

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

DWAYNE R. WINSECK and ROBERT M. PIKE, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets and Globalization, 1860-1930*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, xx + 429 p., index.

For Communication researchers interested in the modern history of media, the political economy of media, and/or issues of empire in its various senses – and one would hope that would be a large proportion of them – this study represents an original, provocative and substantial step forward. (Full and frank disclosure: the reviewer attended high school with one of the authors, but we have met only twice since.)

In their emphasis on history, the authors have already left behind the obsession with the just-now-happening or the imminently-forecast that dogs Media Studies – its protagonists seemingly yearning in their heart of hearts to be news commentators, a splendid and necessary role, but nonetheless not their profession. Yet the authors' historiography is never mere chronology. In their use of political economy, the authors have bypassed the silly division of labor between infrastructure analysis and content industry analysis. In their analysis of empire, they carefully dissect the multiple and contradictory processes entailed, and in the process ask some rather rude questions about the schematic definition of the first ocean-cabling era that many of us, including this reviewer, have all too often churned out in our lectures. They bring back into focus the extraordinary reach of Britain's Eastern Telegraph Company (forebear of today's Cable & Wireless). And in passing they also point up the varying but significant inputs into this first phase of modern globalization made by individuals of whom many of us, once again including this reviewer, were entirely unaware until now: the Canadian Sandford Fleming, the Englishmen John Henniker Heaton and John Pender, the American Walter Rogers, and China's Kang Youwei.

The first chapter lays out the basic thesis, namely that the vectors at work in forming the global communication system up through the 1920s were an unstable three-part amalgam. They consisted of (1) capitalist cartels dominating the field for the most part, rather than directly nationalist or colonialist interests; (2) clashing government policies (Realpolitik and hawkish conservatism vs. a global free-market, internationalist "systems" approach) that, with altering circumstances over 1860-1930, waxed and waned in influence; and (3) the interaction among international financial flows, global communication networks and the Janus-faced economic opportunity/economic crisis scenarios which the latter provided the former.

The next three chapters focus on the Euro-American, and South American, communication markets; the Indian subcontinent, plus the partition of Africa; and China from 1870 through the so-called “Boxer” Uprising. Two chapters on global attempts to reform the communication system follow, the first covering 1870-1905, and the second 1906-1916. The remaining four chapters, respectively, take the saga through the First World War and its immediate aftermath; Wilsonianism and the incipient “free flow” policy doctrine, hitherto ascribed to the 1940s; the key roles played by corporate consortia in South American and Asian communication markets from 1918 to 1930; and the merger mania characterizing the postwar Euro-American communication market. Came the Great Depression, and this vigorously globalizing era stalled, only slowly resuming as the decades began to lengthen beyond the defeats of Nazi and Japanese colonialism, then moving into high gear following the USSR’s collapse and the internet’s coincidental emergence.

The book emphasizes that the cooperative dimensions of the political economy of global communication in the first fifty years of this era did not automatically result in a sunny scenario for the colonized. As the colonial powers competed to extract concessions from China’s government but were then faced with the emergence of the “Boxer” uprising, their collective interest triumphed. The east Asian affiliate of the Eastern Telegraph Company (its subsequent name) rapidly built a cable connection from Shanghai to Beijing via key cities along the coast, which enabled the effective mobilization of 20,000 European troops to crush the insurgency. The cost of the line was contractually borne by the Chinese government. And in more routine situations than revolution and war, the rates charged by the cartels were monopolistic. Despite energetic efforts by Fleming and Henniker Heaton to drive cable rates down to mirror the British imperial penny post, for which the latter had successfully campaigned, it was not until 1919 that these concessions were made. Cable was only affordable for business and governments until the final decade of this era.

Inevitably, in a text characterized by careful detail and a plethora of primary and secondary historical sources, there will be space for disagreements on specifics among specialists. There is no room to address those in a review. Instead, I will conclude by flagging two points of more general critique.

One is the distinction insisted upon in the book between territorial imperialism (= colonialism) and capitalist imperialism (= global capitalism). I would suggest that it makes things clearer to define colonialism as a subset of imperialism, rather than taking the 19th and early 20th use of the latter term as equivalent to colonialism. That way, the interplay is not lost between geo-strategic pre-emptive strikes, as in much of the scramble for Africa, and the emergence of truly global capitalist processes, whether competitive in one place and moment, or cooperative in others. Furthermore, their contention with the standard historiography to date of ocean cables and empire stands on its own feet, based upon the historical evidence they marshal. Their terminological distinction is thus

more rhetorical, to underscore that colonial powers did not for the most part pursue a competitive investment strategy with each other regarding ocean cables, than essential.

The other point of critique is their defense in chapter eight of Wilsonianism, as a “thick” (their term) version of internationalism, contrasted with “thin” internationalism, namely the rapacious exploitation of the global South by powerful Western nations. Granted, they have a point in pointing up its attractiveness by contrasting it with the mega-death strategies of Nazi and Japanese imperialism that instead dominated the 1930s and 1940s. Yet when the long-term consequences of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Treaties of Versailles, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Trianon and Sèvres are taken into account, it is I would suggest hard not to approximate Wilsonianism to the pious promises of the 1885 Berlin Agreement which they cite (104): “...They shall, without distinction of creed or nation, protect and favor all religious, scientific or charitable institutions...which aim at instructing the natives and bringing home to them the blessings of civilization...”

These critiques notwithstanding, this book is a major contribution to media history and also to our grasp of the dynamics of communication globalization in the current era. The authors manage to convey the specifics of “collaboration, competition, and conflict, self-interest and opportunism, private enterprise and state intervention” (90), while still succeeding in plotting a convincing line of least squares through their fascinating thickets of detail.

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