

geigi 芸妓 – a relationship that would be much clearer to the reader if it were possible to see the characters. (Using the kanji would have also made it clear to the author that *geiko* 芸子 does not fit in this category.)

In sum, the book presents a strong case for foregrounding the musical artistry of geisha, and I assume the same can be said about those geisha who specialize in dance. *The Gei of Geisha* should attract those interested in the social phenomenon of female performing arts, as well as those interested in the arts themselves. I can only hope that Foreman will expand her audience by creating a website in which we can hear, as well as read about, the music that geisha are working so hard to preserve.

Buddhism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka.

By Patrick Grant. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009. Pp. xiv + 146.

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On Tuesday, 19 May 2009, the Sri Lankan government declared finished the twenty-five-year-old civil war between itself and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (the Tamil Tigers). Understanding the reasons for the conflict, however, remains a critical need, in order to insure that Sri Lanka's military victory does not serve merely as a prelude to more insurgency. In *Buddhism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*, Patrick Grant seeks to contribute to this understanding by explaining the formation of ethnic division along religious lines. He begins by arguing that a key aspect of Buddhism, as found in the Pali texts of the Theravada Buddhist tradition, is a dialogical subtlety that mediates between the demands of transcendence and human needs in the world. On the basis of this observation, Grant then seeks to demonstrate how three influential Sri Lankans, Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), Walpola Rahula (1907–1997), and J. R. Jayewardene (1906–1996), exemplify a pernicious misunderstanding of this dialogical subtlety that leads to a process called “regressive inversion”. In this process, the universalist message of authentic Buddhism is distorted into a belief system that champions a violence-prone ethnic nationalism. Grant's skill in textual analysis makes his argument engaging, particularly in the first part of the book when he examines the concept of *upāya*, the “skillful means” that the Buddha uses to tailor his message to his audience. But when Grant applies this analysis, which depends upon a limited number of Pali texts, to Sri Lankan Buddhists, his approach obscures the complex contexts in Sri Lanka in which interpretations of Buddhist texts have played a part in ethnic conflict.

Part One of the book, “Reading Buddhism,” lays out the case for a Buddhism found in the Pali texts that balances the call for detachment with a compassionate awareness of humans' needs for meaning and belonging in the world. In the first chapter of the book Grant describes Vedic religion in India, in order to establish the religio-cultural context in which (and against which) the Buddha formulated his teachings (pp. 3–16). Grant argues that understanding this context is important because the Buddha's teachings, though “disjunctive” in the sense that they ultimately confound language, were formed in a dialogical encounter with “conjunctive” Vedic teachings that see the world described by language as immediately expressive of the divine (pp. 6–7). Buddhism is thus a transcendent (i.e. disjunctive) entity that must make allowances through simplified teachings (i.e. conjunctive ones) for people with insufficient understanding to grasp the teachings in their unadulterated form (p. 45). It is through skillful means, found in the dialogues of the collection of texts called the *Suttapīṭaka*, that the Buddha adjusts his teachings to his audience, in order to chart a middle way between conjunctive and disjunctive discourses (p. 28). To show this, in the second chapter Grant displays his skillful reading of various suttas (pp. 17–44). Grant argues that the Buddha promoted

dialogue that balanced conjunctive and disjunctive elements in order to avoid the intolerance purely conjunctive discourse breeds and to avoid the “scarcely human detachment” (p. 42) of one too focused on the disjunctive. (This leads one to wonder, however, how enlightenment fits into this scheme when it is the ultimate detachment.) Grant ends the chapter by explaining that regressive inversion occurs when this balanced approach is forsaken for a seemingly conjunctive focus on an ethnic group that is given power, ironically, through an appeal to a transcendently disjunctive vision. This is regressive because it goes directly against the universal vision of the Buddha and an inversion because it upends the value of universal transcendence in favor of a particular group (p. 42).

The reading of Buddhism in Part One, while compelling, does not indicate any possibility for the historical development of Buddhism. Instead, Grant presents the Buddhist tradition in an ahistorical fashion that suggests its core meaning was fixed early on, even as early as the time of the Buddha. Much scholarship in Buddhist Studies, however, has pointed out the mutability of Buddhism over time. For instance, it was only well after the time of the Buddha that the Mahāvihārin monastic lineage in Sri Lanka formulated the Pali canon as a means to gain authority and power. Even if we were to take the Pali texts as a stable and coherent entity, by ignoring much of the literature, including the Abhidhamma, the Vinaya, the Jātaka stories, and, indeed, much of the dialogues themselves (not to mention the commentarial texts), Grant makes Buddhism too simple to contribute significantly to an understanding of recent ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Part Two of the book, “Reading Sri Lanka,” begins with a chapter that sets the scene on the island by describing the religious and political situation from earliest times up to the present day. Here Grant describes the importance of the Pali chronicle the *Mahāvamsa*, which includes the story of King Dutthagamani establishing Sri Lanka as a Buddhist kingdom by defeating the Tamil king Elara. Grant characterizes the *Mahāvamsa* as “rereading” (p. 46) the Pali texts and assumes that the violent actions depicted in the *Mahāvamsa* run counter to the true teachings in the Pali canon. Thus, any countenance of violence on the part of the Sinhalese Buddhists, based upon the *Mahāvamsa* or other related texts, stems from “misreadings” (p. 65). In regard to the possibility of violence in Buddhism, it is surprising that Grant does not engage with Tessa Bartholomeusz’s *In Defense of Dharma: Just-War Ideology in Sri Lanka* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), which argues that not only the *Mahāvamsa* but parts of the literature in the Pali canon can be construed as supporting violence. More generally, a greater attention given to other scholarly analyses would have made Grant’s arguments more robust and served to undercut the impression that ethnic conflict has arisen largely, if not entirely, due to religious ideology. In *The Religious World of Kīrti Śrī: Buddhism, Art, and Politics in Late Medieval Sri Lanka* (1996), for instance, John Holt argued that religious factors are overemphasized and economic grievances too often overlooked. Further, the fact that the immensely important chronicle literature, especially the *Mahāvamsa*, is relegated to the second part of the book suggests that post-canonical texts are addenda to the authentic message of the suttas, rather than a constitutive part of many Buddhists’ understandings of Buddhism.

Besides the analysis of the *Mahāvamsa*, in this chapter Grant describes the colonial history of the island and the modern Buddhist revival (pp. 53–61), in order to outline the development of Sri Lankan forms of Buddhism that were exclusivist and would lead to violence. A short political history of the island up to recent times ends this chapter (pp. 61–65), sketching out in broad terms the results of a Buddhism that falls prey to regressive inversion.

In the final chapters Grant examines three influential Sri Lankans’ writings to show the ways in which each poorly reads the canonical Buddhist discourses, thereby falling afoul of regressive inversion by missing the suttas’ dialogical complexity. Each man goes wrong in a different way: Dharmapala (Chapter 4, pp. 67–80) substitutes a graceful balance of the disjunctive and conjunctive with the totalizing discourse of a utopian science; Rahula (Chapter 5, pp. 81–96) relativizes Buddhist history and makes it ideological, arguing for a special role for Sinhalese through use of the *Mahāvamsa*; and

Jayawardene (Chapter 6, pp. 97–112) promotes a cultural agenda that stokes ethnocentrism, in spite of his efforts to keep monks apolitical. Grant is perceptive in his analyses of these men's writings, but his treatments are quite short. This is because, as Grant notes in his conclusion, these chapters are not meant as extensive treatments of these men's careers or their writings, but rather as case studies that demonstrate ways in which the phenomenon of regressive inversion operates (pp. 114–115).

As I mentioned, Grant's skill in his analysis of his chosen sutta dialogues makes his case for dialogical complexity interesting, but not convincing as a representation of a core Buddhism that can be applied to Sri Lankan religious and political figures. Scholars have long recognized that Buddhist texts and the meanings and values they hold have changed over time. Contrary to Grant's suggestion (p. 82), the colonial period was not the first time Buddhism seriously changed over the course of its history in Sri Lanka, and so a characterization of a single Buddhism through which the dynamic of regressive inversion could take place is suspect. An accurate understanding of local conceptions of Buddhism in Sri Lanka that could be put into the service of reducing ethnic tensions remains important, given the necessity of governments and NGOs to work with the Sri Lankan government as it deals with displaced Tamil populations in the aftermath of open conflict. Grant's concept of regressive inversion could offer a helpful way to understand claims to truth and power within the context of Buddhism, but more extensive connections to traditions of Buddhism as historical realities are needed. Beyond the larger theoretical issues raised above, one small way to move toward this goal of a more fully fleshed out portrait of regressive inversion in Sri Lanka would be a more substantial engagement with secondary literature; related to this, the book does not contain a bibliography, but only a "Further Reading" section. It should also be noted that Grant's analysis is limited to English-language sources.

Asian Voices in a Postcolonial Age: Vietnam, India & Beyond.

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Susan Bayly's *Asian Voices in a Postcolonial Age* is a comparative study of the legacies of colonialism and socialism in Vietnam and India. For Bayly, the post-colonial elites of Vietnam and India were part of a "global socialist ecumene". Members of this ecumene shared a socialist language that, for Bayly, was less one of political or economic organization than "a set of broadly inclusive moral, emotional, and even aesthetic dispositions" (p. 9). They also shared lives characterized by rupture and movement, whether within the Indian sub-continent or across the network of socialist states in Europe, Asia, and Africa. In order to form understandings of these experiences of rupture, movement, and separation, Bayly concentrates on key sites such as the family, particularly children. This focus allows her to reveal that far from being the passive objects of processes of colonization, de-colonization, and the creation of socialist post-colonies, her "socialist moderns" were "active moral agents engaging reflectively and dynamically with the multiple pasts and presents which they have forged and shared" (p. 240).

Although *Asian Voices in a Postcolonial Age* is conceived as a comparison of Vietnamese and Indian elites, readers should note that its focus is overwhelmingly on Vietnam, and more specifically on those French-educated Hanoi intellectuals who supported the Communist-led government after 1945. After introducing the book's themes in the first chapter, in Chapters 2 and 3 Bayly investigates how notions of family, nurturing, provision, and education structured experiences of separation and sacrifice for Hanoi intellectuals. In Chapter 4, she continues with a discussion of the problematic