

Development of India Under the East India Company 1814–58: A Selection of Contemporary Writings. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 225).

This reviewer from a non-English-speaking country wishes the author had referred to this linguistic impact on the Indian business community. In addition, it would have been quite helpful if the author included a glossary of Indian terms for those unfamiliar with this aspect. In spite of these shortcomings, by examining the impact of the Europeans' trading organization and its activities in Indian business society, this introductory book brings new insights to the history of the East India Company.

The Uniqueness of Western Civilization

By Ricardo DUCHESNE

Studies in Critical Social Sciences vol. 28

Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers, 2011. 540 pp.

ISBN: 978-9004192485 (Hardcover)

Reviewed by Geetanjali SRIKANTAN

Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, Bangalore, India

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/arwh.2013.1.2.316>

Why have the great accomplishments in the arts and sciences been overwhelmingly European and why is Europe the most creative culture in the world? One fails to be persuaded by Ricardo Duchesne's focal question in his heavily cited voluminous 540 page effort to prove that there is something "wrong" with the non-Western world. The author's objectives include tracing the devaluation of the Western world in academic culture and refuting the arguments of multicultural revisionists. He argues that the traditional Eurocentric historiography is important and that the development of a liberal democratic culture was indispensable in the

rise of the West. The roots of this libertarian spirit lie in the aristocratic egalitarianism of the Indo-Europeans who are the progenitors of Western civilization.

The first half of the book concentrates on evaluating the work of prominent world historians such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Patrick Manning, Felipe Fernandez-Armesto and Kenneth Pomeranz among others. Duchesne's object of ire is the replacement of the Western civilization course in American universities by the world history course which seeks to see events and achievements in Europe being the result of inter-cultural connections in the context of a history of the world. With an impressive array of sources, he empirically refutes the claim that Europe's technological achievements were the result of borrowings by showing the adaptation and innovation of outside ideas and advances in the natural sciences. He is however less successful in showing that Europe did not need colonial profits and resources. His argument that Britain did not need coal and could have industrialised based on its own technological advances (such as water power) and that in "the case of commodities produced by slave labour there were many instances in which the terms of trade were favourable to the Americas" (p. 145) vindicates the colonial enterprise as a project of exploitation. It is surprising that he argues that the Chinese indirectly benefited from the discovery of silver in the New World but does not investigate how Switzerland and Germany may have benefited from New World resources (Duchesne mentions these countries as examples of how industrialisation could take place without colonisation).

Duchesne may be right about the crisis that world history faces and that present methodologies make Western culture unintelligible. He however scarcely offers an understanding of this crisis let alone a coherent description of Western culture. According to him the West is "the ideal of freedom" and the ideal of a "reflexive public culture," a culture becoming Western when it is self-legitimising and self-grounding, individuals being free to exercise their own faculties (p. 238). It is hard to understand how this vague psychologised definition can describe a culture. This makes it difficult to evaluate the argument in the second half of the book where

he makes shaky connections between these traits and what he calls the “aristocratic warlike culture” of the Indo-Europeans to explain the West’s dominance.

Duchesne begins this argument by summoning a range of resources in philosophy, history, art and music to show all major achievements in the world can be traced to the West. It is noteworthy that the “invention” of polyphony and the novel find place on this list but not ayurveda or acupuncture. Kant, Weber, Hegel, Habermas and Nietzsche (Marx is left out with no explanation) are then analysed in order to build a fragmented history of the distinctive nature of Western freedom and reason. Through Weber the Jewish contribution to the Protestant ethic in relation to the doctrines on prohibition against idolatry and salvation are drawn out (interestingly the influence of Islam on Europe merits just a few sentences). It is also argued that the “aristocratic desire for personal distinction” led to the dialectic of Western reason and freedom captured in Hegel’s work *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. The master-slave dialectic, ancient Greek mythology and philosophy are deployed to define “aristocratic” as individual heroism in an ethos of egalitarianism. Duchesne tries to show that such an ethos existed in the Indo-European culture on the basis of archaeological evidence. This argument is flawed as one does not know the intention and agency of the Indo-Europeans due to lack of records,

The major drawback of the text is its reliance on secondary sources to make a vast and ambitious argument. The deployment of selective commentary on philosophical works along with the author’s own analysis of the philosophical work (Duchesne’s analysis of Hegel and Nietzsche being combined with commentaries by Michael Foster and Alexander Nehemas) gives the impression that these sources have been cited merely because they have been favourable to the author. Non-Western theorists are not analyzed with the exception of cursory nods to Edward Said and Amartya Sen in the footnotes

One also finds discrepancies that one does not expect in an academic text. It is unusual to assert that a) “non Han Chinese living today in South Asia were expelled by the Han” (p. 66), b) de-

scribe Java as part of Bali (p. 433), and c) describe Stalin being a political despot due to his “Asian/Georgian background” (p. 424).

It is clearly alarming that such scholarship has had positive reviews. Duchesne is free to make his arguments but must substantiate the same with rigour.

Traditional China in Asian and World History

By Tansen SEN and Victor H. MAIR

Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, Inc., 2012. xxi + 108 pp.

ISBN: 978-0924304651 (Paperback)

Reviewed by Hang LIN

University of Würzburg, Würzburg, Germany

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12773/arwh.2013.1.2.319>

There has been a long mistaken stereotype of an “isolated China” in its long history among historians of China. In recent years, however, some scholars begin to challenge the conventional perception that Chinese civilization, in particular in its early phase, existed with no or only little influence from other parts of the world (Sanping Chen, *Multicultural China in Early Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012 and Jonathan Karam Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors: Culture, Power, and Connections, 580-800*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). In *Traditional China in Asian and World History*, Tansen Sen and Victor H. Mair offer a radically revised view of China’s past, demonstrating multiple examples of early Chinese interactions with other cultures in a broad range of manifestations including ancient Chinese perceptions of foreigners, military and diplomatic missions to and from China, China’s international trade across land and sea, as well as role of religious pilgrims in fostering intercultural contacts.