於更老牌的英文書籍出版商別發印書館（Kelly & Walsh, Ltd.）；不過，中華和商務在運作結構上，仍與別發有所不同。別發在上海、香港、新加坡與檳濱也都設有分公司，這些分公司都可在當地徵求作者，主要是殖民地官員、商人和傳教士，並可直接就地印刷、出版並販售；其出版品主題、類別多樣，包括實用工具書和通俗讀物，如語言學習、關稅表、地理、旅遊指南等等，客群以英語系僑民為主。因此，別發各分公司都既可以是出版中心，也可以是經銷中心，形成了一個不是由公司總部統一決策、生產、銷售的無頭網絡結構。相較之下，商務與中華在海外乃是以東南亞華人社群、華文學校為對象，最大宗的出版品則是教科書，其生產有賴大量且集中的勞力與資本，所以兩間大出版商都發展出一套以上海為編纂中心，在滬、港印製出版，然後透過新加坡將出版品批售到東南亞各地區的軸輻體系。而經由這兩類各具特色的經銷網絡，這三家出版公司流通發行的書籍，也各自裨益了英國和中國的殖民事業。

關鍵詞：出版、發行、華僑、南洋 / 東南亞、殖民主義

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