

Frykenberg's book is truly a great contribution to the exploration of the complicated nature of religion and society in India. But, as any good book does, this one also points towards the future, specifically, the vast amount of research regarding conversions and Christianity in India that remains to be done.

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*The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning.*

By Kelly M. Foreman. SOAS Musicology Series. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. Pp. xiv + 158.

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In this well-crafted book, Kelly M. Foreman takes on the pervasive conception of Japanese geisha as exploited erotic entertainers, and argues that the center of their professional lives is their dedication to traditional Japanese performing arts. While acknowledging the importance of dance to many geisha, Foreman focuses on those who concentrate on music, especially the playing of the shamisen. The book is the most significant contribution to literature on geisha since the publication of Liza Dalby's *Geisha* in 1983.

Foreman begins by attacking the stereotypes of geisha presented in popular media – notably the geisha as sexual plaything, and the geisha as passive and exploited. Arthur Golden's novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* comes in for its share of criticism, as does the idealization of geisha as a “lost feminine ideal” of submissiveness. Foreman argues that this depiction serves Western interests by contrasting the allegedly independent and powerful Western woman with the pathetic Asian one, symbolized by the geisha. Thus the geisha stereotype becomes an Orientalist product, an interpretation with which I am not entirely comfortable – surely Japanese themselves have promoted this stereotype, and one need look no further than Kawabata Yasunari's *Snow Country*. Be that as it may, however, it seems ironic that the geisha, shown by Foreman to have an iron-willed dedication to their art, appear in fictional depictions as helpless and pathetic.

Foreman's second chapter turns to the musical repertoire and training of the geisha. In the Preface the author suggests that those who are not musicologists or musicians might want to skim over this chapter; but I found myself wanting to know more about the genres than I could learn from the printed page. An included CD or an associated website, with examples of each genre, would have been a big help (the author could still create the latter!). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the training that geisha receive from professional teachers outside the geisha world. Foreman states that geisha spend from four to six hours a day in arts training, added to performing time in festivals and recitals. It is this busy schedule, Foreman suggests, that discourages geisha from marriage. The picture presented in this chapter is of women totally dedicated to their art.

Foreman then discusses geisha performances; they are of two types, large public stage productions and *ozashiki* お座敷 or private performances given in teahouses. She opens the chapter with a survey of the history of female performance, from early shamans to women's kabuki, and the eventual enclosure of female entertainment in the Edo-period pleasure quarters. Continuing into the Meiji period, when women were again permitted to perform in public venues, Foreman examines the inception of large stage performances in Tokyo and Kyoto. Organized by geographically-based geisha communities called *hanamachi* 花街, these performances enable geisha to present their arts of music and dance to the public, and serve as an important device for preserving Japan's traditional performing arts. Rather than earning money from these performances, however, the geisha are actually required to finance them – often going into debt, Foreman notes, to perpetuate an important cultural legacy. To support these activities, geisha turn to *ozashiki*, where geisha perform both for and with customers. At both *ozashiki* and stage performances, geisha are required to demonstrate their virtuosity in a

number of different genres. Unlike professional stage musicians, who can concentrate on a single genre, geisha must study several, requiring them to spend a great deal of time – and obviously money – on lessons and practice. Each different genre is transmitted personally and according to the rules of a particular *iemoto* 家元 (a line of headmasters), continuing a tradition of esoteric master to disciple tradition that characterizes some varieties of Japanese Buddhism as well as many traditional arts.

By this point in reading Foreman's book, it becomes apparent that few geisha are going to get rich, and that they have to work very hard indeed. Why does anyone want to be a geisha? Foreman cites several factors: the freedom to pursue several different artistic genres; the support of the geisha community; the convenience of studying various arts in a single location; the ability to interact with members of the audience on a one-to-one basis; and the desire to avoid teaching (the way in which many performing artists make a living). Elsewhere she cites the wish to avoid marriage and family responsibilities as another motivation. It is hard to argue with Foreman's conclusion that only a deep dedication to traditional music or dance could inspire the dedication required to be a geisha in important *hanamachi* of Kyoto or Tokyo.

Regular customers sometimes turn into patrons, helping the geisha in various ways, such as buying large blocs of tickets for public stage performances. In popular literature such as *Memoirs of a Geisha*, patronage is fraught with sexual implications. Foreman focuses instead on the *artistic* implications of patronage. Men (and sometimes women) support geisha for the opportunity to study traditional music with them and themselves to become amateur performers alongside geisha at *ozashiki*. In order to do this, patrons foot the bill for geisha participation in public performances, including fees for kimonos and wigs. Beginning geisha also receive support from the owner of the house or *okiya* 置屋 to which they belong. Foreman laments the lack of funding from government sources, despite programs that designate (mostly male) performing artists as Intangible Cultural Assets or Living Cultural Treasures. She argues that as repositories of traditional arts that are fast fading from Japan's cultural scene, geisha rightly deserve consideration for such honors.

Is it really possible to view geisha strictly as artists and ignore the erotic aspects of their encounters with customers and patrons? Foreman clearly thinks not, including a discussion of "liminal eroticism" characterized by elegance and restraint (*iki*) in her final chapter. Foreman quotes the aesthetician Kuki Shūzō in defining *iki* as a kind of coquetry that draws men and women together but does not develop into actual sexual relations, and she argues that this sort of attraction/restraint is represented musically by shamisen genres associated with the geisha world.

Foreman makes forceful and convincing arguments that geisha need to be seen as artists rather than erotic entertainers, and that in modern times at least, they are not forced into the profession but rather choose it for artistic reasons. Demonstrating the amount of time and effort spent on musical training and performance helps to make Foreman's case. I remain to be persuaded, however, that the relationship between geisha and patron can be totally explained by the concept of *iki*. Surely there is an element of massaging male egos – with or without erotic implications – that geisha share with non-artists such as bar hostesses. I wonder, too, if it is entirely fair to blame misconceptions about geisha on Orientalist fantasy. The history of female performing arts has always been entwined with sexuality – female entertainers in classical and medieval times often traded sexual favors for compensation, and Foreman notes the confinement of female performing artists within the pleasure quarters of Edo and Kyoto. The fictional pathos of the geisha's life may derive as much from the fictional pathos of the courtesan's life in the plays of Chikamatsu as it does from Western wishful thinking about pliant and oppressed Asian women.

One minor gripe: at times throughout the text, kanji would have been very helpful – if not embedded in the text, then in a glossary to which the reader might refer. A case in point is the discussion on page 51 of the orthography for the term *kabuki* 歌舞伎 and its relationship to the term

*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.

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*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 *Suttapiṭaka*, 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