

## **Review Article**

# **OVERCOMING THE BORDERLAND COMPLEX: INDIA & CHINA, 600-1400**

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Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003, xxx + 556 pp. ISBN: 0-520-23899-0 (hbk).

Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2003, xvii + 388 pp. ISBN: 0-8248-2593-4 (hbk).

S.A.M. Adshead, *T'ang China: The Rise of the East in World History* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2004), xvii + 233 pp. ISBN: 1-4039-3456-8 (hbk); 1-4039-3457-6 (pbk).

The term 'Middle Kingdom' has long been synonymous with imperial China, reflecting the belief that China was the centre of a civilized world and that the further one moved from the imperial throne the more barbaric life became. The Sinocentric world order constructed on this foundation shaped inter-state relations for centuries. The three books reviewed here remind us that this perception of China's place in the world emerged only after an intense Indianisation of Chinese life. The bedding down of Buddhism in Chinese soil brought many Chinese under the sway of what Antonio Forte has called 'the borderland complex', the feeling that China, while not barbaric, was certainly peripheral to the centre of civilized life, which was to be found in South Asia. It was there that the brilliance of Buddhism was made manifest and it was there that Chinese must journey if they wished to share in that brilliance.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Hui-chih (fl. 676-703 A.D.), A Brahmin Born in China,' *Estratto da Annali dell' Instituto Universitario Orientale* 45 (1985): 106-134.

Overcoming this was a gradual process, accomplished only once Chinese Buddhism began to flourish independently of its Indian origins. Romila Thapar tells us much about the South Asian world to which Chinese civilization became deeply indebted in the period before 1400, while Tansen Sen and S.A.M. Adshad are explicitly concerned with the Indianisation of Chinese life and its significance for world history. Thapar is Emeritus Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University. In *Early India* she has revised her classic study of early South Asian history, first published nearly forty years ago and reprinted many times since. Adshad is also Emeritus Professor, at the University of Canterbury, and in *T'ang China* he continues his excursions into world history, this time offering a prequel to his earlier books on China, Central Asia, salt, material culture and critical theology.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade* is a first book, rich in detail and extensively documented. It is a substantial monograph that will help reshape understandings of the interactions between South and East Asia in the period before 1400. In reviewing these books, a last-minute challenge due to the non-appearance of the commissioned review article, I explore their distinctive features as well as those areas where they intersect.

Most students of Indian history will be familiar with Thapar's *A History of India, Volume One*, first published in 1966.<sup>3</sup> *Early India* is a substantially revised version of that book. Her aim with this edition was to incorporate new evidence and fresh interpretations, while retaining the older arguments that remain relevant. The result is a book that will be as useful to future students of South Asian history as the earlier version has been over the past forty years. It will also be appreciated by those of us who come to Indian history as outsiders, interested in South Asia and its place in world history. The product of a lifetime's work in the field, Thapar notes that a book of this nature inevitably has 'elements of autobiography', not only reflecting the way a field has developed but also how her own readings of the past have changed (Thapar xvii).

The most obvious difference with the earlier edition is the restricted chronological scope. Instead of ending with the foundation of the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth century, *Early India* closes around 1300. This reflects Thapar's success in convincing Penguin it should publish a three-volume history of India. She believed that the earlier two-volume history meant the Mughal period did not receive the attention it deserved, something that will now be corrected. Unlike some other historians of early India,

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<sup>2</sup> *China in World History* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988), *Salt and Civilisation* (Christchurch: University of Canterbury Press, 1992), *Central Asia in World History* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1993), *Material Culture in Europe and China, 1400-1800* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1997) and *Philosophy and Religion in Nineteenth-Century England and Beyond* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> This was the first part of Penguin's two-volume history of India, both of which were used as textbooks. Percival Spear was the author of the second volume, *A History of India, Volume Two*, which covered the period from the foundation of the Mughal Empire down to the early post-independence years.

Thapar does not restrict herself to a view of the South Asian past that is shaped solely by injunctions from the Hindu Right. She criticizes the tendency to read everything concerning early India as 'Hindu', thereby concealing a multiplicity of identities (of caste, occupation, region and sect), and does not confine her history to the Sanskritic traditions and the Ganges valley. In fact, the richness of her narrative shows how impoverished such readings are.<sup>4</sup> In the context of contemporary South Asian politics, Ranabir Chakravarti suggests that the most significant message of Thapar's book relates to 'the hollowness and the potent danger of any attempt to homogenize the multiple traits that constitute Indian culture and civilisation.'<sup>5</sup>

Thapar begins *Early India* with an excellent historiographical chapter in which she discusses how perceptions of the past have changed since the nineteenth century and how this has influenced understandings of South Asian history. She then turns her attention to 'landscape and peoples', exploring early understandings of space and time, and how these reflect patterns of occupation and settlement. Here she juxtaposes archaeological evidence with textual knowledge derived from the Vedic corpus to suggest the existence of 'multiple vibrant cultures in various parts of the subcontinent', particularly in the second and first millennium BCE (Thapar 96). The crucial shift during this period was from pastoralism to the settled communities that came to occupy the Indo-Gangetic watershed during what is sometimes called the 'second urbanization' (to distinguish it from the earlier Harappan civilisation of the Indus Valley). Acknowledging the difficulties associated with the terms 'Aryan' and 'Indo-European', Thapar insists they be used only to refer to the *linguistic* communities that settled India during this period. She rejects the post-Harappan invasion theory, arguing instead that there was a gradual migration of Indo-Aryan speakers into South Asia from the northwest:

Indo-Aryan is a cognate of Old Iranian, dating to the second millennium BC, with which it has a close relationship. Indo-Aryan also incorporated elements of Dravidian and Munda, languages known only to the Indian subcontinent. The incorporation increases in the texts composed in locations eastwards into the Ganges Plain. This points to a considerable intermixing of the speakers of these languages (Thapar 106).

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<sup>4</sup> Thapar has been subject to considerable criticism in India for such views. For instance, after the BJP came to power in 1998 attempts were made to restrict the circulation of textbooks considered 'unacceptably soft on Islam's bloody history in India'. Thapar's *Medieval India* (1957) was on the list of books to be removed. See Vinay Lal *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 107.

<sup>5</sup> Ranabir Chakravarti 'Revisiting the Past' *Biblio: A Review of Books* VII, 11 & 12 (November/December 2003), 23.

This was a slow process, lasting perhaps one thousand years. Attempts at maintaining distance between societies were gradually eroded, with particular groups emerging as socially and politically dominant. Thapar argues that *arya* status was not biologically or racially determined but related to language, to belief systems and rituals, and to acceptance of the social codes eventually gathered into the *Dharmasūtras*.

The period from 600 to 232 BCE saw the transition to fundamentally new forms of society in north India. New territorial polities emerged (*mahājanapadas*), along with new cities and heterodox religions (such as Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivikism and Carvakan-Lokovatan materialism). These developments were inter-related, and Thapar's long experience of research into the Mauryan era means that she has an excellent grasp of the complexities of the period and its long-term significance for South Asian history. Her control of historical narrative is shown clearly in these chapters. There are excellent discussions of what the *Arthashastra* and the Aśokan edicts convey, and how they have been interpreted over time. Thapar distinguishes Aśoka's (Ashoka: c.270-230 BCE) personal commitment to Buddhism from the state Dhamma he propagated. This Dhamma comprised a range of social and ethical principles that cut across religious differences and social diversity, recognising plurality and the need for the coexistence of difference. In this edition, Thapar has replaced the older view of the Mauryan Empire as unitary and monolithic with a greater appreciation of the regional and cultural diversity within the empire.

By the second century BCE, however, this first experiment in imperial rule in India had ended, and, for a variety of reasons, later experiments never achieved as much. Thapar is less empire-focused than some Indian historians, yet there remains a sense of failure here. Adshead suggests otherwise:

The real failure, it may be argued, lay less in the disunity of the whole than in the lack of political development in the parts, particularly in the south where other kinds of development were taking place. India's lesser success lay not in the absence of unity but in the quality of pluralism (Adshead 55).

*Early India* tells us more about the detailed pattern of this pluralism than its comparative quality. Thapar's interests lay elsewhere. For instance, she has high regard for Aśoka's 'commitment to a social ethic', which, she suggests, 'was unique in Indian history and rare in the histories of other societies' (Thapar 208).

While less explicitly comparative than Adshead and Sen, Thapar does place South Asian developments with the context of wider Eurasian history. She suggests there was considerable intercourse between the Mauryan Empire and the neighbouring Seleucid Kingdom, and that Aśoka possibly borrowed the idea of engraving inscriptions on appropriately located pillars from Darius. While she discounts the suggestion found in Tibetan sources

that Aśoka visited Khotan, Thapar is more willing to accept that one of his daughter's may have married a nobleman from Nepal, thus establishing an important connection to the north. 'Contacts with China,' she suggests, 'are difficult to determine with any precision at this date' (Thapar 183), although, as both Sen and Adshead note, Chinese sources indicate the beginnings of contact date from soon after this. In 138 BCE the Han court sent Zhang Qian 張騫 to Bactria to forge an alliance against the Xiongnu Empire and on his return he reported the existence of a trade route linking southwestern China to India. Sen argues persuasively that military concerns of this kind were a powerful factor in the developing interaction between China and India over the next 500-600 years (Sen 3-4 & 12-13).

Different regimes emerged from the fragmentation of the Mauryan Empire to dominate different regions. In the northwest there were Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek states. Impressive in themselves, they soon fell prey to incursions of peoples from the steppe. The decline of these states, and the subsequent history of the Scythians, the Parthians and the Kuṣāṇa (Kushana), is evidence of the extent to which the migrations and movements of nomadic pastoralists from Inner Eurasia shaped events in the settled communities of South Asia, just as they did in China and Europe. Pastoral nomadism also acted as an avenue for the development of commercial interaction between South Asia and the Mediterranean, and South Asia and China. For instance, it was during this period that Chinese silk entered India. It was also at this time that the culture of the horse, that great symbol of nomad power, began to entrance and attract the peoples of China and India alike. Increasingly we see the agricultural communities in South and East Asia responding in similar ways to the powerful challenge from the steppe.

In the peninsula proper a different array of administrations emerged, less directly influenced by the steppe but nonetheless shaped by many of the developments that were occurring in the north. Adshead usefully discusses the 'two Indias', Aryavarta and Dravidia, distinguishing a northern history that was profoundly influenced by its links to Central Asia and beyond from a southern history that reflected more the commercial networks that shaped the lives of peoples along the Malabar and Coromandel coasts and their hinterlands (Adshead 55). Significant chiefdoms were formed here, but the emergence of kingdoms in the south was a slower process and had more to do with the growth of commerce than of increasing agricultural productivity and population growth. Despite the mosaic of political entities that emerged during this period, Thapar argues a common feature to all South Asian life was the growth of exchange and trade, both within the peninsula and beyond. She provides a fine account of the complexity of these commercial networks and the ways they intersected with missionary and religious activities, arguing that 'because of its geographical position and because of its economic enterprise, [India] participated effectively in what was probably viewed in those times as almost a global trade of the first millennium AD' (Thapar 244). Later chapters explore these networks in more detail,

particularly with regard to the Cōḷas (Cholas) and their links to the worlds of Śrīvājaya and maritime China.

In 'Threshold Times', the chapter covering the period between 300 and 700, Thapar indicates a significant shift from the first edition of this book. Whereas in the earlier edition this period was seen as marked by the evolution of the classical pattern, culminating in the 'Golden Age' of the Guptas, greater attention to the material legacy emerging from archaeological work 'suggests a less glowing life-style for the majority' than the textual and artistic legacy imply. This is in itself 'a commentary on the social context of classicism' (Thapar 282). Nevertheless, this chapter gives considerable attention to systems of knowledge, literature, art and architecture, the cultural legacy of the Gupta period and its successors. This period also witnessed the emergence of new social, cultural and political forms that would only gradually take more definitive shape (hence 'threshold'). In particular, initial steps were taken 'toward the legitimisation of a new order – the culture and society of the landed intermediaries, of the new *kshatriyas* and the new religious sects' (Thapar 323). Here, and in subsequent sections, Thapar intersperses the narrative with reflections on debates that have long engaged Indian historians as they try to make sense of these developments. She argues that significant regional variations to the new social order mean that unitary explanatory models, whether they be of a feudal society, an integrative polity or a segmentary state, fail to capture the diversity of South Asian pluralism (Thapar 442-455). But the ever-present threat from the steppe, this time from the Hunas, or White Huns, again undermined the stability of a north Indian regime. Gupta power gradually eroded in the wake of Hun invasions during the fifth century, and India was divided into a number of different regimes through until the rise of Harṣa (Harsha: r.606-647) in the seventh century.

By this time Buddhism had taken deep root in China, and the interaction between India and China deepened. The adoption of Indian scripts and the use of Indian languages in the Afghanistan and Iranian regions were followed by the migration of Indians into Inner Eurasia, most notably Kumārajīva (344-413), the Buddhist philosopher and great translator who lived at Kucha in the fourth century and arrived in China in 401. In return, Buddhism drew pilgrims and migrants into north India, and, as a result, Chinese sources tell much about conditions in north India during the seventh and eight centuries. Between 619 and 753 the courts of India and China exchanged more than 50 embassies. Some were triggered by commercial motives and others by political and military agendas, but increasingly Buddhist interests helped shape the growing interaction. For instance, the opening of diplomatic channels between the Tang court and the kingdom of Kanauj in northern India owes much to Xuanzang (玄奘 600?-664) and his desire to foster ties between the Chinese and Indian Buddhist communities (Sen 16-18).

The story of these growing links between South and East Asia is the subject of Tansen Sen's book *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade*. The son of Indian diplomats, Sen grew up and was educated in China. He has a good command of many of the languages necessary for such a study, and, like Adshad, is a Sinologist who does not privilege China. There is a thesis fairly close to the surface of this book and it involves Sen contesting what he calls the received view of China-India relations: the belief that they reached a peak during the Tang dynasty (618-907) and thereafter declined, due to the diminished role of Buddhism in both societies and the fracturing of commercial networks. Sen argues that this model of premodern Sino-Indian relations

not only fails to do justice to the intricacies of exchanges between India and China during the Tang period, it also neglects the thriving state of Buddhism in eastern India in the ninth and tenth centuries and in China under the Song dynasty (960-1279). Nor does it explain the profusion of Sino-Indian exchanges in the eleventh and twelfth centuries or the explosion of trade between the two regions during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Sen 12).

The received view, if there is such a thing, is perhaps not so narrow as Sen suggests. Much of what he argues has been known, but it has been dispersed knowledge. His achievement is to collate this material and develop it into an integrated discussion of Sino-Indian relations between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In the early chapters Sen demonstrates that both Buddhist doctrines and diplomatic and military concerns played a significant role in shaping Sino-Indian relations during the Tang dynasty. Shared concerns over the growing strength of the Tibetan Kingdom, especially under the leadership of King Srong-brstan sgam-po (r.614-650), and the expansion of Arab armies into Central Asia provided as much stimulus to the diplomatic exchanges between China and northern India as did the shared commitment to Buddhism. But Buddhism was a crucial factor and Sen goes on to argue that the reduction in trans-Himalayan contact between China and India in the post-Tang period had less to do with the decline of Buddhism in either place and more to do with 'the shift in doctrinal interests by Chinese clergy towards indigenous schools and doctrines'. This 'rendered new teachings from India obsolete, and led to the diminishing of transmission of texts and contacts.' The second part of the book goes on to explore how 'Sino-Indian trading relations between the seventh and thirteenth centuries were gradually restructured from Buddhist-dominated exchanges to a large-scale and market-oriented interaction' (Sen 14). These sections of the book, particularly the detailed analysis of south Indian commercial contacts with China via Śrīvājaya, can profitably be read in conjunction with Romila Thapar's book.

In reminding us of the powerful attraction India exerted over many Chinese in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, a point made long ago by Erik Zürcher, Sen notes that Buddhist doctrine and imagery had percolated through Chinese society to such an extent that 'India found itself occupying a unique place in the Chinese world order: a foreign kingdom that was culturally and spiritually revered as equal to the Chinese civilization' (Sen 8).<sup>6</sup> Adshead, more explicitly comparative in approach, goes further, suggesting there was a real material foundation to the utopian descriptions of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims. By the 6<sup>th</sup> century,

India possessed the largest economy in the world and the highest per capita distribution ... [It] has the best basic cereal, rice; it had the best luxury foodstuff, sugar; it had the best everyday fabric, cotton; it had the strongest domesticated animal, the elephant; and it had the most sophisticated mathematical notation, 'Arabic' numerals [...] Magdha, in the middle Ganges valley, the heart of the Gupta realm, was the most urbanized, richest and most prosperous, most virtuous place on earth, a witness to the truths of Buddhism' (Adshead 93-4).

This was to change, and change dramatically, so that by the 8<sup>th</sup> century 'the Indian economy had been overtaken by the Chinese in both absolute and per capita terms' (Adshead 94). Profound social, political, and economic changes in the Chinese world were as fundamental to overcoming the borderland complex as was the developing sophistication of Chinese Buddhism.

These three books demonstrate very different approaches to historical writing. Thapar's is a narrative history, designed to serve as a textbook and to be of interest to a general audience. Sen's book is a thesis transformed into a monograph, rich in detail and referencing. In contrast, Adshead's study of Tang China is a fine example of history as argument. It covers the same period as Sen's book, but in a very different manner. Much of the material Sen brings to the forefront of his discussion is latent in Adshead, understood but not recounted in detail. Rather it is developed into a typically Adsheadian argument, sophisticated and challenging. There will be parts that will puzzle readers, some with which they will disagree, but also much that will stimulate new understandings of the past and its significance for us today. It is not intended as a comprehensive history of China during the Tang dynasty, but rather as a history of the Tang from a comparative standpoint, from the perspective of world history. Adshead argues for the preeminence of China during this period, especially in the sphere of politics and the intellect, suggesting that Tang cosmopolitanism 'should be part of everyone's history as a credit to the species and not merely to a people' (Adshead x).

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<sup>6</sup> Erik Zürcher *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 2 vols (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972).



Adshead frames his book as a response to André Gunder Frank's *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Impressed by the vigour of Frank's argument, and sympathetic to its concerns, Adshead nevertheless finds that his overall judgement of it is negative. The value of a world history perspective is that it draws Asian peoples and their experiences into mainstream historical discussions, challenging those in a constructive manner. But Frank's eagerness to contest Eurocentrism results in magnified and unfounded claims, especially his case for an almost permanent China-centred world order, in existence from earliest times until around 1800. Frank's systemic, holistic view of world history inhibits historical explanation, and is reductionist in its obsession with economic factors (a problem with much world history). As Adshead notes, 'A world order need not be mainly economic. Its different registers, political, economic, social, intellectual and so on cannot be privileged *a priori*. In the case of the period AD500-1000, the intellectual register of the world order, specifically its religious institutions, was more significant than its economic' (Adshead 14-15). Instead of a permanently China-centred world order, Adshead argues for the 'rise of the East', which did not bring pre-eminence until the Sui-Tang empires and which was due primarily to political and intellectual factors.

After developing his contra-Frank polemic, Adshead then makes his case for the rise of the East. Comparing China during the Han dynasty with the Roman Empire, Adshead concludes that 'around the year AD 400, the balance of advantage lay with the West rather than China' (Adshead 20). And in economic terms, as noted above, Adshead suggests people in South Asia were better off than those in East Asia. But under the Tang, China emerged as preeminent: 'a provincial, unicultural, faction-ridden aristocratic state had been transformed into a cosmopolitan, multicultural, orderly and partly meritocratic state, no longer peripheral in the world order, but central in a world network created by itself' (Adshead 31). To develop his argument, Adshead divides his discussion into chapters covering politics, the economy, society and the intellect. In each he begins with China and then compares it with other Eurasian centres, India, Islamdom, the Byzantine Empire and Latin Christendom. This comparative approach allows him to make the case for China's overall advance.

Buddhism was crucial to this advance, in all areas – in politics, economics, society and especially intellect. It became a central ingredient in Tang diplomacy, particularly in relationship to South Asia, Tibet, the Korean states and Japan, producing what Adshead considers 'one of the most significant innovations' for all East Asia, the creation 'of what has been called the Chinese World Order or Sinosphere.' As a result 'China was no longer on the edge of some else's periphery, but now fully metropolitan, was the core of its own East Asian world' (Adshead 43). Buddhism also brought to China the new social institution of the monastery, and because these monasteries drew the greater part of their income from trade, new economic developments flowed from them.

Mahayana Buddhism, like Counter-Reformation Catholicism, was a lavish extravagant religion, which surcharged expenditure and redirected demand. To society, it gave new forms of prestige and status, to the state new opportunities for patronage and clientage, and to the intellect a register of critical thinking, a new technical vocabulary and a fresh iconography. If any one factor, apart from political genius, took China from the periphery of the Eurasian world to its centre, it was the reception of Buddhism (Adshead 86).

The bureaucratization of Chinese politics was another key factor in the rise of the East during the Tang. Political genius was displayed through the personalities of the early Tang emperors, but in the long term it was the new institutional matrix for governance that was of most significance. This is often seen as a development of the Song, but Adshead places its origins in the Tang, and particularly during the reign of the much-maligned Empress Wu. He suggests that, almost involuntarily, Empress Wu promoted the kind of bureaucratic monarchy Confucians wanted: 'As a woman, she could not command armies personally nor operate the kind of man-to-man personal management techniques' used by her predecessors. Instead, she turned to the 'impersonal mechanisms of examination, promotion by merit, and government by due process.' Increasingly, political power was concentrated in the three Secretariats, the 'brain of the government', which were 'the perfect vehicle for the intelligence provided by the examination system' (Adshead 46-7). This bureaucratic constitutionalism was entrenched by Empress Wu's successors, and, with the expansion of the examination system into the primary source of social status during the Song, the educated classes were drawn into the sphere of government. Adshead argues that these political developments lay at the heart of China's preeminence during the Tang and Song periods.

Its legacy of applied intelligence, executive checks and balances, proper process, distinction between state and government, cosmopolitan receptivity, most evidently displayed in the reign of Hsüan-tsang, have become part of everyone's politics in the current world institution of the common consensus. Politics is not everything but its significance has been undervalued by the tradition, wider than Marxism or Hegelianism, which sees economics or sociology as primary. Without proper political achievement, the wealth created by the economy may be dissipated, the order generated by society may be disrupted, and the drive to judgement in the intellect may be sidetracked [...] The better half of politics is the control of violence, whether internal or external. In the reign of Hsüan-tsang China achieved it to a better degree than in the two Indias, Islamdom, the Byzantine Empire or the community of Latin Christendom (Adshead 67).

China's advance was evident also in its social institutions, which diversified and became more complex, and in the standard of living of its people. Adshead explores economic development through discussions of the natural environment and human ecology, as well territorial expansion, technological innovation and an emerging consumerism. Readers of his earlier *China in World History* will be familiar with some of the arguments in these chapters, although here they are more Tang-focused. And in the chapter on society Adshead shows again the productive use he makes of French scholarship. For instance, he draws on Gérard Delille's 1985 study, *Famille et Propriété dans Le Royaume de Naples (XV<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle)* to develop arguments about the relationship between economic factors and social formations, particularly the juxtaposition of 'intensive agriculture and super urbanization on the one hand, with a strong sense of lineage and a preference for endogamy on the other' (Adshead 102). Familiarity with contemporary French historiography is increasingly rare, especially in China-studies, and one of Adshead's strengths is the way he uses this work to enable us to think in new ways about old issues.

From these political, economic and social foundations emerged what Adshead rightly considers the summit of Tang China's brilliance, complex pluralism in thought. He explores this increased complexity in each of the major traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism) but also in those other traditions that were of minor significance but which added to the cosmopolitanism of the Tang (Zoroastrianism, Nestorianism, Manichaeism, Judaism & Islam). Adshead's command of the range of intellectual activity across these various traditions is impressive. His discussions of religious Daoism and critical Buddhism are particularly rich. Even more impressive, however, is his ability to see the interrelationships between them and the significance of this. He argues that 'an intertextuality of synergism was created whereby what was fact in one register was metaphor in another, terms being transposed between fields to express new shades of meaning.' Tang poetry provides clear evidence of this cross-fertilization. Poets such as Du Fu, Li Bo and Bai Juyi used imagery and themes from these diverse bodies of thought,

taking advantage of the further possibilities for allusion, resonance and mood-creation that the new intellectual registers and their vocabulary afforded. T'ang poetry, it may be argued, has retained its primacy in the Chinese canon because it was able to draw on the widest and deepest pool of ideas at the moment of their freshest and most immediate impact (Adshead 145).

This is the most challenging of the core chapters of the book, but also the most rewarding.

In the last chapter of *T'ang China* Adshead returns to his engagement with André Gunder Frank's argument, suggesting that the rise of the East during the Tang was eventually followed by a return to the West. This was

increasingly evident as the second Christian millennium progressed, and Adshead pursues the reasons for it in all four registers, politics, economics, society and intellect. Like Frank, he sees this more as a rise of the West than the decline of the East, but he differs from Frank in his explanations of the causes for it. Whereas Frank only seeks explanations in economic developments, Adshead again places these in a wider context, attributing as much to political, social and intellectual developments where necessary. Inevitably, the analysis here is concise, and readers who want greater detail will need to turn to Adshead's earlier books on world history. Provocatively, he ends with a brief prognosis, contesting Frank's suggestion that we are returning to a world in which China will again become preeminent. The reasons are varied, he suggests, but most importantly the developing nature of globalization will probably mean that any talk of one part of the world becoming central will lose relevance. And against any such prognosis he reminds us of Hilaire Belloc's Byzantine official, who at the beginning of the seventh century 'weighed every factor but was unaware of the immanent maturity of Muhammed' (Adshead 2-3).