

## Reviews

Rania Huntington, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative*, Cambridge, Mass. & London, Harvard University Press, 2003, 370 pp. ISBN: 0-674-01094-9 (hbk).

As Lewis Mayo noted in a review article in this journal last year (“Heavenly Creatures?”, *NZJAS* 5, 2 (December, 2003): 155-65), recent years have seen a renewed and welcome scholarly interest in the place of the animal in traditional Chinese cultural discourse, to which he has himself contributed (movingly) an avian dimension. The late imperial narrative too has occasioned much excellent work of late. Rania Huntington engages with both these fields of scholarly endeavour – although the timing of her book was such that she was unable to refer to either of the books discussed by Mayo. One of the two main literary protagonists of her research, Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724-1805) and his *Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記 [Notebook from the Thatched Cottage of Close Scrutiny], has also been the focus of much contemporary interest both in China (popular and scholarly) and the West, but in this case Huntington’s book has benefited from the best of this work, Leo Tak-hung Chan’s *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth-Century Literati Storytelling* (1998) and David L. Keenan’s *Shadows in a Chinese Landscape: The Notes of a Confucian Scholar* (1999).

Her topic is the fox (*huli* 狐狸), that “most ubiquitous and ambiguous alien in the Chinese imagination from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries”, as she puts it. She begins her work, appropriately, by quoting the first item found in the first of the nine *juan* devoted to the fox in the great Song dynasty encyclopaedia *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [Broad Gleanings from the Era of Great Peace], “Shuo hu” 說狐 [On the Fox], cited from the no longer extant *Xuanzhong ji* 玄中記 [Records from Within the Obscure Realm]: “When a fox is fifty years old, it can transform itself into a woman. When it is one hundred, it becomes a beautiful woman or a shaman; some become men and have sex with women. They can know events from more than a thousand *li* away and are good at witchcraft, beguiling people and making them lose their senses. When they are a thousand years old, they can commune with the heavens and become heavenly foxes”. Huntington then juxtaposes an extract from one of Ji Yun’s fox stories, written a millennium and a half later, and which by contrast emphasizes not the fox’s shape-shifting abilities but its in-betweenness and liminality. It is the trajectory between this body of age-old received fox lore and the usages to which the fox is put in the high Qing dynasty narrative that is her topic – the shift from a focus on the fox’s “transgressive abilities” to the extent of its “transgression of categories”. “It is”, Huntington states, “a study of an age in which the rare thousand-year-

old fox has become the most ordinary strange creature a man might meet” (2). Her study is explicitly literary in its concerns (rather than, for instance, zoological, religious or anthropological) and as such, she is interested in the change over time of the representation of the fox during the late imperial period, the generic forms in which fox stories are embodied (particularly the classical tale (*wenyan xiaoshuo* 文言小說) and its extensive sub-genre, the *zhiguai* 志怪 [record of the strange]) and the role of the fox within these stories. After two introductory chapters, successive chapters deal with various manifestations of the fox in the literature of the period: their intrusion into the domestic world of the private home and garden, the relationship between the fox in literature and in popular religion, vulpine sexuality and romance, and finally (and uniquely) the fox’s ability to play the contrasting role of *xian* 仙 [transcendent] intent upon self-improvement or of *yao* 妖 [monster] caused by human misbehavior.

Much of the material she covers is fascinating, as much for some of its details as for Huntington’s overarching theme of the extent to which, in Ji Yun’s hands in particular, the fox is rationalized and drawn into a grand and unified master narrative. In this respect, Ji’s moral and literary conservatism and his anxieties about the dangers inherent in fiction stand in stark contrast to the delight taken in illusion and invention on the part of his predecessor, Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1644-1715), a far more significant writer.<sup>1</sup>

Of particular interest is Huntington’s concluding chapter in which she seeks to establish something of a comparative East-West cultural perspective on the topic of the fox. “The most obvious difference between the two traditions”, she argues, “is the absolute division in the West between the possession and the lack of a soul ... The Chinese tradition has no such absolute answer to the question of what makes men unique. Buddhist ideas of reincarnation serve to blur the boundaries between species; the afterlife becomes the point at which men and beast can be confused, not distinguished” (326). And yet the boundaries in China are not entirely porous, nor could they be, and as the distinction between the marvelous and the ordinary seems about to dissolve, it is the fox (“ever the confounding in-between”) that becomes the embodiment of the problem: “Despite what appears to be a dramatic difference between species defined by the presence of the absence of a soul, with death as the moment of truth, as opposed to species defined by the wheel of rebirth and the ladder of cultivation, the rhetorical uses of the self-improving fox are similar to the double meaning of the elemental spirits: the diligent fox, starting in a burrow and aspiring to the heavens, reminds us of human striving, human superiority, and human limitation” (327).

Unfortunately, for all the intrinsic and comparative interest of the fox, the text of this book tends toward the dense and somewhat wooden, particularly where it translates excerpts from some of the tales discussed. Neither does the book live up to the high standards expected of Harvard University Press in terms of book production; the first copy I was sent for

<sup>1</sup> As Huntington notes, in a note attached to the end of his *Yuewei caotang biji*, Ji Yun blamed the premature death of his son on his obsession with Pu’s *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異.

review proved to be missing a large number of pages, whilst the replacement copy contains numerous instances of transposed Chinese characters, overprinting and so on. A pity, in both respects.

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David Coates, *Models of Capitalism: Growth and Stagnation in the Modern Era*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000, x + 304 pp. ISBN 0745620582 (hbk); 0745620590 (pbk).

Coates does an extraordinarily good job at introducing readers to the fate of different capitalist systems in the modern period. He has a rich agenda encompassing the economic policies of the US, UK, Japan, Germany and Sweden predominantly in the post-1945 period. The rise and fall of state-centred developmentalism in Japan, the varying fortunes of pluralist liberalism in the UK, the dominance of free market ideology in the US, and patterns of social democracy in Germany are telling reminders that there is no single path to the acquisition and sustenance of national economic performance. Nor should there be any presumption that we know whether the proximate causes of economic performance lie with the state, with other economic actors, or as a result of the combination of enabling influences such as education, cultural perceptions and attitudes, training and the organisation of industry and finance to an extent perhaps underestimated in the current literature.

Coates tackles these and other issues with a sweeping but impressive survey of competing theories and contemporary literature. The coverage and analysis are impressive and highly organised. The stories of how major capitalist economies reacted to the threats and opportunities within the national and international economic environment after 1945 are developed around the key themes outlined above. In addition, the arguments buttressing support for liberal capitalism in the UK and the US are compared to those surrounding Japanese trust-based capitalism and negotiated/consensual capitalism in Germany and Sweden, the whole judged against evidence from each of the countries over the post-war period. In short, Coates provides a schematic, multi-disciplinary analysis of the leading economies of the post-war period with sometimes scathing judgements on the inherent contradictions and shortcomings of the capitalist models under review. The text also embraces the emergence of globalisation and the effect that had upon labour interests in particular (the leftist focus of the book is unmistakable). The style is racy and non-technical though at times the attempt to summarise argument and counterargument within particular nations, across them, and alongside unifying theories often leads to a compression of analysis and citation of sources that can be somewhat bewildering. Inevitably too many of the assessments about policy stance or relative economic performance are drawn from the

juxtaposition of particular pieces of evidence in a way that tempts the reader to ask what conclusions might have been drawn if the considerable literature upon which the synthesis is built had been examined in more detail or at different comparative points in time.

That said, it is clear that the fate of the major economies in the twenty first century is dependent in part upon what conclusions economic policymakers and principal economic agents draw about the benefits and losses of free market and state- influenced activity from both the post-1945 period and over the long century. This book offers a rich and penetrating overview of which capitalist systems were thought by inside and outside observers to work best. Not surprisingly, each system has been found to be far more intricate and complex to allow for any easy or lasting conclusions to be drawn. The relative and at times absolute performance of the principal industrialised nations in the recent past and the extent to which circumstance, opportunism and the political agenda (not least during the Cold-War years) were in evidence inform this debate. But, as Coates demonstrates, it is extremely dangerous to presume that aspiration and performance can properly be tested and judged according to purely deterministic criteria. The political economy of change is ascendant making comparative analysis the more challenging because it must go beyond what can readily be measured (though magnitudes naturally provide the essential context) to reach into areas of trust, consensus, and national will which were ever present after 1945 as countries searched for a place in the evolving international economic order.

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Pompa Banerjee, *Burning Women: Widows, Witches, and Early Modern European Travelers in India*, New York, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003, xviii + 278 pp. ISBN: 1403960186 (hbk).

The figure of the burning Hindu widow has been a prominent element of outsider's perceptions of South Asian civilization for many centuries. Travellers have recorded instances of sati since the fourth century BC, when a Greek soldier recorded an act of sati in 316 BC as he witnessed the junior wife of an Indian soldier serving in Iran join her deceased husband on his funeral pyre. Over subsequent centuries, Greek soldiers and travellers recorded witnessing sati in northern India and over time, sati became a crucial marker of European understandings of India. Pompa Banerjee's *Burning Women* examines early modern European accounts of *sati*, when representations of widow-burning became a stock element of travel narratives produced by the growing number of European who travelled to India as merchants, soldiers, diplomats or agents of God.

Banerjee's monograph is an important contribution to the growing body of literature on the encounters between Europeans and South Asians in the early modern period. Here Banerjee is not offering a straightforward survey of European representations of sati, but rather uses these narratives as a site from which she articulates a set of sophisticated arguments about the growing enmeshment of European and South Asian culture in the early modern period, prior to the establishment of the British East India Company's large territorial empire in South Asia in the final third of the eighteenth century. The starting point of Banerjee's argument is the desire to connect representations of sati to European gender ideologies, especially the fears of murderous wives, unruly widows and witches that gripped the European imagination in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She suggests that sati – which was practiced in public and depended on an audience for its effect – and witch burning were spectacles that 'seem to have been critical for the maintenance of their respective patriarchal orders' (4). However, Banerjee recognises that written European accounts of Hindu widow-burning did not in fact explicitly compare this practice to witch-burning, despite representations of the two practices being '*visually, arrestingly, alike*' (4). This silence – the inability or reluctance of European observers to explicitly connect witch-hunting and sati – Banerjee argues, reflects the political work that early modern accounts of South Asia were doing. These narratives were in effect 'distancing the European authors from the burning scene in India' and, more broadly, producing the cultural distance between Indian and European culture in general (5).

*Burning Women* explores narratives relating to sati from 1500 to 1723, exploring forty-three European travelogues which provide Banerjee a small but rich cross-section of the large body of material relating to the "Orient" produced by European travellers, merchants and missionaries. These accounts circulated widely, particularly as European print culture was disseminated more widely and at greater speed as European accounts of India were translated, edited, anthologised, plagiarised and frequently republished. Writers from a wide range of European nationalities are explored. Banerjee assesses texts produced by Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, German, Danish, Icelandic, as well as French and English authors. These Europeans were from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds and travelled east in a variety of roles, as missionaries, chaplains, priests, agents of East India Companies, physicians, and ambassadors. Banerjee uses English versions or translations of this multilingual textual body, which allows this project to remain manageable and this decision to focus on English language texts also gives her the opportunity to further enrich her analysis, by providing some interesting insights into the process of translation and editing of accounts of South Asia. Banerjee carefully contextualises her exploration of these narratives within the contours of early modern print culture, highlighting the critical commentaries provided by editors and the competitive positioning of authors and publishers as they attempted to produce the most authentic (and, more importantly, most popular) accounts of India.

Banerjee develops her argument through an introduction and five substantial chapters. Chapter one is about absence and silence, as it explores the failure of European travellers to deploy the analogy of witch burning in their narratives about India, even though these writers were well acquainted with the public trial and execution of witches within Europe. Searching beyond evidence of an explicit and conscious circulation of arguments between texts describing the Indian and European forms of patriarchal violence, Banerjee suggests that while it is impossible to reconstruct any explicit connection between patriarchal discourses in the two divergent contexts, 'a form of literary haunting' can be diagnosed in European accounts of sati. Reading accounts produced by various travellers to South Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Banerjee asserts that 'the repressed witch uncannily returned to haunt the narratives and images of widow-burning' (32). This argument is clearly supported by her reading of the travelogue produced by the French physician François Bernier's which recounted his travels in India between 1658-1667. In Surat, Bernier was asked to speak to a widow in order to try to dissuade her from joining her husband on the funeral pyre. Bernier's account of this encounter demonstrates the ways in which European modes of representing witchcraft and the diabolical provided a language for describing the social context of the sati rite:

I complied, and found on entering the apartment a regular witches' Sabat of seven or eight old hags, and another four or five excited, wild and aged Brahmens standing round the body, all of whom gave by turns a horrid yell, and beat their hands with violence. The widow was seated at the feet of her dead husband; her hair was dishevelled and her visage pale; but her eyes were tearless and sparkling with animation while she cried and screamed aloud like the rest of the company, and beat time with her hands to this horrible concert. The hurly-burly having subsided, I approached the hellish group, and addressed the woman in a gentle tone ... I repeated these arguments [against sati] several times without receiving an answer; but, at last, fixing a determined look on me, she said, "Well if I am prevented from burning myself, I will dash my brains against a wall." What a diabolical spirit has taken possession of you, I thought (62-3).

Chapter two focuses on the strategies that allowed European travellers to construct geographic and cultural difference between Europe and India. Banerjee shows how this distancing was achieved through images that instantiated and reaffirmed a fundamental disjuncture between Christianity and Hinduism. Banerjee notes that Stephen Greenblatt has identified similar dynamics in European accounts of the "New World". The Spanish found some Aztec practices 'disturbingly homologous' to aspects of their own culture, but they used cannibalism and human sacrifice as practices to establish the essential and profound difference between Europeans and the peoples of

Mesoamerica (84-5). In a similar vein, Banerjee suggests, ‘illustrations of widow burning [in India] often constructed the rite as the definitive example of the differences between Hinduism and Christianity by offering candid exposés of the cruelty and barbarism of the Hindu religion’ (87).

Chapter three examines the ‘doublings and fragmentations’ in European discourses on sati. Here Banerjee traces the ways in which the chaste sati emerged in European discussions of the ‘good wife’, who was defined by her disciplined and docile body and her willingness to submit her will to her husband’s patriarchal authority. The narrative of Pietro della Valle, a traveller from Rome who travelled along the Malabar coast and through Gujarat in 1623-4, encapsulates some of these connections (119). After witnessing a sati in Ikkeri, della Valle turned to the gathered crowd and addressed them:

I told them by an Interpreter that I was a Person of a very remote Country, where we had heard by Fame that some Women in India love their Husbands so vehemently as when they dye to resolve to dye with them; and that now, having intelligence that this Woman was such a one; I was come to see her that I might relate in my own Country that I had seen such a thing with my own Eyes.

Just as the sati embodied an ideal of female devotion, the figure of the Hindu widow who lived on after her husband’s death intersected with broader European understandings of widowhood. In the particular, the Hindu widow who pursued worldly life conjured up the same anxieties that Europeans expressed over the ‘lustful’ widow and women who exercised financial independence (two groups who were particularly prone to be identified as witches). In effect, the Hindu widow who refused to become a sati rejected a practice that many Europeans framed as barbarous, but in so doing she became a liminal and unruly figure who destabilised the social order.

Chapter four extends this discussion, focusing on the criminalisation of the widow. In part, Banerjee argues, this discourse developed within European accounts of sati as many travellers were convinced that the practice of sati emerged as a response to the treachery of Hindu wives. This argument insisted that many wives poisoned their husbands and sati emerged as both a punishment for this crime and as a form of deterrent. Banerjee rightly locates the origins of this image of Hindu women not in any South Asian practice, but rather in a range of European anxieties, including paranoia about the ‘criminal wife’ and resentment of the authority of midwives (who commonly used potions and powders in their work). Even more importantly, witch-hunters’ manuals stressed witches’ knowledge of poison and notorious cases, such as the German midwife Walpurga Hasummin (who was burnt at the stake in 1587 for allegedly poisoning sixteen animals, children and adults), encouraged many European authors to see widows and spinsters as not only a threat to the social fabric but also as a literal threat to life and limb (149).

The fifth and final chapter returns to the issue of historical voice and assesses the question of silence in historical writing and literary analysis.

Banerjee stresses that European travellers to India devalued local languages and produced texts that authorised the authority of European languages, especially English. This chapter also considers the transformations entailed in the production of a written text from eye-witnessing events such as sati. Within these contexts, Banerjee locates the writing out of the sati herself from these accounts of widow burning and the elevation of this practice as being emblematic of Indian culture for Europeans. These narratives and counter-narratives of an exoticized India, Banerjee claims, were central to the articulation of various visions of gender within Europe, and, as a result, the 'dark shadow of the sati hovered over wives, widows, and witches in Europe' (210).

With time, many aspects of these early modern accounts would 'calcify into imperial orthodoxy', as they were deployed by the British East India Company's colonial state in its attempts to discern the 'traditional basis' and social context of sati (21). Banerjee argues that as these texts were translated across time to be 'fed into subsequent imperial representations of colonized women', they frequently 'reappeared in particularly vicious forms' (28). Within both these early modern accounts of sati and later colonial discussions of the practice, Banerjee broadly supports Gayatri Spivak's suggestion that the subaltern cannot speak. She suggests 'Hindu widows and European witches' are not represented in an unmediated way in any of the texts and when they are recorded they are 'ventriloquised projections of the writers' fantasies' (29).

Broadly speaking, this is a thoughtful and sophisticated work. Banerjee certainly succeeds in her desire to use sati as a site from which she can map 'the complex and tangled nature of identity formation in the age of discovery' (1). Most importantly, Banerjee highlights the contribution of these texts to the 'reverse traffic' – cultural flows from the edge of the empire to metropolitan centre – that historians have increasingly recognised as being central to the constitution of European culture (3). *Burning Women* shows how these entanglements not only opened up new possibilities for the European imagination, but also potentially destabilised and called into question European cultural formations. In particular, this monograph is an important contribution to the growing literature on the intersection between travel and the construction of gender, as it rematerialises the ways in which these 'foreign influences' from South Asia influenced European gender ideologies. While Banerjee does not want to suggest that European gender relations were built on an edifice transplanted from India, her evidence certainly suggests that European notions of wifely comportment had complex and diverse origins, including significant non-European influences. Banerjee suggests that the notion 'the chaste European woman ... might have been shaped by the models of sexuality and heroic chastity projected by the Hindu widow who burned herself alive with her dead husband in order to prove her chastity' (3-4). Or, as she reformulates this argument, '[t]he Hindu wife's chastity and self-renunciation seemed to the unreachable destination of the rigorous disciplining of the "good wife" as suggested by Catholic and Puritan conduct books' (98).

Because much of her work depends on the analysis of textual echoes and reflections, Banerjee's argument occasionally loses momentum. This is particularly the case in chapter one, where Banerjee explores the absence of any direct transplantation between discourses on witch-burning and sati; nevertheless, Banerjee ultimately makes a reasonably strong case for her reading of this silence, but the project of producing (and reading) a chapter about absences is a difficult one. Aside from this weakness, *Burning Women* is an important contribution to the historiography of travel, Orientalism and the construction of gender within a cross-cultural frame.

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Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal eds., *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003, 321 pp. ISBN: 0520232402 (pbk).

The fierce Hindu goddess Kālī has attracted much attention in recent years. This collection of articles, which grew out of the 1996 conference at Barnard College entitled "Encountering Kālī: Cultural Understandings at the Extremes", looks at the various sites inhabited by this fascinating goddess. *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West* explores, problematises and illuminates this goddess; in her various Indian forms, her popular western transformations and her academic study. The body of the text is divided into two parts; the first made up of articles dealing with Kālī in her South Asian context, while the second examines several ways in which she has been presented, manipulated and appropriated in the West. The lines between the articles in each part cannot be too harshly drawn, however, as the very nature of the collection asks the reader to consider the overlapping perspectives of both academics and devotees of the goddess. In the words of the book's editors Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal, discussing the many representations of the goddess: "Here Kālī beckons us, powerful, dangerous, fascinating, and paradoxical. Appropriately, those who seek to encounter such a Goddess respond to her multi-armed nature in equally diverse and even contradictory way, through personal devotion, animal sacrifice, ecstasy, suffering, and, perhaps strangest of all, academic scholarship." (15)

McDermott and Kripal's Introduction to the work presents both an overview of the historical development of the goddess herself, but also of the academic study of her. This historical placement acknowledges the conditions and limitation, as well as the potentials, inherent in the study of Kālī. Since the 1960s western counter-culture has taken a special interest in goddesses. It is one of the aims of this collected work to engage with popular western discussions about Kālī, both to inform, or 'correct', western non-academics

who desire some kind of relationship with the goddess, but also to create a respectful space which recognises their importance as new devotees of Kālī. The overview of the field of research focused on Kālī also offers a useful resource for all those interested in entering that field; the references, appendix on video resources and selected bibliography alone make it extremely valuable.

Part One of *Encountering Kālī* begins with the reproduction of David R. Kinsley's chapter on Kālī from his important book *Hindu Goddesses*.<sup>1</sup> This functions as both an introduction to the goddess and as a tribute to this hugely influential scholar. Kinsley covers Kālī's scriptural history and offers some interpretations of her importance with tantric practice and popular devotionalism. Discussing the power of her symbolism, Kinsley presents his characteristic argument that, "Kālī reveals that ultimately all creatures are her children and also her food and that no social role or identity can remove the individual from this sacrificial give and take. While this truth may appear grim, its realization may be just what is needed to push one over the threshold into the liberating quest for release from bondage to *samsāra*" (36).

The next three articles all demonstrate the 'sweetening' of Kālī within various South Asian contexts. These articles look at how the fierce, terrifying tantric goddess is softened and domesticated as the object of popular devotion. Patricia Dold's examination of *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* shows how Kālī can be seen in this mythology to be not only a warrior goddess, but also a loving Mother who tests and rewards her devotees, as represented by her parents and Śiva. Sanjukta Gupta presents a detailed study of how Vaiṣṇava priestly practice at Kālī's famous Bengali temple Kālīghāt has largely eliminated many of more fearsome features of the goddess's cult, such as animal sacrifice, even though the majority of the pilgrims who visit this temple still see her as a tantric goddess. In the next article, Usha Menon and Richard A. Shweder use both textual analysis and field work in the temple town of Bhubaneswar to trace the evolution of the meaning attributed to the icon of the goddess in which she stands on top of a passive Śiva with her tongue out and her eyes bulging, from the *tantric* origin in Kālī's domination of Śiva, to the now popular *dharmic* interpretation that Kālī's expression as one of shame for having stepped outside her rightful subservient role. These articles all identify the presence of competing and coexisting perspectives of Kālī among her Hindu devotees.

With powerful first-hand accounts of temple goers and oracles that resulted from her field study, Patricia Lawrence explores how a less 'sweet' Kālī has become increasingly drawn upon by the Tamil victims of torture and disappearances in the Sri Lankan civil war to relieve suffering and trauma. There has been a massive resurgence of devotion to Kālī since violence broke out some twenty years ago. Lawrence concludes, "In a historical moment when dissent is impossible, amid fear, displacement, and unnatural death, it has become part of Kālī's many tasks to overcome political silencing, to embody memory, and to reconstitute a diminished world" (119).

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<sup>1</sup> David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Roxanne Kamayani Gupta's fascinating contribution to this collection recounts her touching and very personal reactions to the aged and impoverished priest of a tiny Kālī temple in a Banaras ghetto, Kālī Māyī. This vivid, poetic account conveys the relationship between two women who are worlds apart and offers intriguing insight into the ways in which South Asian and western academic ideas of Kālī meet, clash and hopefully come to a fuller understanding of each other. Interestingly, Gupta expresses far more about herself and her thoughts about the goddess than she illuminates about the gentle, quite woman she found so inspiring. Comparing her own tendency (in the tradition of western feminist readings of Kālī) to see the goddess as an empowering figure expressing female rage, to Māyī's incredible passivity Gupta comes to the realisation that, "Although it seems contradictory or even ironic from a Western point of view, for Hindus, Kālī is the embodiment, not of rage, but of compassion. In order to assess whether this compassion is "empowering" or its opposite, we would have to become much more self-conscious about our own definitions of power: to ask whether by this term we refer to an external or internal agency, power as the ability to *do*, or power as the ability to *be*, to simply continue to exist in the face of potential annihilation, real or imagined" (141).

The first two articles of the second part of *Encountering Kālī* are devoted to, largely negative, western constructions of Kālī by eighteenth and nineteenth century Orientalists and Colonialists. Cynthia Ann Humes attempts to show how the various western views of Kālī were based on pre-existing Indian discourses, which she categorises as Apologist, Disbelieving, Demonizing, Dismissive and Sensationalizing or Scandalizing. Finally, in the British mind, "the many shapings merged into a less malleable reification; she hardened into an implacable, oversexualised female enemy" (164). Carrying on from Hume, but with quite a different focus, Hugh B. Urban argues that western concepts of Kālī say more about the western mind and its fears, fantasies and colonial quests for power, than about the actual reality of the goddess within her South Asian framework. Kālī was constructed as the absolute Other, representing everything that separated the primitive, violent, disruptive but seductive East from Western civilisation. Urban then explores how these fears and fantasies were turned back on the British by revolutionaries, such as Aurobindo Ghosh, who took up a ferocious image of Kālī to inspire nationalist terrorism. Many of the essays within this collection illuminate conflicting views from 'within', ranging from the various views of those who worship her to the differing representations by those who study, however, the thinkers presented in these to articles could be largely said to be those on the 'outside', those who do not wish to know this goddess. Their discourses represent different ways of rejecting Kālī, of refusing to understand her.

In an article, which in many ways continues the discussion of western construction of the goddess presented by Hume and Urban, Jeffrey J. Kripal provides an interesting historical overview of western psychoanalytical use of Kālī. He then proceeds to employ this controversial form of analysis to

explain the heroic tantric approach to Kālī in terms of Indian child-raising practices. This article focuses largely on the transformative power of the ‘impure’, socially subversive elements of Kālī and her cult and relates this tendency to similar leanings with psychoanalysis itself.

Keith E. McNeal identifies how and why Kālī worship was been marginalised among indentured Indian workers in Trinidad and the ways in which the religious community has adapted its practices in response. In a way that is comparable to the ‘sweetening’ presented by Dold, S. Gupta and Menon and Shweder, Kālī’s less savoury elements, especially animal sacrifice, have come to be downplayed in contemporary Indian communities in Trinidad. McNeal then presents an interesting discussion of the adaptive powers of the cult of Kālī due to the philosophy of *śakti* which sees the goddess as manifest in everything.

One of the most interesting essays in this book is Sarah Caldwell’s discussion which uses historical analysis and a feminist perspective to call into question concepts of what is ‘central’ and ‘marginal’. Kālī is typically considered a marginal goddess and yet she has a long and continuous history of devotion within India among a large number of its population. What is marginalised geographically and by the Brāhmaṇical tradition should not be automatically assumed to be peripheral to people’s religious lives. As Caldwell notes, “It is perhaps worth considering who is left once we exclude such “marginal” populations as low-caste, rural, and aboriginal males, and women of all castes – in fact, only metropolitan, high-caste males!” (259). She argues that scholars need to reconsider who they class as ‘outsiders’. With new understandings of where the centre lies, especially influenced by the shift in religious studies from text-based research to fieldwork, Kālī can come to be seen as not a ‘marginal’ goddess at all.

Finally, Rachel Fell McDermott explores Kālī’s new manifestations on the Internet, where feminist and New Age re-imaginings of this Indian goddess as the ultimate sexy bitch who can free the individual from the repressions of western patriarchy can be seen to depart substantially from, and frequently clash with, popular South Asian understandings. McDermott offers a look at the range of, often bizarre, forms this new Kālī takes. This appropriation of eastern religious iconography for western ends is seen by many as another example of neo-colonialism. McDermott recognises this as a genuine complaint from the Hindu community and yet is hesitant to dismiss too quickly what could well be a new religious community itself. Furthermore, she examines how the Internet has allowed a democratization of information, bringing western popular uses of the goddess into contact with Indian devotees as well academic sources, which has led to the increasing ‘Indianization’ of the western Kālī.

*Encountering Kālī* opens new doors for connections between practitioner and scholar, ‘East’ and ‘West’, the personal and the intellectual by blurring and complicating these distinctions. This is done with self-conscious honesty and adds to the work’s general premise of the multifaceted, cross-cultural nature of Kālī and those concerned with her. This is a rich, lively

volume of work, which contributes much to the study of this goddess by allowing some understanding of the scope of the competing images of Kālī, both within India itself and outside it. The range of disciplines and focuses presented here creates an invaluable source for anyone interested in the dark goddess. With so many different images of the goddess, however, a concluding chapter relating what the introduction rightly refers to as the “Many Kālī’s” to each other would have allowed the reader a clearer overview of this extremely complex deity. Furthermore, many of the articles in this work suggest new directions for study and therefore some summary and discussion of these possibilities at the end the collection would have been a useful addition to this otherwise helpful and captivating book.

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Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, xxiii + 321pp. ISBN: 0521630274 (hbk); 0521639743 (pbk).

Until the mid-1990s, historians of South Asia were poorly served by textbooks. In the classroom, many relied on Stanley Wolpert’s endlessly reissued *A New History of India*. The first edition of Romila Thapar’s outstanding *A History of India* (which dealt with Indian history up to the Mughals), Percival Spear’s very dated survey of Mughal and British India *A History of India Vol. 2* (the companion volume to Thapar’s), and Jim Masselos’s excellent *Nationalism on the Indian Subcontinent* remained the standard texts for general readers as well as undergraduate students needing to meet an essay deadline for to prepare for a fast-approaching exam. Fortunately, over the past decade, this situation has changed rapidly and South Asianists are now spoilt for choice. Lawrence James’s lively account of British India, Burton Stein’s volume on India for the Blackwell History of the World, Peter Robb’s volume on India in Palgrave’s ‘Essential Histories’ series, and Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose’s punchy *Modern South Asia* have provided teachers of South Asian history with a variety of quality of introductory texts for their students. Thapar’s *Early India* (reviewed in this volume) also marks the first of Penguin’s new three-volume history of India. This generation of recent work in turn builds upon, and is complimented by, the *New Cambridge History of India*, an outstanding collection of volumes that focus on particular communities, movements, and themes within South Asian history, providing authoritative assessments of each particular subject and its historiography.

Cambridge University Press has ushered another volume into this rapidly growing field, *A Concise History of India*, a volume that is part of the impressive series ‘Cambridge Concise Histories’. This volume is produced by a distinguished husband and wife team. Barbara Metcalf is a leading authority

on the history of South Asian Islam and has more recently produced groundbreaking scholarship on Islam in the West. Since the 1960s, Thomas Metcalf, on the other hand, has been one of the most important scholars of British India. His work has ranged widely, from the social context and impact of the 1857 rebellion to the cultural history of imperial architecture, from the history of imperial ideologies to his most recent work on the place of British India in the Indian Ocean World. Taken together, the Metcalfs are a team with an impressive array of expertise and interest. This broad and complimentary knowledge invests this volume with a richness and texture that cannot be found in any other single volume history of India.

The volume is divided into nine chapters. The first covers the 'Sultans, Mughals, and pre-colonial Indian society', painting the development of Indian society from 1206 to 1707 in broad brushstrokes to set the scene for the rise of the British. Chapter 2 explores the rising power of the British East India Company within a context of the 'Mughal twilight', the decline of centralised Mughal authority in the wake of Aurangzeb's death in 1707 when regional 'successor' states, disaffected warrior communities, and European East India Companies jockeyed for position within a fragmented political terrain. The consolidation of British paramountcy and the nature of the colonial state fashioned by the British East India Company is the focus of chapter 3, which covers the period 1772 to 1850. Chapter 4 spans the 1848-1885 period, focusing on the development of an explicitly authoritarian vision of colonial modernity and forms of resistance that Indians adopted in the face of British power. Chapter 5 focuses largely on the development of Indian nationalism, examining the years between the formation of the Indian National Congress (1885) and the Amritsar massacre (1919). 'The crisis of the colonial order' between 1919 and 1939 is the focus of chapter 6, which explores British attempts gradually to reform the colonial state in the face of increasingly urgent demands made by various nationalist elements, including the All-India Muslim League which was beginning to articulate its 'two nation theory'. Chapter 7 re-assesses the 1940s, highlighting both the substantial achievements of the nationalist movement and the fledgling states of Pakistan and India, as well as documenting the tragedy of Partition and its poisonous legacy. The vice-like grip of the Congress party over Indian politics and society following Independence is the chief concern of chapter 8. The final chapter focuses on the India in the 1990s, offering a rich exploration of the interconnections between class, consumption and competing visions of community. Each chapter is well-structured, presented in accessible prose and interweaves narrative and analysis in a very effective manner.

The scholarly apparatus that supports the volume is excellent. The volume contains over 50 illustrations. These are not simply gathered in a section of plates, but are rather evenly spread throughout the volume. Typically, the images are well-placed and deftly interwoven with the narrative, so they enrich the analysis rather than simply providing decorative illustration. The authors have made good use of Thomas Metcalf's own photos (ranging from images of steel mills to a district magistrate addressing villagers, details of

Mughal architecture to images of 1960s election rallies), both colonial and India art (including pieces from their own collection), and, for the final chapter, images drawn from the internet. This range of illustrations is impressive and allows readers to engage with the visual world of South Asia. Moreover, the use of these images nicely compliments the frequent and extensive quotations from primary sources that are a prominent feature of the volume; both devices allow readers to encounter the range and complexity of South Asian society in a way that is unusual for a synthetic historical survey.

*A Concise History of India* also provides a very good glossary for readers unfamiliar with South Asian languages. The definitions offered are of a good length and in two or three sentences (rather than just two words) they sketch the multiple meanings of words or changing meaning of a term. 'Dalit', for example, is explained in the following way: "'Down-trodden", term used by former untouchables to describe their community. Has replaced Gandhi's term, *harijan* "children of god" in recent decades.'" At the end of the main body of text, the authors supply an additional five pages of brief biographies, giving the kind of extra detail on leading political figures from colonial and independent India that many undergraduate students value. The excellent bibliographical essay, which organises its material on a chapter by chapter basis, will also be a valuable tool for either senior undergraduates or early graduate students who quickly want to gain a sense of the landmark pieces of research and key historiographical debates on major issues. In sum, the quality of this apparatus adds a great deal to *A Concise History of India* and it definitely makes the volume a highly teachable text.

This is, then, a tremendously impressive single volume history. I do, however, have one major reservation about the organization of the volume. Although I can understand the reasoning behind the chronological structure of *A Concise History of India*, the pre-British period really requires fuller treatment. Only the first chapter is devoted solely to developments predating the rise of the British East India Company as chapter two, 'The Mughal Twilight', is designed to make the emergence of the regional states and the growing power of EIC intelligible. As a result, chapter one's 27 pages deal with 'pre-colonial' history, the rise and fall of Muslim dynasties in north India from the thirteenth century, and the development of the Mughal empire. This truncated history is heavily skewed towards north India: the complexities of Vijayanagar, for example, are devoted little more than one paragraph. More broadly still, this strategy means that the sheer range of religious practice, social organization, and spiritual life prior to the dominance of Islam in north India are neglected and the historical underpinnings of contemporary 'Hinduism' are not explicated in sufficient detail. The Mughal empire itself is treated in only thirteen pages, which is disappointing given the rich scholarship that has developed over the past three decades on economic life, political structures, and material culture within the empire. The overall effect of this decision is to implicitly suggest that developments prior to the East India Company's rise to power in the final third of the eighteenth century were somehow a 'prelude' to the main story in Indian history: the encounter with

the British and the struggle for independence. This framework also suggests that the main audience for this volume lies outside South Asia itself. Given the contentiousness of historical writing within South Asia, particularly over issues such as the 'Aryan Invasion Theory' and Mughal policies towards non-Muslims, it is hard to imagine than readers in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh wouldn't want a fuller treatment of the inter-relationship between Islam and Hinduism prior to the onset of British colonialism. In the end, my feeling is that the five chapters covering the period of British rule might have been condensed to four, leaving an extra chapter to be devoted to pre-colonial developments.

Nevertheless, *A Concise History of India* compares well to other recent survey texts. While Burton Stein's Blackwell history offers a more even-handed treatment of South Asian history (devoting 200 pages to the pre-British period, and 40 pages to contemporary India, as well providing a sophisticated treatment of southern India), his volume lacks the narrative drive and accessibility that characterise the Metcalfs' volume. That accessibility, together with its excellent use of visual material and its effective scholarly apparatus means that *A Concise History of India* is better suited to classroom use than Peter Robb's history for Palgrave. Jalal and Bose's *Modern South Asia* probably remains *A Concise History of India*'s toughest competition. But where frequently Bose and Jalal plunge readers into the historiographical deep end, the Metcalfs strike a better balance between narrative and historiography for an introductory text. As this discussion suggests, teachers and students of South Asian history now have very good range of introductory texts and historical surveys to choose from. At this moment, *A Concise History of India* stands out as the very best single volume introduction to South Asia for undergraduate students and the general reader.

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G. Delouche ed., *Religions et États en Indochine contemporaine*, Paris, ACHCPI, 2003, 92 pp. ISBN: 2904955070 (pbk).

This small 92 page book is part of an in-house series put together by the Centre d'Histoire et Civilisations de la Péninsule Indochinoise (CHCPI) at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE) in the Sorbonne. This particular book is composed of four papers presented in 1997 during a French-Russian symposium in Moscow. While the actual CHCPI remains a fairly obscure body outside French academia, the authors themselves are not newcomers and belong to four well-established academic institutions. Po Dharma (also known as Po Dharma Quang) is a member of Ecole française d'Extrême Orient (EFEO) and contributes a chapter to this volume on the ideology of the Vietnamese State regarding religious practices of the Cam (Cham) between

1975 and 1988. Mak Phoeun works at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) and contributes here a piece on Buddhism and traditional beliefs at the time of the Angkar in Cambodia (1975-1979). After starting his career as collaborator of EFEO, Pierre-Bernard Lafont has been a long time member of EPHE and CNRS and his chapter focuses on Buddhism in Laos from 1975 to 1988. Editor Gilles Delouche, finally, is the current president of Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO), in addition to a brief introduction, contributes an article to this volume on the problem of the integration of Buddhist nuns into the clergy in Thailand.

These four authors present here a mature vision of an especially troubled period in the recent history of the Peninsula, namely the implantation of Communist regimes in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In the latter case, of course, this upheaval was compounded the Khmer Rouge's bloody dictatorship in Cambodia. Liberal and relatively peaceful Thailand, it could be said, plays here the role of counterpoint to the troubles that afflicted the other parts of the peninsula in this period. It is the relationship between history, politics, and religion in each of these countries that is the centre of attention of this book. How did the state use religion to its own ends, how did the local clergies respond to these strategies while having their own agendas, and how did the population make sense of it all, are questions at the core of the book. With each article being less than 20 pages on average however, the depth of the historical exploration and the finesse of the analysis are limited and many questions are left unanswered.

The level of erudition of this unpretentious book is high, in keeping with the experience and scholarship of the authors. One only regrets that it has materialised in such a humble publication that can hardly be found on the market, especially outside France. A single frugal map adorns the book, and there is no consolidated bibliography (only footnote references), nor index to the volume, which makes it less than user friendly.

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Greg Bankoff *Cultures of Disaster: Society and Natural Hazard in the Philippines*, London and New York, Routledge Curzon, 2003, xvi + 232 pp. ISBN: 0700717617 (hbk).

This book makes a significant contribution not only to scholarship on the Philippines but also to academic research on natural disasters in the non-western world. Bankoff's work goes beyond studies that compartmentalize the effects of disaster into human and non-human effects and produce ever-more discreet aspects of study. Bankoff instead attempts to understand the way ordinary life in the Philippines has been shaped and in turn shapes responses to environmental extremes. Bankoff studies the political, religious,

social and cultural aspects of environmental events and the way these contribute to understandings of the natural world. He argues that Filipinos meet natural hazards so frequently that they have become an accepted and normal part of their lives.

In the first three chapters, Bankoff looks at the history of environmental hazards in the Philippines over the last five hundred years, arguing that to understand present day attitudes and problems one must study their historical background. In these chapters, Bankoff explores the ways people have made, worsened and responded to such events. One of his most important arguments is that present-day western discussions of disaster are embedded in the way Europeans feared tropical environments during in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in the unequal developmental legacy European empires left behind. Bankoff notes that many western authors elide the broader social and historical forces exacerbating the effects of disaster. Instead, contends Bankoff, these authors present disasters as purely natural forces, thereby ignoring the role of colonialism and later under-development in exacerbating such hazards. Chapter two also charts the fascinating interplay between economic development and environmental misuse in creating and worsening hazard. Chapter three looks at the history of hazard in the Philippines, underlining the interaction between people and non-human events in creating disasters.

The remaining chapters explore in greater detail the roles hazard plays in shaping society, economy and politics in the Philippines. In chapter four, Bankoff demonstrates how natural disasters shape policies and worsen inter-ethnic conflict. Indeed, in chapter five, Bankoff shows how disasters, as he puts it, 'exacerbate inequalities in society' (83). Disasters aggravate the suffering of the poorest and most vulnerable in society by trapping them in a cycle of poverty. As Bankoff demonstrates, the wealthy take political advantage of such situations by siphoning off money, gaining private rebuilding contracts and embezzling funds in other ways. Based on these arguments, Bankoff observes that: 'It is possible that natural hazards on the scale and magnitude experienced in the Philippines function as integral mechanisms that partially regulate the flow of power and wealth within societies' (97). As Bankoff notes in chapter seven, non-Christian minorities, for instance, often receive less disaster relief help from government, while the systems set up to deal with disaster are woefully inadequate. Disasters also put off foreign investors, he points out, further entrenching the country in poverty. In chapter six, Bankoff explores the complexity of human-environmental interactions by looking at the impact of microalgae on humans. Pollution from urban areas and industry has helped to expand toxic algal blooms, of which red tides (*dinoflagellates*) are the most deadly. Chapter seven looks at the impact of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) mechanism in bringing flooding and drought to the country. Bankoff points to the importance of regional variation in governing rainfall patterns. He predicts that access to water resources, both for drinking and industrial use, will increasingly be controlled by the wealthy to the disadvantage of the poor.

I particularly enjoyed the final chapter, which shows that people frame disasters and explanations in their own cultural terms. Bankoff notes that, because disaster is such an everyday aspect of life, people have learned to live with it. Pre-colonial building styles and material, with low ceilings and easily weighted-down roofing, for instance, resisted high winds better than Spanish architecture. The popular concept of 'bahala na' is about facing one's destiny, but also, as Bankoff notes, 'about courage and daring and a sense of finely calculated assessment of the odds' (167). Unsurprisingly, many Filipinos have no faith in official responses to disasters. Instead, they frame the outcome of natural events in relation to 'graysa', a sense of spiritual grace and 'gaba', a concept of supernatural punishment. There is also growing evidence, Bankoff notes, of an indigenisation of overseas scientific and technocratic ideas by many Filipinos. Many see global warming and the problems associated with ENSO events as divinely driven. Sadly, Bankoff shows that officials have used these ideas to abjure their responsibility for causing and mitigating them.

Before summing up its many attributes, I want to air some mild criticisms. Bankoff does not address the gendered nature of environmental impacts. I found this surprising given the author's thesis that the poor are worst affected by natural disasters, and given the findings of many studies that women are particularly affected by disasters and poverty.<sup>1</sup> Equally, I found his assertion that, other than simplistic explanations, '[h]istorians have been reluctant to attribute any special role to natural hazards in shaping the course of human events' somewhat puzzling (18). This certainly is true of earlier historians, but those of today are far more attuned to environment as an 'actor' in human affairs, as witnessed by the explosion of environmental history in recent years.<sup>2</sup> This last point brings me to a wider observation of Bankoff's study. I feel Bankoff presents a kind of Orientalism in reverse. He juxtaposes the complex beliefs and environmental events in the Philippines with the almost monolithic view of western authors. These, he asserts, bring a technocratic viewpoint to natural disasters that fails to recognise either the complexity of that society, the on-going importance of religious beliefs or the role of the west in exacerbating these disasters. While that may be true of past writing, many current authors on development issues are far more attuned to the cultural complexities of non-western societies.

As a whole, though, *Cultures of Disaster* is a valuable inter-disciplinary study that adds to this author's already impressive contribution to scholarship on the Philippines. Its inter-disciplinary breadth brings together many aspects of history, science, anthropology, geography and political science and gives this study relevance beyond the Philippines. Not least of which is its recognition that people frame natural events and scientific explanations within

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance: Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*, New York, 1996; Bina Agarwal, 'The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons From India', *Feminist Studies*, 18, 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 120-127; Agarwal, 'Environmental Action, Gender Equity and Women's Participation', *Development and Change*, 28, (1997), pp.1-44.

<sup>2</sup> John McNeill, 'Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History', *History and Theory, Theme Issue*, 42, (December, 2003), pp.5-43.

their own cultural understandings. This assertion builds upon existing work into the epistemology of indigenous groups such as that undertaken by Ajay Skaria in western India.<sup>1</sup> Recognition of the differential aspects of development both between and within countries also reflects the work of academics such as Amita Baviskar. Baviskar has looked at development and environmental issues over a large dam project in India, drawing attention to issues of unequal equity inherent within development.<sup>2</sup> The similar subjects investigated in Bankoff's book – uneven external and internal development, growing environmental problems, equity, global warming – are pertinent ones whose effects will only magnify in the future. As Bankoff notes, 'beyond the concept of a society's vulnerability lies that of a culture's adaptability: it is the measure of the two that ultimately determines its exposure to risk' (183). Hopefully, in the future we shall be able to adapt our lifestyles.

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<sup>1</sup> Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*, New Delhi, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Amita Baviskar, *In The Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*, Delhi, 1997.