

This is the most authoritative book on Indus Basin politics yet written. It will be of wide interest to scholars of modern South Asia, and to environmental historians more generally. Gilmartin's clear and engaging writing style is suited to a broad audience of students as well as academics. <daniel.haines@bristol.ac.uk>

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THE MODERN SPIRIT OF ASIA: THE SPIRITUAL AND THE SECULAR IN CHINA AND IN INDIA. By PETER VAN DER VEER. pp. xi, 282. Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2014.  
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The purpose of this book is to examine the ways in which India and China were “transformed by Western imperial modernity” during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A “study in comparative historical sociology informed by anthropological theory”, the main theme is the relation between spirituality and secularity in nationalist movements. Thus far, it is argued, the discipline of ‘world history’ has been dominated by the economic perspective; it is now time for the impact of imperial encounters on culture and religion to be taken fully into consideration as well. The monograph is based on Professor Dr Peter van der Veer’s own field work combined with his complete command of a vast range of secondary literature in various languages. Earlier versions of two of the chapters (six and seven) have already appeared in print elsewhere; and the author has delivered papers on his research at universities throughout the world.

Inspired by a youthful trip to India, which induced him to study Indology at university, van der Veer then commenced a lifetime’s immersion in the cultural anthropology of India. As his career developed he became increasingly fascinated by China as well. His discoveries in this connection raised new questions for him about India, including the idea that secularism in India could fruitfully be compared with the situation in China. Meanwhile, he rose to become director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity at Göttingen and a Distinguished Professor at the University of Utrecht. His published works include *Gods on Earth* (1988) and *Imperial Encounters: Nation and Religion in India and Britain* (2001) as well as a number of edited volumes, most recently *Handbook of Religion and the Asian City* (2015).

*The Modern Spirit of Asia* is a concise, multi-faceted, and nuanced critique, full of detailed and sophisticated analysis. In a nutshell the study is structured as follows. Chapter Two shows how the category of ‘spirituality’ received a global modern meaning in the nineteenth century. The thesis of the third chapter is that Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism were invented or constructed as ‘isms’ or religions in the nineteenth century. The author also looks at the then-new concept of ‘world religion’. Chapter Four addresses conversion to Christianity and the impact of missionary movements; the main argument is that Christian missionaries played a key role in education and medicine, but inadvertently (and more importantly) provoked an anti-imperialist proto-nationalism within a range of non-Christian reform movements. The fifth chapter engages the question of ‘popular religion’ whilst the sixth takes up the discussion of anti-superstition campaigns. In Chapter Seven yoga is compared with *taiji* and *qi gong*. Chapter Eight deals with the construction of minority and majority ethnicities.

‘Spirituality’, which is not to be confused with ‘(organised) religion’, is a sufficiently vague and flexible concept to suit the author’s purposes; a crucial term, it “suggests more than it defines” (p. 7). It is investigated here in relation to the ‘secular’, often seen as its opposite. Furthermore, ‘spirituality’

and 'secularity' are connected insofar as they both limit religious institutions. Professor van der Veer employs the idea of a "syntagmatic chain of religion-magic-secularity-spirituality", indicating that these terms are "connected, belong to each other, but cannot replace each other" (p. 9). His goal is to show that the said chain is an integral part of modernity; and, to do so, he adopts a comparative framework. Whilst there is an extensive literature examining the interactions between India and the West as well as China and the West, there has been hardly any attempt at comparative analysis of these interactions.

In Chapter Two he examines how the concept of spirituality – a modern term with no equivalent in either Sanskrit or Chinese (p. 35) – moved from the West to India and China and how it functioned to connect different conceptual worlds. He maintains (p. 36) that the spiritual and the secular were produced simultaneously as two connected alternatives to institutionalised religion in Euro-American modernity. The categories of 'religion', 'secularism' and 'spirituality' were universalised in the age of nineteenth-century imperialism and produced different effects in different societies. The relative centrality of 'spirituality' in India in contrast to China is explained by the fact that Chinese traditions had to be replaced by Western science, while India's traditions were resources in the anti-imperialist struggle. Faith was seen as a valued aspect of Indian nationalism but an obstacle in Chinese nationalism (in part because Confucianism disdained religion).

Various motifs run through the book, such as that India was colonised whereas China was not; the centrality of the imperial encounter for both countries; the different place of religion in nationalism in the two nations; the caste system in India versus clan groupings in China; the secularism of the colonial state in the sense of being neutral towards religion, particularly after the events of 1857; and that the 'secularization thesis' has been proved wrong almost everywhere. Along the way there are discussions of theosophy, Weberian disenchantment,<sup>1</sup> millenarianism, orientalism, cultural translation, tradition, Falun Gong, and much else besides; space is even found to mention the Beatles, who (along with others) "promoted Indian spirituality as a lifestyle element that could be marketed in the West in a variety of ways" (p. 179). Rather more seriously, prominence is given to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 (pp. 83–89), which produced a triumph for Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902).<sup>2</sup>

The author makes use of Foucault's 'genealogical method', in other words the idea that concepts might have different meanings at different stages of history and that 'knowledge' in one era might become 'false knowledge' in the next. Professor van der Veer also suggests that, although the words 'China' and 'Mandarin' are derived from Sanskrit, civilisational interaction between the two countries was limited to the first millennium and to the spread of Buddhism, after which the interchange came to a halt "in terms of the expansion of empires and/or religious traditions" (p. 3). The touchstone for both India and China came to be the West rather than each other; hence there is a dearth of scholarship about China in India and vice-versa. Because of closer linguistic and historical links, Western scholars have tended to be more at home with the South Asian nation rather than with the East Asian one. The author also contests Professor Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' thesis, denying that the Islamic world is a unity and pointing out that Bangladesh broke away from Pakistan in 1971, not on the basis of religion, but on that of linguistic and ethnic difference (p. 193).

Chapter Eight notes that in both Indian and Chinese nationalism Islam was seen as "coming from outside" and as "not entirely belonging" to national culture. The main difference between the construction of a Han majority and the construction of a Hindu majority is that the first was based on ethnicity and the second on religion (p. 209). The idea of a Hindu civilisation unifying India became

<sup>1</sup> See further Robert A. Yelle, *The Language of Disenchantment* (New York, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> To this day there is a Vivekananda professorship at the University of Chicago, a post held by Professor Sir Christopher Bayly FBA until his untimely demise in April 2015.

the ‘founding myth’ of mainstream nationalism. But nationalism not only unifies; it also diversifies by creating alternative identities: the partition of India in 1947, for example, was occasioned for reasons of religious nationalism. To this day Muslims comprise a significant proportion (around 14%) of the Indian population; and, but for the loss of Pakistan (including what is now Bangladesh) in mid-century, it would have been a third. They have a history that gives them a centrality in processes of state formation in India, as exemplified by the Mughal Empire. In China, by contrast, Muslims make up a relatively small minority of nineteen millions or just 1.5% of the total number of inhabitants. Muslims in Xinjiang might have been independent from Chinese empires for a very long time; but they have never taken over the centre. The situation is exacerbated in both China and India because Xinjiang and Kashmir respectively are majority-Muslim regions at the edge of national territory; and, once the state map has been established, there is a paramount desire to maintain its integrity.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, *The Modern Spirit of Asia* is at once reflective, informative, and penetrating. An insightful study written in accessible style, it remains a work of rich scholarship which will continue to yield its fruit for years to come. As the philosopher Professor Charles Taylor remarks (back cover), the book “gives us interactional history at its best”. <[avmhorton@hotmail.com](mailto:avmhorton@hotmail.com)>

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CHARIOTS IN EARLY CHINA – ORIGINS, CULTURAL INTERACTION AND IDENTITY. By HSIAO-YUN WU. (BAR International Series 2457). pp. 135. Oxford, Archaeopress, 2013.  
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The evolution and spread of chariots across Eurasia is a subject of enduring scholarly fascination and has been fuelled by the publication of notable archaeological discoveries made in the southern Urals and ancient China. The unearthing of complete chariots, however, is an exceptional occurrence in the Urals when compared to the considerable amount of materials recovered from early Chinese funerary contexts. The earliest evidence for Chinese chariots appears in the Bronze Age and derives from burials belonging to the Late Shang period *circa* 1200 BCE. So far there have been over 100 Shang chariots unearthed, while over 700 chariots have been found in burials relating to the subsequent Zhou period *circa* 1046–221 BCE. Thus, the monograph *Chariots in Early China* offers a timely review of these findings, while also providing a closer examination of the roles they played amongst the elites in Chinese society.

Chapter 1 starts off with outlining the background to the discovery of Late Shang and Zhou period chariots. It also summarises key points put forward in the scholarship of prominent researchers in the field of chariot archaeology including Stuart Piggott, Jessica Rawson and William Watson. Based on these foundations, the volume then sets out its research agenda which entails the exploration of the politics and hierarchies of chariot use in Shang and Zhou society by drawing upon Chinese archaeological reports and highlighting important anecdotes from translations of early Chinese texts.

The theories about the evolution of chariots in western Eurasia and how chariot technology arrived in Early China is re-examined in Chapter 2. The precursors to the Chinese chariot can be seen in a handful of burials associated with the Sintashta culture of the southern Urals (*circa* 2000–1750 BCE) and

<sup>3</sup>On Chinese cartographic sensitivities, see Timothy Brook, *Mr Selden's Map of China: The Spice Trade, a Lost Chart & the South China Sea* (London: Profile Books, pbk, 2015), particularly the first chapter.