



Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods (Harvard East Asian Monographs)

Cynthia J. Brokaw

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Sibao today is a cluster of impoverished villages in the mountains of western Fujian. Yet from the late seventeenth through the early twentieth century, it was home to a flourishing publishing industry. Through itinerant booksellers and branch bookshops managed by Sibao natives, this industry supplied much of south China with cheap educational texts, household guides, medical handbooks, and fortune-telling manuals.

It is precisely the ordinariness of Sibao imprints that make them valuable for the study of commercial publishing, the text-production process, and the geographical and social expansion of book culture in Chinese society. In a study with important implications for cultural and economic history, Cynthia Brokaw describes rural, lower-level publishing and bookselling operations at the end of the imperial period. *Commerce in Culture* traces how the poverty and isolation of Sibao necessitated a bare-bones approach to publishing and bookselling and how the Hakka identity of the Sibao publishers shaped the configuration of their distribution networks and even the nature of their publications.

Sibao's industry reveals two major trends in print culture: the geographical extension of commercial woodblock publishing to hinterlands previously untouched by commercial book culture and the related social penetration of texts to lower-status levels of the population.

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