Reviews


Were a handful of Kwantung Army officers acting on their own accord when they initiated a military operation that eventually evolved into the Manchurian Incident of 1931 or, did they execute the desired, though unwritten policy favoured and formulated by Army officials in Tokyo? This is just one of the many questions which has, over the course of the last thirty years, dominated the historiographical debate concerning relations between Japan and Manchuria during the 1930s. Scholars have focused far less attention, however, on the development of Manchukuo, the puppet state created in 1932, under Japanese tutelage and how, more importantly, this endeavour influenced Japanese society and culture in the home islands. In her original and provocative book, Japan's Total Empire, Louise Young has propelled modern Japanese historiography forward in a new and needed direction. Arguing that it took 'more than ministers and generals to make an empire' (8), Young focuses her attention on the empire-building process in Manchuria and traces its impact on the colonizers at home. In doing so, she has produced a monograph which will be of great interest to historians and students of Japan as well as scholars of imperialism and colonial history for many years to come.

After providing a concise history of Japan's early expansionary interest in Northeast Asia and placing Manchurian development within a larger international context, Young turns her attention towards the infamous Manchurian Incident of 18 September 1931. While avoiding a recapitulation of the well-documented military exploits launched by the Kwantung Army, the author provides an in-depth analysis of how the incident was portrayed in Japan. In her eye-opening chapter entitled 'War Fever,' Young illustrates that 'without any urging from the government, the news media took the lead in promoting the war' (56). The mass media, by this she means radio, newspapers, and publishers, followed the war not because they were forced to by a militaristic and semi-totalitarian pro-army government, but because it made good business sense. Here, Young documents that throughout the early 1930s most Japanese citizens were active consumers of any and all information related to the military's exploits in Manchuria.

In this context, Young provides a fresh interpretation of the domestic implications associated with the Manchurian Incident. While the military's activities contributed to the eventual establishment of the political entity known as Manchukuo, the Manchurian Incident and the subsequent war fever that erupted in Japan helped lay the foundation for Japan's total empire in Manchuria. There is another provocative historiographical inter-
pretation here, one which I think gives this study added significance. On the whole, Young’s analysis challenges the sometimes popular, though somewhat spurious notion that beginning with the Manchurian Incident, also referred to as the Mukden Incident, Japan was pulled blindly into a ‘valley of darkness’ by a few right-wing militarists. On the contrary, her research suggests that Japanese civilians, both at the elite and local level in society, were avidly willing to follow, support, and champion the war effort on the home front and further Japanese expansion into Manchuria.

The importance of this development manifests itself in Young’s subsequent sections which deal with the economic development and population of Manchukuo by Japan. In these chapters, Young skilfully documents how the cause of making Manchukuo work united many divergent interest groups in Japan, including the military, capitalists, left-wing intellectuals, utopian ideologues, and agrarianists. Mirroring the support exhibited by the populace, business interests actively sought expansion into Manchuria not out of coercions by the state, but because of the economic potentialities which they felt existed there. While many tensions existed between the army who, on the one hand favoured a ‘radical program of state control over important economic activities’ and ‘coordinated development between every branch of the economy’ (200) and capitalists who, on the other hand, wanted to extract resources from Manchukuo to supply production needs in Japan, Young suggests that both ‘drew together nevertheless, united in their perception of the boundless possibilities of development’ (205).

Popular support of Manchurian development also underpinned the important phenomenon of migration to Manchuria, which Young examines in the last part of her study. Between 1932 and 1935, both the economic malaise associated with the Great Depression and the new opportunities that surrounded agricultural expansion on the continent helped fuse the agrarian and emigration movements into a mass movement for the population of Manchuria. Of great significance, Young shows that the state backed this enterprise only after agrarian colonization had become a well-established social movement that garnered broad support amongst the would-be colonists and landlords in rural communities. Indeed, it was 1936 before the Hirota cabinet created a well-organized migration machine that ‘performed the tasks of planning, recruiting, financing, transporting, settling, and supplying the new settlements’ (352). While the national government’s operation fell short of its goal to send ‘Millions to Manchuria,’ it did facilitate the relocation of nearly 300,000 Japanese between 1936 and 1945.

Specifics aside, there is one final point which I feel needs to be made about Young’s work. Throughout Japan’s Total Empire, Young subtly illustrates the importance of institutional history, particularly in analysing the pluralistic political realm and society of the early Shōwa period. Unfortunately, institutional studies are not the most fashionable subject in history at present but Young’s work should encourage all historians, whether they are examining society from the grass-roots level up or from the elite level down, to give thought to the institutions which often exist in the nebulous area in between state and society. Clearly, as vehicles by which individuals
can influence power through collective actions as well as organizations which can be manipulated by the state to further its aims throughout society, institutions are important.

In conclusion, Young has written a remarkable book. My only criticism is that some of her chapters are very long and such length sometimes dilutes the thematic cohesion of the chapters in question. Being stylistic in nature, this drawback does not detract from the considerable merits of this work. Overall, Young should be commended for producing such a thought-provoking, and well-researched study. It is one of the finer books I have read on Japanese history recently and I am sure it will receive considerable attention and provide the basis of much discussion amongst historians and students of Japan now, and for a long time in the future.

University of Cambridge

J. CHARLES SCHENCKING


An important point that Dr Sundar sets out to demonstrate from the inception of this wonderfully rich book is that ‘contrary to popular perception, “frontier areas” like Bastar were not isolated from the rest of the larger economy in the pre-colonial period’ and that ‘Colonialism’s distinctive contribution was not in integrating these regions into some wider system, but in changing the terms of this integration’. This idea comes from the fertile infusing of anthropology with history, and vice versa, that has gone on in recent years, a trend that also gives rise to this book. Dr Sundar goes on to stress the weakness of clan exogamy, how tribes can merge into castes and castes into tribes, that sanscritization is a mistaken label for what is a two-way process of cultural exchange, and how important trade and migration was, and is, in the constitution of so-called ‘tribal’ society and economy. These points will meet with widespread agreement. They are especially well made in this particular context, since they are fleshed out, not only by the careful use of a wide variety of secondary sources, but by pointing to specific examples drawn from the recent and pre-modern history of the central Indian kingdom of Bastar: a kingdom which was until the beginning of this century not only the largest independent tribal kingdom in India, but one which has played a crucial role in the Indian anthropological imagination.

A strong point of Subalterns and Sovereigns is its preface and introduction, which display, not merely the conventional self-reflection of postmodern anthropology, but remarkable honesty and insight into the problems and dilemmas faced by the well-intentioned, politically motivated but also urbanized and western-educated anthropologist when approaching the ‘discontented but not de-hegemonised world’ of former adivasi kingdoms, such as Bastar. This kind of honest introspection historians could occasionally do well to imitate. The introduction also shows a keen awareness of the limitations and dangers of oral history, although oral history is used to good effect at several points in the book. The insight of the trained anthropologist is
further used to good effect in explaining the stories of clan origins and the role played by the festival of dussehra in integrating the society of Bastar, through the gifts and labour devoted to the ceremony each year in the capital Jagdalpur. In this ceremony both the chief local goddess, Danteshwari, and the raja participate, or latterly the raja’s descendants and the Sirkar. Both narrative and analytical histories can address these issues of course, but the interdisciplinary approach adopted here is effective and convincing.

In subsequent sections (pp. 79–190), Dr Sundar proceeds to address a series of what are regarded as key moments in the history of Bastar, in a similar manner to that adopted by Nicholas Dirks, in The Hollow Crown, and Richard Fox in Lions of the Punjab, though without the serious disjunctures between narrative and theory seen in the latter work. These events are: the 1876 rebellion, the 1910 rebellion, and the era of anthropologist administrators up to 1950. After that, a discussion of post-independence developments (pp. 191–203) ensues with fewer chronological rifts, including an account of the campaign by the last formally invested raja, Pravir Banj Deo, to recover his kingdom, ending in his death in 1966. The narrative then proceeds up until the present day, when the application of the sixth schedule of the constitution to Bastar, the impact of the government of India’s new forest policies on this and similar regions, and the nature of present-day revivalist and political movements are thoughtfully assessed. A discussion of controversies surrounding the issue of human sacrifice, which arose in the nineteenth century (an issue which miraculously disappeared as soon as Bastar came more directly under the control of the Central Provinces government in Nagpur) was a part of the original Columbia University Ph.D. thesis on which this book is based, but does not appear, having been published elsewhere. It can usefully be read alongside this volume.

Dr Sundar’s study of the era of anthropologist administrators (1927–50) is highly illuminating for its exposition of the links between colonialism and anthropology in South Asia, and for its explanation of how the ‘tribal question’ came to be posed, in terms of isolation versus assimilation, and understood, by regarding tribal societies as ‘whole cultures’ functionally separate from those around them. This discussion is unavoidable, since so many of the key figures in these debates (V. Elwin, W. V. Grigson and E. S. Hyde) had experience as anthropologists and administrators in central India, and especially in Bastar which, like the district of Mandla, served as a model for many of their theories. Clearly though this was not all that went on in this period, and rather less attention is paid to other issues, such as the economic changes of the period (Bastar became a resort for labour recruiters after the formal ending of indenture), and the increasingly important role played by the Indian Princes, powerless or otherwise, in the endgame of empire. For instance, in the late 1940s Bastar became the object of dispute between the colonial government and the neighbouring Princely State of Hyderabad, when the latter applied for permission to construct a

railway, in the hope that Bastar’s iron and mineral resources might become the engine of industrial growth in an independent Hyderabad State following the departure of the British. Quite a lot is said about this; historians may still have wished for more, although doubtless limitations of space prevent this.

Perhaps the strongest and certainly most interesting part of the book is the analysis of the 1910 ‘Bhumkal’ rebellion. Here an extensive use is made of colonial archives, contrasted with modern perspectives on the events, coming from the descendants of those involved and from the author in the guise of anthropological critic. Interestingly, it is the latter which is the most romanticized—perhaps demonstrating how it is still feasible to blur the line between the ‘Arts’ and ‘Social Sciences’. The most singular contribution of this study, however, is its exposition of the impact of colonial land and forest administration policies, which are held up as being the most proximate cause of rebellion. The impact of British land revenue and settlement policies show in fact a remarkable similarity with those seen elsewhere in the Central Provinces, and throughout the Chhattisgarh region, some thirty years earlier—a fact which demonstrates well the arbitrary nature of the distinctions often made between ‘tribal’ and ‘caste’ economy and society in this region. What is notable too is how deeply the forest policies of the colonial government impacted on the kingdom of Bastar itself, even while it was formally still an independent feudatory state: so much for its isolation. The role of Lal Kalendra Singh, the raja’s cousin and a former diwan of the state, in fomenting the revolt is explained too, thereby implicitly accepting the reports of the police and various officials involved which are to be found in the archives—perhaps because of their abundance. This is in contrast to Dr Sundar’s account of the controversy over human sacrifice which sees events mainly as arising from a clash of cultures and colonial versus indigenous conceptions of law (in the manner of Galanter). The analysis here is more subtle and convincing. The study of the 1876 uprising is perhaps too much analysed, a wide variety of anthropologist’s views being proffered as possible explanations. The erudition this displays is impressive and highly educative, but one feels that the theory may be substituting for the lack of a contrasting oral historical narrative to duel with, such as were clearly available for the more momentous events of 1910. The archives, and the diversity of perspectives seen within them, might possibly have been allowed to say more at this point, to the reader’s benefit. This is, however, a very minor quibble.

Overall, one senses that, notwithstanding the carefully balanced comments in the introduction, Dr Sundar is deeply mistrustful of the evidence of colonial archives. This is obviously often with good reason, but there is no reason why archival evidence should be taken less seriously than other perspectives on the past. There are precedents for this view of history, but they are not healthy ones, and it is only from a wholly modern perspective that such a view might be upheld. In the case of Bastar, the fact that the last raja was murdered and that the dussehra ceremony, formerly the centrepiece of the raja’s power, has been hijacked and is now a government-run event, is so obvious to anyone who knows anything about Bastar that it
is easy to gloss over these issues. They are indeed harsh realities, which some may be disinclined to debate, although the historian must; as for the most part Dr Sundar does, pointing out how Pravir can be seen as a last tragic victim of colonial policies which encouraged feudal ambition long past its viability.

However, despite the deference shown to competing anthropologist’s models, the theme of Subalterns and Sovereigns is very much one of using ideas of anthropological insights to aid the understanding of history, rather than the more dubious exercise using history to refine the ‘science’ of anthropology. The use of the two disciplines is well balanced, and the empiricist and subjective elements in each is acknowledged. The only problem is that the methodology of ‘anthropological history’ has yet to be clearly defined, which is one reason why this book is so fascinating, and important. Is it a debate between anthropologists and historians about the past, is it a debate between archives and anthropologists, between archives and oral histories, or a debate between historians and oral historians? One thing it cannot be is a debate about ‘the truth’, using all of the above, since a straightforward conclusion exemplified through the presentation of a single narrative of events is an idiosyncratic approach found amongst historians, which social science is unwilling to adopt, even though it may sometimes be well suited to the task. This difficulty the author struggles with throughout the book, such that, although considerable efforts are made to avoid eliding the two methodologies (a practice historians are always inclined to obscure when borrowing from the social sciences), in the discussion of the annual dussehra festivities one is momentarily uncertain whether one is reading a modern account of an event or one drawn from evidence of the past. In these instances it is clearly the structure of the event that is the primary focus of analysis, but in the process opportunities for historical analysis are occasionally lost. Since Dr Sundar’s account of dussehra in Bastar is drawn from five separate narratives originating over nearly a ninety-year period, one might have hoped for a study of how the rituals changed in reflection of altered circumstances. It is possible, though, that there was insufficient data or simply not enough room to accommodate a historical perspective at the same time as the careful and detailed explanation of the structure of this event which is presented.

Thus, there are occasional opportunities lost by the mixing of methodologies. This is perhaps inevitable in an exercise of this sort. However, it is rare to see an anthropologist performing such an equally thorough job as a participant observer in the archives as well as participant observer in the field. This book, describing as it does the recent history of one of the most important, and certainly the largest, tribal kingdom in India, is long overdue and extremely welcome. It will be warmly received as an immensely readable and highly original contribution by all those interested in adivasi history, culture and society, and the history of ‘indigenous peoples’ more generally in Asia.

University of Edinburgh

Crispin Bates