

In This Issue

The five feature articles in this issue range broadly in subject matter yet share significant and varied thematic resonances. Both Greg Bankoff and Brett Walker are interested in human-animal interactions; Philip Constable and Douglas Howland write about the ways societies are structured hierarchically (both by the people living in the society and by people writing about them); Constable, Bankoff, and Chuan-kang Shih explore colonial constructions of society and the ways in which local peoples participated in and responded to that construction; Constable and Shih are interested in ethnic identities; and, finally, both Walker and Howland look at the complexities of Tokugawa Japan.

GREG BANKOFF's article focuses on horses in the Philippines and the responses of the colonial state to what it regarded as the degeneration of equine bloodlines in that tropical climate. He suggests ways in which Spaniards (and Europeans more generally) in the nineteenth century began to regard the tropics as hostile to non-indigenous species, human as well as animal. He argues that animal breeding provides a means of understanding the development of science and its close relationship to imperial venture in the late nineteenth century, a relationship too often overlooked by historians.

PHILIP CONSTABLE's article examines the exclusion of Mang and Mahar (*dalit*, or "untouchable") soldiers from the Bombay Army and demonstrates that this recategorization was the expression of a long-term indigenous trend of social differentiation in kshatriya identity in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century western India. His focus on dalit history is important not simply as a recovery of an understudied area of Indian military and social history, but also as a contribution to what we know about colonial knowledge formation, and the way in which kshatriya and dalit ideologies influenced the construction of colonial social identity.

CHUAN-KANG SHIH's article explores the origins of Chinese-style marriage among the Moso, a people who lived in southwestern China. When Moso areas were incorporated into the Yuan empire in the thirteenth century, local chieftains brought Chinese-style marriage into Moso society. But for ordinary Moso, retaining matrilineal descent and a pattern of visiting sexual union called *tisese* was (and remains) an important component of ethnic identity. Shih traces the introduction of the Chinese institution of marriage and untangles issues of identity and cultural influence across the Chinese ethnic landscape.

BRETT WALKER's article explores a famine in Hachinohe, Japan, in the eighteenth century and the ways in which changing agricultural patterns precipitated conditions where wild boars and the human population were in direct competition with one another for food. He reminds us that historians need to be alert to the environment as an historical actor. He concludes by suggesting that in eighteenth-century Japan, in times of crisis, domains were forced to rely on their own resources, with very little outside help.

DOUGLAS HOWLAND's article investigates the historiographical problem of samurai status during the Tokugawa period. He explores the different conceptual

implications of class and status, and argues for a conceptualization of class that encompasses both status and labor. He suggests that this reconceptualization may facilitate an analysis of change, particularly of the changes that led to the Meiji Restoration.

I sent each article in this issue to each author and asked for comments on the resonances they found with their own work and the other articles in the issue. Greg Bankoff made an important point—that reading the articles in conjunction with one another underlined, for him, not their similarities, but their rich differences—in subject matter, in methodology, in source materials, and in theoretical perspectives. He correctly suggests that one of the points of comparison is to underline differences rather than to smooth them over (Bankoff, e-mail, 30 January, 2001).

But Bankoff, and the other authors, went on to delineate common arenas in which the various articles can be read in juxtaposition with one another, and in which their particular differences can be appreciated. Douglas Howland articulated a common concern of the five articles as the “cultural construction of the world, or to put it another way, the embedment of nature in culture.” He further articulated two major aspects of this process: one as “the naturalization of social differences into hierarchical systems or orders,” and the other as “the effort to culturally appropriate or domesticate ‘natural’ systems or relations” (Howland, e-mail, 1 February 2001). Philip Constable finds that the five articles share a “common concern . . . about the impact on local cultures of wider state/imperial forms and structures for social categorization” (Constable, e-mail, 7 March 2001). Walker wrote that “one resonance that the five articles share with one another is the theme of pushing the notion of the fluidity or unstable nature of such categories as status, class, ethnic identity, and environment, particularly in the face of different forms of state, economic, and cultural forces” (Walker, e-mail, 27 January 2001).

The various ways in which social categories are formed is a fruitful ground for reading these articles. Let’s begin with Constable’s reading of Shih’s article, in which he makes explicit connections between imperial control, social categories, and ethnic identity:

In consolidating their centralized imperial control, Chuan-kang Shih argues that the rulers of the Yuan and Qing dynasties took measures that sought to homogenize the diverse cultures in their respective empires and bring the *tisese*-practicing Moso elite closer to the Chinese imperial mainstream through assimilation to Chinese marriage customs. Just as India’s kshatriya Marathas and Mahars assimilated but subordinated colonial racial ideas to their indigenous purposes, the fact that *tisese* relationships remained the defining feature of Moso socio-personal interaction might be seen to suggest that Moso cultural development was less one of assimilation to Chinese matrimonial norms than the subordination of imperial Chinese/Pumi marriage ideals to the Moso’s own social designs and political needs. The cultural hegemony of the Han Chinese over the Moso (like British ideological hegemony over colonial Indian society) would seem ambiguous when the defining community characteristic in the case of Moso identity remained their largely unchanged practice of *tisese*.

(Constable e-mail, 7 March, 2001)

Reading these two articles in tandem suggests, as Constable points out, the varying ways in which local cultures have a strong impact on and may even determine state/imperial categorizations. Bankoff echoes this observation when he comments that what interested him about Shih’s piece was “the way in which major historical events such

as the Mongol and Manchu invasions affected common life practices, the interplay between macro- and micro-histories” (Bankoff e-mail, 30 January 2001).

Shih comments on Constable:

I find Constable’s analysis of the exclusion of the untouchable castes from the Bombay Army in nineteenth-century India particularly interesting. Extricating himself from the conventional (and often superficial) distinctions between colonizer and colonized, Constable strives to delve into deep historical complexities to reveal that Indian colonial society cannot be understood as a homogenized category in opposition to English colonial power. The result is a picture that is too evasive and fluid for convenient dichotomization, but much richer and more vivid than conventional portrayals The Han and non-Han peoples in China have always been viewed in fixed patterns of antithesis, such as center-periphery, dominant-subordinate, oppressor-oppressed, assimilation-resistance, advanced-backward, etc. in which the Han have been linked to the first term in the binary opposition and the non-Han to the second. My discussion of the introduction and institutionalization of marriage in Moso society shows how the dyadic paradigm obscures the vibrant situational dynamics of ethnic relations in Chinese history and how it hinders our understanding of the factors which have helped shape such relations.

(Shih, e-mail, 1 April, 2001)

Bankoff is fundamentally interested in colonial categorization and he too appreciates the complexity with which Constable delineates the discourse on martial races in nineteenth-century India:

It is the [discourse on martial races] that chiefly concerns Constable, and it is one that he clearly shows to have had a much more complex pedigree than simply the realization of an administrative policy of divide and rule and to be much more sophisticated than simply an instrument of colonial oppression. All too often, it seems to me, the colonial relationship is reduced to a dyadic one between colonizer and colonized. While recent historiography has gone some way to redress the balance for the latter, little has been done for the former, who are usually portrayed in rather clumsy brush strokes as singularly brainless, unobservant, somewhat hedonistic bunches of racial bigots whose success mainly lay in their seemingly boundless self-confidence in their own superiority. In contrast, I am continuously amazed at the often rich complexity of colonial discourses, which even though I may not be in sympathy with them, still exhibit sophisticated thinking processes often based on astute and acute observations and reflections on the cultures over which they administered. Thus Constable reveals myriad layers of meaning to the discourse on martial races and how it was used both as an instrument of oppression and one of advocacy by castes within Indian society and by alien colonial administrators alike. In the process, colonial society is shown to be much more complex than is usually depicted, and the colonial army, in particular, emerges as a much more important avenue of social mobility than previously envisaged.

(Bankoff, e-mail, 30 January 2001)

Philip Constable amplifies one connection between his article and Bankoff’s, while suggesting that there were alternative discourses about tropical degeneration in India:

The British colonial military establishment in late nineteenth-century India . . . utilized arguments of racial (Aryan) degeneration in tropical climates in similar pseudo-scientific forms to those examined by Greg Bankoff for the nineteenth-century Philipines. There was also an alternative and strongly argued case from Bombay and Madras army officers that most men could be turned into effective soldiers regardless

of race or climate. My analysis would further emphasize that what was particularly important about these pseudo-scientific and racial justifications for social engineering was also the adaptive uses made of such arguments by indigenous societies in order to promote their own social and cultural change in the nineteenth century. In consequence it is essential to examine the manner in which the colonial establishment itself was in turn widely conditioned in its perceptions by indigenous debate.

(Constable, e-mail, 7 March 2001)

The articles by Bankoff and Walker most clearly exemplify the effort to culturally appropriate or domesticate “natural” systems or relations. Both Bankoff and Walker are interested in human-animal interactions, and in both cases, the animals are completely implicated in the human world. The boars Walker writes about are engaged in direct competition with the peasants of Hachinohe for food. The horses Bankoff writes about have been transplanted to the Philippines and are in the service of the colonial state. Bankoff wrote:

I naturally found much of immediate interest in Brett Walker’s study of the Wild Boar famine of 1749, in which he depicts humans and ungulates locked in fierce competition over the same sources of food during a severe famine in Hachinohe, Japan. In particular, he demonstrates how agricultural changes in response to export-based economies, even in proto-industrial societies, had crucial effects on other animal and plant populations. Such arguments only confirm my own conviction that historiography should be more about analyzing processes rather than events: that the convergence of climatic changes, global developments, local environments, and the relations among species all have important bearing on what the historical process is all about. Moreover, in Walker’s case, he provides another example of how large-scale environmental degradation is not just the special characteristic of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries or one uniquely attributable to Western cultures, but is a universal consequence of more complex human societies.

(Bankoff, e-mail, 30 January 2001)

Howland sees a crucial difference in the nature of human-animal interactions in the cases delineated by Bankoff and Walker:

Walker focuses on the survivability of a Japanese community in the faces of challenges like the weather and the wild boar; curiously, his story is one of human passivity in the face of “natural” forces beyond human control. The prime vehicles for human “intervention” are the local deities. This approach contrasts strongly with that of Bankoff, who focuses on the human attempt to modify natural history. . . . This attempt is not merely the cultural appropriation of the horse (what the horse means in Spanish culture) but also the introduction of zootechny, the breeding of horses in light of evolutionary possibilities. What is interesting here is that the initial issue of “acclimatisation” of the Spanish race to the tropical environment is to be countered by this theory of “breeding”—that humans can control the environment, which is rightly subject to human intervention.

(Howland, e-mail, 1 February, 2001)

Howland and Walker demonstrate instabilities in both environment and the status system in Tokugawa Japan. Brett Walker writes:

Another resonance shared by Howland and Walker is the explicit positioning of the Tokugawa period as a fluid and dynamic period in Japanese history. This is less historiographically striking than the call for a less “species-centric” historical discourse [as seen in the Walker and Bankoff pieces], as historians have increasingly

identified the Tokugawa period as a dynamic one, but Howland and Walker illustrate that all categories used by “social scientists” (historians included, I guess) to describe the early modern Japanese experience are unstable at best. In particular, historians sometimes take for granted the fact that during the Tokugawa period the environment and the status system were etched in stone. In fact, it’s fair to say that the environment and status systems have been polestars for measuring the changes in other aspects of Tokugawa society. Commercialization outpaced the benefits of samurai status, leading to discontent, and ultimately, the Meiji restoration. Indeed, highlighting the revolutionary nature of the Meiji period has always been dependent on portraying the Tokugawa period as a feudal and backward one. By linking status and class, and showing how economic change set in motion a variety of changes in status and class categories, Howland demonstrates just how distant the idyllic Confucian rhetoric of *shimin*, or four status groups, was from the social reality of the day. His listing of samurai status as bureaucratic labor welds status to class. Similarly, the “wild boar famine” illustrates that the environment too needs to be viewed as constantly changing. Climatological trends, harvest cycles, and animal distribution were all changing variables in the Tokugawa experience.

(Brett Walker, e-mail, 27 January 2001)

Shih found that while Howland’s article dealt with a “big” question—the categorization of the samurai—the other articles dealt with

seemingly inconspicuous topics that could be easily overlooked when the historian tries to tackle the big issues of environment and colonial ideology, social and cultural relations in a colonial society, the interactions between nature and human behavior, and the multiethnic origins of Chineseness. Yet, by careful examination and judicious interpretation of horse breeding in the late nineteenth-century Philippines, the marginalization of martial races at the turn of the last century in west India, a famine in northeast Japan in the eighteenth century, and the introduction and institutionalization of marriage in a minority ethnic group in Southwest China, these pieces demonstrate how much insight into the larger picture can be gathered through closeup vignettes of a single theme.

(Shih, e-mail, 1 April, 2001)

These rich articles do indeed illuminate larger pictures—the nature of colonialism, the construction and naturalization of hierarchies, the production of ethnic difference, the interactions between the human and the animal world. I hope you read them with pleasure.