

modern world. The notion of the 'savage within' '...was powerfully consolidated by the war and explicated through anthropology,' (p. 45). She shows how anthropology was of interest because of the fascination with contemporary civilizations across the world as part of a search for meaning and efforts at healing in post-war environment.

Carden-Coyne explores the relationships between bodies (their experiences, styles and performances) and those represented in images and material culture. The book is ambitious and offers the reader a vast amount of diverse information to digest. A clear argument threads the main points throughout the book giving the reader a sense of focus. The themes of classicism are followed through a variety of subjects and images. The reader is left with a clear notion of the power of the influence of the ideal Greco-Roman marble, white, strong body. As Carden Coyne concludes: '...despite all the pain and suffering of the war, human beings demonstrated a remarkable capacity to forgive themselves the carnage, to reconstruct their bodies, and reshape their memories of violence through modern visions of the classical imaginary,' (p. 319).

References

- Bourke, J.** (1996) *Dismembering the male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*. Reaktion Books, London.
- Showalter, E.** (1985) *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980*. Pantheon Books, New York.

SUSIE KILSHAW

*Department of Anthropology, University College London,
UK*

The Body in Asia (Asia Pacific Studies, Volume 3). Edited by Bryan S. Turner and Zheng Yangwen. Pp. 230. (Berghahn Books, Oxford, 2009.). £53.00, ISBN 978-1-84545-550-7, hardback. doi:10.1017/S0021932010000714.

Bryan S. Turner and Zheng Yangwen's edited volume *The Body in Asia* features the work of a number of younger scholars across the social sciences and humanities whose research is based somewhere within Asia and in some form engages issues related to the body within political, social and cultural domains. The fact that most of the contributors to the volume are relatively new to their respective fields is a mixed blessing for the reader. On the one hand, the volume contains several innovative and excellent chapters by scholars who, while they are not widely known at present, offer innovative, fresh approaches to particular questions regarding the body in Asian contexts and exhibit the potential in their work to make substantial contributions in their respective fields. On the other hand, many of the contributions appear to reflect their origins as chapters in PhD theses and are marked by somewhat repetitive explanations of now-canonical works in a manner that seems to be less about providing a framework for the evidence at hand and more about establishing the credibility or competence of the writer. Thus, while theorists such as Foucault, Bourdieu and Mauss are essential to any discussion of the multiplicity and particularity of 'the body' in any contemporary context, at times their place in the

actual theoretical frameworks offered by individual authors tends to have an air of ritualized gesture rather than specific engagement with the empirical material under discussion.

Perhaps more importantly, in offering somewhat cursory readings of the theorists just mentioned, critical questions are sometimes taken for granted. Most glaringly, questions such as 'What is a body?' or 'What is Asia?' are often mentioned but not engaged directly, leading at times to a rather uncritical acceptance of the taken for granted and overdetermined 'culturalist' approach summarized by the editors in the Introduction and advocated by Brownwell in her opening chapter.

It is noticeable (and more than a little ironic) that Brownwell's somewhat defensive claim that previous engagements with the body 'lack a well-developed concept of culture' does not seem to be a particularly salient problem for many of the better individual efforts here, as they do not directly utilize this concept at all. This is understandable, as Brownwell's own definition of culture seems to merely be an argument for 'cultural relativism' (g. 26), which is a fairly anaemic way to describe an anthropological engagement with human diversity. Thus, even similar approaches taken by individual authors who follow often yield very different results. For example, Bautista and Planta's historically oriented chapter 'The Sacred and the Sanitary: The Colonial 'Medicalization' of the Filipino Body' (Chapter 8) makes very broad claims regarding cultural change and the transformation of Filipino body cultures in the face of colonial medical discourses that exceed the rather slim evidence regarding hygiene manuals that they present. Starting from a somewhat similar historical/textual approach, however, Dix deploys a psychoanalytic and textual approach in her chapter 'Saint or Serpent? Engendering the Female Body in Medieval Japanese Buddhist Narratives' (Chapter 2), that effectively demonstrates the complex semantic changes regarding the 'impurity' of women found in Buddhist didactic tales over time in Japan. Not concerned with explicitly arguing 'for culture', Dix nonetheless contributes to the larger questions raised in the editor's Introduction in a manner that eludes those contributions that explicitly try to 'take on' culture. This seems to inadvertently demonstrate that the concept often remains too open, undefined, and intellectually flabby to effectively 'explain' the body in Asian societies.

This issue aside, Turner and Yangwen's volume offers several excellent individual pieces of work regarding the body in Asia. The problem of 'the body' is not a new one, as the editors point out. There are, however, particular modes by which the body as both a problem for study and as an object available for research has emerged in the first decade of the 21st century. Moving away from frameworks that assume that the body is either merely a reflection of social structures or an artifact of power relations within social and cultural institutions, a growing number of scholars are engaging with the body through frameworks that privilege concepts such as 'embodiment', 'affect' or 'experience'. While it remains to be seen if any of these approaches truly can work to deepen the general 'culture concept' advocated here, several of the individual works in this volume reflect these current approaches through the analysis of particular cases; contributions by van Wichelen, Lora-Wainwright, Gaintry and Zheng's own individual chapter all positively stand out in this regard.

As a singular volume, *The Body in Asia* is quite uneven. It does stand as a valuable book for scholars interested in the topic, if for no other reason than to gain

a preview of several scholars who appear to be capable of making substantial scholastic contributions to conceptual and historical debates regarding experience, the body and the forms of life we see emerging in contemporary Asia. What is unfortunate is that the larger framing of the volume by its editors and more senior contributors seems to privilege the false problem of 'culture' over the complexity and multiplicity of the body in Asia in concrete terms. Honestly, must we expend so much effort asserting that 'culture is important' in a newly published text aimed at the humanities and social sciences? The fact that it somehow does for the editors blunts their otherwise useful introduction and sets a needlessly negative tone for the volume by opening with Brownwell's defensive chapter that seems to offer little more than preaching to the choir. Setting up the volume in this way often obscures individually excellent work and mars some of the subsequent contributions where the authors do not yet feel that they can disagree with, or simply ignore, their seniors.

RICHARD BAXSTROM
Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh,
UK