

writings not only enjoyed great cultural capital but also remained one of the most important sources of information for Victorians at home. Information transmitted through travel writing served the public discussion and more scholarly research, contributing to the formation of “public opinions” and the institutionalization of various disciplines at home. On the other hand, like the previous century, Victorian travellers went to China with different agendas – political, religious, and commercial – trying to describe the “Middle Kingdom” in, as they believed, a unique way. After all, China meant different things for different Britons. The heterogeneity of British travel writers and their writings provided a more complicated picture of China and the Chinese. Therefore, perhaps the ways of knowing China in the nineteenth century had not changed that much from that of the eighteenth century, neither had the heterogeneity of the big picture.

Last but not least, Millar’s nuanced picture of Enlightenment debates about China’s political economy and the more complicated picture of Britain’s perceptions of China throughout the second half of the nineteenth century invites us to a more critical reading of the contemporary broad theory of Saidian Orientalism. Millar’s perspective reminds us that while it is not necessary to undermine the imperial narratives, it is crucial to provide a more nuanced, contradictory version, subject to changing historical and political circumstances, of the representation of China and the Chinese in the West.

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KATHLENE BALDANZA:

Ming China and Vietnam: Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia.

(Studies of the Weatherhead East Asia Institute, Columbia University.)

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Kathlene Baldanza’s *Ming China and Vietnam: Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia* is a history of Sino-Vietnamese relations during the time of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). It is also the most sophisticated historical study of Sino-Vietnamese relations to date. Rather than presenting the interactions of these two countries as a dichotomous engagement between “the Chinese” and “the Vietnamese”, as many earlier works have done, Baldanza presents a history of the interactions between two polities that were in turn divided. More specifically, Baldanza demonstrates that in the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries there were major policy disputes at the Ming court and political conflicts within Dai Viet, as Vietnam was known at that time, and that relations between these two countries took place within, and can only be fully understood in reference to, these divisive contexts.

Baldanza also argues that any effort to understand Sino-Vietnamese relations during this period requires that we also take into account two additional, but related, factors. First, the fact that the two countries shared a common elite culture ensured that the elites of these two lands could communicate with each other and find ways to negotiate and compromise, and they did. At the same time, however, Baldanza argues that “the two countries had conflicting understandings” of their shared

elite culture and that this led to “differences in self-representation” (p. 5) which in turn had political consequences. In particular, Baldanza argues that in certain cases Vietnamese elites represented themselves as fellow heirs of the East Asian classical tradition in an effort to influence certain negotiations but that such efforts had the opposite effect as the Vietnamese “were actually decentering the Chinese world by positing a cultural hub beyond the borders of the Chinese state” and that “Chinese observers were made profoundly uncomfortable by the intimation of a center of classical culture outside of the Central Country” (p. 6) and thus did not agree to Vietnamese demands.

To demonstrate these points, Baldanza begins by exploring the close relations between the two lands. She does this by examining the writings of two Vietnamese exiles at the Ming capital: one (Le Tac) capitulated to the Ming in the fourteenth century; and the other (Ho Nguyen Trung) was captured in the early fourteenth century. In writing about Dai Viet for Chinese readers, both of these authors produced works that relied on cultural and historical information shared by their Chinese counterparts. This at times had the potential to blur the distinctions between the two countries, and Ming officials likewise struggled to define the status of Dai Viet.

We see this clearly in debates at the Ming court in the early fifteenth century when political instability in Dai Viet led the Ming Dynasty to send troops to the Red River delta. The decision to invade Vietnam at that time was made by the third Ming emperor, Zhu Di, and it contravened an earlier order by the first Ming emperor that Vietnam should be left alone, as he had wished to honour it for being the first tributary state to send an embassy to the Ming. Ming emperors were thus not consistent in their policy towards Vietnam. Their court officials also offered contending perspectives. In this case, some officials cited the type of shared history and culture that Vietnamese exile Le Tac had documented as justification for invading and re-incorporating Dai Viet into the empire. Others, however, argued that the Vietnamese were alien barbarians who could never assimilate and should therefore be left on their own. These two views persisted throughout the Ming period and Baldanza’s discussion of these debates is an extremely important contribution to our understanding of the history of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

The Ming were supported by some Vietnamese during their two-decade occupation, but they were ultimately driven out by others who in 1428 established a new dynasty, the Le Dynasty. Control of that dynasty was then usurped a century later by an official named Mac Dang Dung who established a rival dynasty, the Mac. Conflict and rivalry between the Le and the Mac persisted throughout the rest of the Ming Dynasty period, an issue that almost brought the two countries to war and resulted in Vietnam being demoted from a kingdom to a pacification commission, a lower-level administrative unit. Baldanza covers all of this history in detail and from different perspectives and in the process we learn a great deal about how politically divided Vietnam was, as well as how Ming officials continued to engage in policy debates, not only at the court but also between the court and provincial officials (Lin Xiyuan and Jiang Yigui).

Finally, Baldanza also examines in detail an effort in the late sixteenth century by Vietnamese envoy Phung Khac Khoan to get the Ming Wanli emperor to restore the title of “kingdom” to Dai Viet. Phung Khac Khoan presented the emperor with poems that he had written that were filled with classical allusions in what Baldanza argues was a political effort to sway the emperor’s decision. However, Baldanza contends that this “self-representation” had the opposite effect because to the Ming these “political and cultural similarities were seen as threatening” (195), and the request for the title change was not granted.

Ming China and Vietnam is essential reading for anyone interested in the history of Sino-Vietnamese relations, as well as anyone interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the complex functioning of the Chinese tributary system. That said, I think the issue of how Vietnamese “self-representations” were understood by officials at the Ming court is a topic that can be investigated further as it is not one that we have direct textual evidence to support. Instead, we have to rely on supposition, and there are always ways to sharpen our historical suppositions. For anyone who wishes to take on this task, however, Baldanza’s ably and carefully researched monograph is definitely the best place to start.

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DIANA JUNIO:

Patriotic Cooperation: The Border Services of the Church of Christ in China and Chinese Church–State Relations, 1920s–1950s.

(Religion in Chinese Societies Series.) xiii, 403 pp. Leiden: Brill, 2017. ISBN 978 90 04 34175 3.

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This excellent study offers the first major English-language analysis of the Border Services Department (BSD) in wartime China, a cooperative venture between the national Church of Christ in China and the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-Shek. Junio assesses the motivations of each side in cooperating to provide charitable services in the borderlands of the southwest; analyses the range of programmes offered and their effectiveness; and asks how this venture could reshape conventional views of the paradigm of “control, resistance and conflict” (p. 14) between religion and the state in China. In doing so, the book contributes to new debates on the place of religion in society that Ashiwa and Wank, Mayfair Yang and others have generated, and to the unpicking of dominant PRC narratives on Nationalist-era Christianity.

The Border Services Department was set up in 1939, and operated out of headquarters in Chengdu until 1955 when its last services and assets were turned over to the government. During the fifteen years of its existence, the Department ran a number of educational, medical and social programmes among the Jiarong, Qiang and Yi peoples, with notable successes in animal husbandry and crop disease control, in goitre reduction and healthcare, as well as in primary education and training local nurses. As Junio explores, however, complex political and evangelical motivations underpinned the shared social work. The church undertook BSD work as part of its contribution to the war effort, and it was the wartime agenda that set the goals of the organization: to rally the border peoples to support the war, to promote cohesion among people groups and national unity, to improve the social and economic conditions of the people groups in the border areas. The church maintained a clear line between its (state-funded) social work and its (self-funded) evangelical work among the border peoples, but the line between fostering national unity and subjugating minorities is fine – a single valid point in the torrid PRC-era criticism of the BSD.

Patriotic Cooperation is extensively researched and well-structured. It begins with the establishment of a united Church of Christ in China out of denominational amalgams in the early twentieth century, and goes on to describe strained relations between