

the climate goals of the Paris Agreement and SDG goals endorsed by the United Nations. Behavior modification can be implemented to encourage voluntary actions such as municipal waste recycling applied in Japanese cities. Big data monitoring can also be used with deliberate and transparent rules as applied in the EU generally. Also, manipulation of global trade is undertaken by many countries not usually considered coercive. Furthermore, geoengineering could be in danger of utilizing a technopolitical tool to suppress some or many individual freedoms not only in China but also in other countries. The problem of Chinese environmental authoritarianism cannot be blamed on its tools only. Rather, the problem is that environmental authoritarianism may utilize not only direct coercive tools but also seemingly not coercive tools to accomplish both environmental and authoritarian ends in certain contexts. So, we may ask how and when such non-coercive tools can be applied for authoritarian means, rather than environmental means. This calls for further research into the complexity and contextuality of environmental governance.

The authors also point out that the coercive state-led environmentalism could not succeed without consensus based on consultation among a broad range of stakeholders, including the local community, NGOs, private companies, and scientists, as seen in the case of the ecological rehabilitation of the Loess Plateau in the late 1990s through early 2000s (but its subsequent scaling up efforts came to failure); and the case of the waste import ban in 2018. It is important to examine what kinds of factors we should consider when evaluating the success of any given case under the Chinese environmental authoritarianism. Furthermore, we may pay more attention to the possibility of “non-authoritarian spillover,” on which the authors have not focused in this book. This provides another focus for further research when we can find more successful cases in terms of multistakeholder consultation under the Chinese characteristic of authoritarian environmentalism. For example, according to my observation of environmental public interest litigation brought under the revised Environmental Protection Law in 2015, local environmental NGOs have come to collaborate with larger influential NGOs to collect evidence on site. Moreover, such evidence-gathering activities are supported by the eyes and the smartphones of nameless individual volunteers. This book shows that coercive state-led environmental governance has been dominant so far, and that non-environmental spillover effects cast a dark shadow over the future. However, we may find alternative ways to work toward environmentalism through careful and persistent observation, especially since “China’s state-society relations are in flux” (p. 18).

In sum, this book inspires us to rethink the complex visions of the future of China and the globe, which should be further examined under its unique amalgamation of authoritarianism and environmentalism.

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## **The Coolie’s Great War: Indian Labour in a Global Conflict, 1914–1921**

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*The Coolie’s Great War* is a richly textured, many-layered, and carefully nuanced account of the half million plus labourers raised in India and deployed to support British operations in Europe, Africa,

and the Middle East in World War I, with the largest number serving in Mesopotamia. Its painstaking reconstruction of these hitherto overlooked veterans, including who was recruited, why, and how, and their subsequent experiences rescues them from the condescending obscurity into which they had been cast. It is an exceptionally timely study. While preparing this review the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which had been struck in the aftermath of World War I to ensure all those who fought and laboured for the British Empire were recognized and remembered without regard to race, rank, or religion, publicly admitted to and apologized for failing to adhere to this foundational principle.<sup>1</sup> By denying or at the very least marginalizing the many non-European combatants and non-combatants who were so vital to Britain's war effort, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has been complicit in the whitewashing of World War I. Ironically, the disjunction between titling the conflict a world war but treating it as a European struggle was evident to many of the long overlooked Indian participants who knew the war, as Professor Singha reveals, as the *European Mahayudh* or European Great War. This is a very telling statement given that most of these individuals spent the war not in Europe but rather in Europe's colonial or soon to be colonial possessions.

The scope of research is truly impressive, ranging from sources which illuminate the evolution of policy to those that shed light on the experiences of those swept up as recruits. Professor Singha has tapped archives from around the world as well as many state and local archives in India. This deep empirical foundation is complemented by an equally impressive mastery of secondary sources stretching across many historical domains, thereby facilitating a long overdue dialogue between labour history, social history, and military history. The vast amount of material collected is cleverly structured around particular episodes or themes in chapters arranged in rough chronological order. The first chapter provides a succinct overview of just how widely dispersed were Indian labour units, and is a forceful reminder that the world war extended well beyond eastern France and Belgium. The next chapter delves into the various types of labour within the Indian army, and disentangles the complicated relations between and within combatants and non-combatants in the Indian Army. This is followed by a chapter that looks at labourers in Mesopotamia and then one that examines more closely how the Indian Army responded to the growing demand for labour. The experiences of a large force of labourers raised for service in France in 1917–1918 is the subject of the fifth chapter which is then followed by a chapter on how labourers experienced demobilization and homecoming. The book ends with an afterword which offers thoughtful reflections on labour and labouring bodies within and outside the Indian army and what their histories offer to our understanding of modern India.

Retrieving the histories of those who were recruited to serve as labourers is a worthy end in and of itself but the author does much more than that. She skilfully uses labour as the lens through which to explore how the Indian Army – what was still in many respects an *Ancien Regime* army, one which had long been preoccupied with preserving racial and to a lesser extent caste and class hierarchies – adjusted to the demands of modern industrial warfare, and what this meant in turn for postwar military, social, and labour developments. Modern industrial warfare exposed the shortcomings of the Indian Army, an army designed for limited colonial conflicts and which was further constrained by deliberate efforts to ensure it was never as efficient or as effective as Britain's predominantly white Regular Army. Modern warfare also highlighted the army's need for abundant, well-trained, and readily deployable labour in place of the rather haphazard arrangements that had sufficed in the past. British constructions of race and caste which featured so prominently before the war would continue to inform practice and policy, but they would do so alongside a growing faith that technology and modern managerial practices could produce the efficiencies that war demanded.

Most narratives of the First World War situate themselves on a narrow strip of the Western Front and devote their attention almost exclusively to the European combatants. Only recently has the story

<sup>1</sup>Commonwealth War Graves Commission. *Report of the Special Committee to Review Historical Inequalities in Commemoration*. Commonwealth War Graves Commission (Maidenhead: 2021). Available at <https://www.cwgc.org/media/noantj4i/report-of-the-special-committee-to-review-historical-inequalities-in-commemoration.pdf>.

been extended to other theatres as well as to other participants. Yet even when the narrative strays from Europeans fighting in the trenches of France and Belgium, the focus remains resolutely focused on the combatants. Non-combatant labour has been largely ignored despite the vast amounts needed to sustain armies in the field. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Indian Army where a historical hodgepodge of local practices, prejudices, and relatively cheap labour had forged an army that relied upon a vast force of labourers who among other tasks gathered grass for and groomed the horses, ensured the troops had food and water, kept the barracks and the lines clean, and tended to the laundry. To these would be added in wartime large numbers of animal drivers, stretcher bearers, and construction labourers. These individuals were doubly marginalized: first by being non-combatants and secondly by imperial algorithms which differentiated between colonized bodies according to indices of class, caste, and race. Of the 1.4 million Indians who were recruited by the end of 1919, just short of 564,000 were labourers. Non-combatants were drawn from a wider social and geographical range than were Indian soldiers for whom the dictates of the British obsession with martial races determined who was an appropriate soldier and who was not.

Followers can be broken down into three broad categories: higher followers, menial followers, and coolies. Higher followers included all those labourers who were deliberately and purposefully recruited into units with their own structures and as such were typically subject to military law, and their terms of service and compensation were standardized and were adjusted with combatant compensation in view. Menial followers were vital to the army, and consisted of those recruited by officers or soldiers to fill such rolls as cook, water bearer, barber, tailor, and sweeper. Some were paid for out of public monies, others were paid either by individual officers or by soldiers pooling funds. The differences in status between combatants and non-combatants were encoded in various ways in an effort to keep them distinct. Yet in practice combatant and non-combatant recruitment overlapped as the Indian Army struggled to meet its many obligations. Gurkhas – the quintessential martial race – could be found in non-combatant roles though the army was careful to mask this as best they could. Amazingly, more than twice as many Gurkhas served as stretcher bearers and labourers than as soldiers (p. 49). The presence of martial races in decidedly non-martial occupations was of considerable concern for it called into question some of the racial and caste hierarchies that were so deeply embedded not only in the Indian Army but within the Raj at large.

Coercion was frequently used though it was often masked so as to avoid any overt association with such contentious forms of exploitation as indentured or bonded labour. The British sought “volunteers” from prisons, local magnates were pressured to provide men, and tribal and other marginalized communities were targeted, often with the assistance of missionaries. It was argued that tapping into such communities not only generated much needed labour for the war effort, but subjecting such individuals to a disciplining labour regime also facilitated their conversion into productive members of society. Faith in the restorative powers of labour discipline justified the attention paid to prisoners as well as members of those tribal communities deemed to be in a primitive state, like the Doms, Bhils, and Santhals, as well as communities straddling the northwest and northeast frontiers.

Racial and caste hierarchies hinged on differentiating between masculine and feminine duties, and any duty which a British soldier could be expected to undertake in Britain but which was viewed as feminine and/or domestic in nature was inappropriate in India. Similarly, martial races were defined in terms of the degree to which they conformed to colonial constructions of masculinity. One of the more tangible manifestations of this can be seen in what has been termed the “whiteness dividend” – duties that could be expected of a British soldier elsewhere in the Empire were assigned to Indians on the basis that it would be too demeaning for a white to be seen performing such tasks in India, or by extension to any context in which they were in close proximity to Indian soldiers or observers. Such attitudes were by no mean confined to the Indian Army for the War Office considered it was inappropriate for British tailors to repair Indian clothing, and British nurses were not to tend to Indian bodies. Wartime demands for men’s bodies – whether as soldiers or labourers – had powerful repercussions throughout society as women were drawn more deeply into agriculture and industry to fill the vacuum created.

It was on the western front that these racial and gendered algorithms came to play the most decisive role. The growing manpower crisis in Britain and the shortage of recruits put pressure on the Empire, yet the reluctance to bring in non-white combatants persisted. Indian troops had been rushed to the western front as losses mounted in 1914, but British authorities saw them as strictly a stop-gap measure. Worried about the precedent of Indian troops being encouraged to fire on Europeans, and fearing that their experiences and observations could weaken imperial authority, Indian troops in 1914–1915 were subject to close surveillance and their interactions with wider society was closely circumscribed. The arrival of fresh British troops as well as contingents from the settler dominions allowed a very relieved government to redeploy all but a few units from the princely states to the Middle East. Labour however was different, and the Indian Labour Corps became part of the solution as those labouring bodies could replace white non-combatants. But the limits to this argument became apparent when the suggestion that Indian labour could be brought into British factories to replace British workers for service at the front was shot down. The Indian Labour Corps which served on the western front in 1917–1918 was generally quite isolated in an effort to maintain discipline and prevent unscripted encounters between soldiers and civilians. Staged encounters were however a different matter, and imperial propaganda played on the images of exotic labourers admiring British landmarks or participating in western sports.

The organizational pressures occasioned by the growth in the Indian army and its demand for labour led the Army to impose some structure and logic to what had largely been ad hoc and informal arrangements. The Indian Army struggled to fill its combatant and non-combatant ranks in the face of growing demand for labour in India. Reports circulating about the terrible conditions faced by sepoys and labourers alike in Mesopotamia hampered recruitment efforts. Salaries and benefits were boosted in an effort to entice recruits, and the pool was enlarged to bring in groups and regions that had customarily been excluded. This led to inflationary pressures on salaries which in turn caused anomalies within cohorts, not to mention instances where labourers were paid more than soldiers. Efforts to regularize salaries and terms of service were accompanied by more systematic efforts at bringing labourers under a more transparent disciplinary regime. There were considerable discussions and debates as to who was covered by military law. In 1917, for example, an order was issued that required that all followers, including officers' servants, were to be formally enrolled thereby rendering them not only visible but also manageable through the mechanisms of military law.

Postwar efforts to apply the lessons learned in the war within the context of demobilization and in the face of growing nationalism led to a series of reforms to the Indian Army. The Esher Committee which had been charged with the task of recommending reforms sought to preserve some traditions, in particular restoring the focus on the martial races for the supply of combatants, while encouraging modernization in other areas including the recruitment and organization of non-combatants. In so doing they sought to protect the colonial hierarchies deemed essential to the survival of the Raj while also ensuring greater efficiencies. The former, as the author argued, was secured through “the ‘martial caste’ label, shored up by a war allowance, a field service allowance and free rations, [which] acted as a status shield” (p. 69). But tellingly they urged the Army to abandon what it concluded was a dated and degrading nomenclature, and recommended that the army no longer refer to the non-combatants as “coolies”, “sweepers”, or even “followers”.

Even with the generous word limit given to me, it is difficult to do justice to *The Coolie's Great War*. It was deservedly shortlisted for the Templer Medal Book Prize and I can think of few books which have so effectively positioned military history within the wider currents of social and labour history. This is a book to which I will be returning often, and also one which can be profitably and pleasurably read by historians in many fields who will find in it modes of enquiry and insights to guide and inspire their own work.