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the word “snob,” “from being a member of the lower classes to being a member
of an aspirant middling class,” just as “the middle-class ideal of moderation had
given way by mid-century to a form of competitive expenditure” (176). Instead of
literary taste and moderate gustatory consumption, dining—and specifically the
middle-class dinner party—became a way to show social distinction.

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The Eighteenth Century in Indian History

Seema Alavi, ed., The Eighteenth Century in India (New Delhi: Oxford University

Indrani Chatterjee, ed., Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia

Rajat Datta, Society, Economy and the Market: Commercialization in Rural

Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, ed., A Man of the Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century
India: The Letters of Claude Martin, 1766–1800 (New Delhi: Permanent Black,

P. J. Marshall, ed., The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or

Prasannan Parthasarathi, The Transition to a Colonial Economy: Weavers,
Merchants and Kings in South India, 1720–1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni-

Norbert Peabody, Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India (Cambridge:

Muzaffar Alam, The Languages of Political Islam in South Asia (Chicago: Chi-

In a famous review essay first published in 1940, the Dutch scholar J. C.
van Leur challenged the relevance of the eighteenth century in Asian history. The
eighteenth century, he wrote, was a “category for the periodization of time bor-
rowed from western European and North American history,” which evoked “the
world of baroque and old fashioned classicism,” on the one hand, and the “new
bourgeois civilization,” on the other. Reacting against a tendency by Dutch histori-
ians to portray eighteenth-century Indonesia through the records of the Dutch East
India Company as a distant outpost of the European “age of enlightenment,” van
Leur urged that Asian history in the eighteenth century was still autonomous and
vital. “That century did not know any superior Occident, nor any self-isolating
Orient no longer progressing with it,” he wrote. “It knew a mighty East, a rich
fabric of a strong, broad weave with a more fragile Western warp thread inserted into it at broad intervals” (van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society* [Dortrect, 1983], 269, 289).

J. C. van Leur may have been surprised by the resilience of the eighteenth century as a category in Indian (more often now styled South Asian) history. In truth, van Leur’s strong aversion to the idea of an eighteenth century in Asia, which grew mainly out of his expertise in Indonesian history, always seemed odd from a South Asian perspective. The eighteenth century has long appeared as an obvious historical turning point in India, marked by the dramatic collapse of the Mughal empire at its start, and the equally dramatic expansion of the British empire at its end. Thus, van Leur’s assertion that in eighteenth-century India “the establishment of local, even regional power by France and England did not disturb the power of the Mogol Empire more than fleetingly” was somewhat quixotic (van Leur, 273).

Nonetheless, recent writing on eighteenth-century India has often gone with the grain of van Leur’s determination to attend to the autonomous dynamics of Asian history, questioning the view that European expansion was necessarily the decisive motor of historical change. Even though the power of the Mughal emperors declined, new regional powers emerged, powers that could be fitted into van Leur’s sense of the “rich fabric” of Asian history. If van Leur’s notion of an “unbroken history in the state of Asian civilization” from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century now seems excessively monolithic and static, his conception of early modern Asian history as something more than the history of European expansion was ahead of its time.

For much of the 1980s and 1990s, revisionist work about the eighteenth century formed one of the poles around which South Asian history revolved. This work was dominated by social and economic history, strongly inflected by Marxist and “Annaliste” perspectives, which sought to uncover the deep structural transformations of Indian society from the dead weight of the political history of empires. Writers on the eighteenth century tended to focus on processes of regional state-formation, and especially the prominent role of Indian merchants, bankers, and landed elites in the formation of both pre-colonial and colonial states. The other major pole of South Asian history-writing in this period was the work of the “Subaltern Studies” school. Subaltern Studies focused more clearly on non-elite groups, such as peasants and industrial laborers, and the ways that they had been occluded or disfigured in conventional historical representations.

Especially as Subaltern Studies gravitated toward the cultural and linguistic turn, there was a tendency to cast the eighteenth-century revisionists and the subalternists as opposite and rival poles of attraction. This rivalry was reinforced by the way that some eighteenth-century revisionists sought to downplay the transformative effects of colonial conquest in the eighteenth century, even as post-colonial subalternists were exploring the multiple reverberations of colonialism in the making of Indian modernity. Thus, the familiar historical culture wars of the late twentieth century, which pitted Marx against Foucault, social history against cultural history, and social structure against discourse, were supercharged in South Asian history by the politics of postcolonial theory and its critics.

As the dust settles around the debates on the eighteenth century and on Subaltern Studies, at least some of the binary oppositions thrown up by these disputes may begin to lose their hard edges. After all, the objects of inquiry of these rival groups were usually quite different in terms of time period, social groups, as well as methodological approaches. Much of Subaltern Studies, for example, fo-
cused on the “high colonial” period of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is not to say that there is an immediate prospect of universal historical peace, or that contrasting historical perspectives on South Asia are reconcilable within some broad consensus. Yet the contests thrown up by these aging debates, such as collaboration versus resistance, “Indian agency” versus “colonial intervention,” continuity versus change, or social history versus cultural history, will be reinterrogated and revised as the historiography moves onto new ground.

Meanwhile, two recent volumes of selected essays, *The Eighteenth Century in India*, edited by Seema Alavi, and *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*, edited by P. J. Marshall, offer a fascinating retrospective on the last few decades of historical debate about the eighteenth century in India. Although these volumes are not much concerned with the broader disciplinary politics within which these debates were situated, they succeed in demonstrating the substantial achievements of the eighteenth-century revisionists, while at the same time suggesting the diversity of their views, as well as the problems, loose edges, and new questions that their work has left over for a new generation.

Edited by two leading experts in the field, one based in India and one in Britain, these complementary volumes fall into two separate series, *Debates in Indian History and Society* and *Themes in Indian History*, produced by Oxford University Press in India. Both Seema Alavi and P. J. Marshall offer informative introductions surveying a range of recent writings on eighteenth-century India, along with very useful annotated bibliographies. They then present well-chosen selections of landmark essays or chapters from books that represent important developments in the historiography. Only one essay, Irfan Habib’s punchy critique of revisionist approaches, appears in both volumes. The editors give space not only to the revisionists who have questioned long-held verities about Mughal decline and the colonial rupture, but also to their critics. Marshall’s volume is longer, so he is able to include a larger group of essays and to offer broader coverage of several regions. Alavi’s selection is more focused on northern and eastern India, though she does include an important essay by Prasannan Parthasarathi on the south.

Taken together, these volumes give an excellent survey of a complicated and diverse terrain of argument. Revisionist ideas about the eighteenth century emerged from a loose conglomeration of distinct groups of scholars. An early impulse was provided by the historical anthropologist Bernard S. Cohn, and his attempt to explore how multiple “levels of power,” from villages and local land controllers to big rajas, provincial governors and emperors, interacted and coexisted in precolonial India. Meanwhile, the growth of scholarship on the Indian ocean pointed to the vibrancy of pre-colonial trading networks in South Asia. (Neither Alavi’s nor Marshall’s volumes delve much into the oceanic dimensions of eighteenth-century Indian history.) A group of mainly British historians, including C. A. Bayly and David Washbrook, working on the local and provincial origins of Indian nationalism in the late nineteenth century, started to look back into the eighteenth century to explore the deeper social histories of the Indian elites and middle classes who formed the leaders of later nationalist politics. This work on “intermediary groups” intersected with scholarship on the late Mughal empire that questioned received views that the Mughal empire collapsed in a welter of rebellions by resentful and oppressed landlords and peasants. Instead, in the work of scholars such as Muzaffar Alam and André Wink, the decline of centralized Mughal power appeared as a complex process of decentralization, in which local elites who had prospered under the Mughal hegemony began to appropriate more of the symbols and substance of sovereignty.
Although revisionist work differed markedly in its orientations and impulses, it tended to share a number of broad affiliations. At the most general level it questioned the blanket picture of eighteenth-century economic “decline,” inherited from both imperialist and nationalist histories of the period. Instead, revisionists posited considerable regional variations, with significant areas of economic growth, evidenced by increasing monetization, as well as agricultural and commercial expansion. Another shared preoccupation was with studying the dynamism of regional and local polities, rather than focusing only on the decline of the Mughal imperial center. A variety of Mughal “successor states” came more into view, including breakaway provinces under Mughal governors and “rebel” groups like the Marathas or Afghans. Finally, the different varieties of revisionists tended to share an interest in the broad category of “intermediary groups,” including landed gentry, administrative experts, and most especially bankers and merchants who were seen to have consolidated their position in an era of competitive state-formation. Some scholars also argued that the British constructed their own empire by tapping into indigenous networks of trade and finance, and that early colonial rule may not therefore have been such a sharp break with pre-colonial political and social structures as was often assumed.

Marshall’s introductory essay presents an overarching analytical tension between approaches that emphasize revolutionary changes associated with the decline or rise of empires, and those that highlight a more evolutionary pattern of change with significant continuities between late Mughal and early British India. Marshall comes down in general on the side of evolution over revolution, but his careful review of recent literature also suggests that there were many divergent regional experiences of the eighteenth century. For example, some cities (like Surat and Delhi) and regions (the Punjab) suffered severe economic dislocations following from the decline of centralized Mughal power in the early eighteenth century. Meanwhile, famine, war, and commercial disruptions made for a confusing and frequently bleak picture of economic life in the later eighteenth century.

Marshall argues that the expansion of British power from the 1750s was driven by the urge for new profits, and also by a distinctive British ideology of sovereignty that tended to demand exclusive control over territories and peoples, rejecting earlier forms of layered sovereignty. Yet Marshall suggests that the ambition of British rulers was cut across by their caution, and by the limits of their bureaucratic and military power. Marshall follows other revisionists in suggesting that the 1820s and 1830s marked a clearer break from the precolonial order, with the establishment of British paramountcy over most of the subcontinent, the decline of Indian manufactures especially in the textile sector, the growing subordination of Indian merchants and bankers, and the maturation of colonial systems of surveillance and military control.

Marshall’s account suggests how the revisionists sought to modify the chronology of the colonial impact, rather than deny it all together. This point is also reinforced by Seema Alavi, who divides the eighteenth-century debate into two parts: first, the question of whether Mughal decline was marked by economic decline or not; and second, whether the rise of the British East India Company was a “determining disjunction” in Indian history. She also includes a brief discussion of the reception of Said’s critique of “orientalism” within South Asian history. Alavi gives an insightful survey of Mughal historiography, showing how revisionist writings opened up new angles of vision beyond the high politics of the Mughal court or contradictions within the Mughal administrative structure. She suggests how military-fiscalism, referring to processes of fiscal centralization
related to military mobilization, provides the key to theories of continuity across the colonial divide. From this point of view, colonial rulers developed or intensified the military-fiscal practices of precolonial rulers. At the same time, Alavi points to new work on colonial institutions and norms that suggests that British notions of exclusive sovereignty, legality, taxation, and military discipline were quite different from precolonial regimes and contained the seeds of later transformations. Like Marshall, Alavi reminds us that there was “no one pattern of change” in the eighteenth century (Alavi, ed., Introduction, 37).

Some of the harshest critics of the various revisionist projects emerged from historians of Mughal India, particularly associated with Aligarh University. M. Athar Ali’s essay, “Recent Theories of Eighteenth-Century India,” reprinted in Marshall’s volume, insisted that the breakdown of the Mughal empire into “mutually conflicting small political units,” collectively less strong than centralized empire, paved the way for European expansion. Collaboration with British invaders needed to be seen in the context of “unequal power relations,” and colonialism had “blue-blooded European ancestry” rather than indigenous origins (Marshall, ed., 95–7). In a similar vein, Irfan Habib argued that the Mughal empire, and especially its elaborate system of tax collection, was a major stimulant of towns and trade, so that its breakdown must have had a deleterious effect on these (Marshall, ed., 62–3). Responding to these critiques, C. A. Bayly detected the imprint of modern Indian secularist nationalism in the insistence that the strength and economic buoyancy of India depended on its political unity (Alavi, ed., 189). And it is certainly true that older views of Mughal decline tended to ignore large and important questions about the broader social context of Mughal decline, for example, processes of commercialization, class and identity-formation, which appeared beyond the purview of Mughal administrative sources.

At the same time, the revisionists themselves usually relied on the administrative archives of regional states and quite often on the colonial archive, and they emphasized how Indian entrepreneurship was closely bound up with the fiscal expansion of militarizing regimes. Their versions of social history also remained closely tied to regional courts and state fiscal structures. Meanwhile, if the old picture of an eighteenth-century “dark age” was too stark, the new picture or regional economies is still patchy, and the underlying causes and dynamics of growth in the economy remain uncertain. We lack, and will likely continue to lack because of the uneven nature of the source base, knowledge of fundamental issues such as demographic change.

The issue of the colonial transition also remains highly contentious and problematic. Much of the revisionist work on this theme was conducted at a rather abstract and schematic pitch, as in Burton Stein’s brilliant essay, “Eighteenth-Century India: Another View,” reproduced in Marshall’s volume. Stein’s structuralist view posited a growing tension within Indian states between patrimonialism and mercantilism, which generated “trajectories into colonialism” as indigenous capital sought safeguards offered by the more capitalist-oriented institutions of the East India Company state (Marshall, ed., 75). Some version of the thesis about the shifting allegiance of crucial intermediary groups of merchants and bankers toward the East India Company was a common feature of revisionist work. It is not hard to see this approach as a development from the “collaborationist” arguments about the “non-European foundations of European imperialism,” associated especially with the work of Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher.

The style of language in which these arguments have sometimes been cast, such as the “drift” of intermediary groups, or the “sucking power” of indigenous
political economy, or the “grafting” of colonial power onto Indian social hierarchies, often seemed to efface the violent or coercive aspects of colonialism as conquest, with too much emphasis on the carrot over the stick. Yet it is not simply the tone of these arguments that provoked criticism, but also the apparent implication that colonialism was as much an outgrowth of Indian history as the “expansion of Europe.” Stein, for example, argued that the colonial state “grew largely from the foundations laid by the Indian patrimonial regimes whose contradictions it resolved and whose tendencies it brought to completion” (Marshall, ed., 81). (For passionate polemics against revisionist emphases on “Indian agency” and “continuity,” see Nicholas B. Dirks, Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India [Princeton], 2001, epilogue, and his more recent work, The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain [Cambridge, Mass., 2006]).

The apparent downgrading of the agency of the colonizers in this picture was exaggerated by the relative lack of compelling new theories of the broader dynamics of British imperialism in the eighteenth century. An older generation of British historians had once been all too willing to treat modern Indian history as a branch of British imperial history, as a procession of lordly proconsuls and generals. Indeed, revisionist historians of India working in Britain were sometimes reacting directly against their experience of being taught a version of Indian history that was dominated by “the aridities of parliamentary elections and the monumental tedium of the land revenue systems of Bengal.” (See Bayly’s “Epilogue: Historiographical and Autobiographical Note,” in C. A. Bayly, The Origins of Nationality in India: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India [New Delhi, 1998], 311.) British imperial historians in the postimperial era were now understandably shy about overstepping their bounds. The lack of new work linking British metropolitan politics and economics with expansion in Asia was noted by Peter Cain and Anthony Hopkins, in their useful if highly schematic rendering of the eighteenth-century empire as an outgrowth of “gentlemanly-capitalism,” a peculiarly British alliance of landed and commercial elites (“Prospective: Aristocracy, Finance and Empire, 1688–1850,” reprinted in Marshall, ed., 374–401). More recently, an “imperial turn” in British history has begun to redress the imbalance in the historiography, and to show the British conquests in Asia as more than the working out of indigenous social history. The ideological dimensions of eighteenth-century imperialism and their relationship to the globalization of European commerce and warfare are coming more clearly into view. (Some key works include: P. J. Marshall, ed., The Eighteenth Century: Oxford History of the British Empire, vol. 2 [Oxford, 1998]; P. J. Marshall, The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India and America c. 1750–1783 [Oxford, 2005]; C. A. Bayly, Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830 [London, 1989]; Kathleen Wilson, ed., The New Imperial History: Culture, History and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840 [Cambridge, 2004].) A provocative article by J. M. Ward suggested that historians of India may have exaggerated the extent to which British colonizers relied on local resources in funding their military endeavors, which were supported by networks of commerce and credit stretching back to an industrializing economy in Britain (J. M. Ward, “The Industrial Revolution and British Imperialism, 1750–1850,” Economic History Review, 47.1 [1994]: 44–65).

The Indianist emphasis on the local context for empire arose in part from an understandable desire to restore historical agency to Indians and dynamism to Indian history where older imperialist histories saw only stasis and misrule. This emphasis is also what motivated van Leer’s “autonomous” view of Asian history before the nineteenth century. (For a discussion situating van Leer in the broader
context of South East Asian history-writing, see Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830, vol. 1: Integration on the Mainland* [Cambridge, 2003], 9–15.) One of the ironies here was that to give historical agency to Asians, historians deployed sociological categories derived from European social theory. For example, Bayly’s arguments about “class-formation” in his book *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars* (1983) were related to models drawn from “studies of European, Chinese and Middle Eastern landed and merchant classes which had been undertaken by both Marxist and non-Marxist historians since the 1950s” (“Epilogue to the Indian Edition,” reprinted in Marshall, ed., 172).

Bayly has staunchly defended the “metanarrative” of class-formation against postmodern critiques of Eurocentrism and “foundationism” as a necessary heuristic device designed to organize data to give it “the widest possible relevance.” (For a critique of “foundational” histories, including Bayly’s work, see Gyan Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31.1 [1990]: 383–408.) The word “relevance” here may give a clue to the struggles of a historian working in the British academy to gain recognition for South Asian history, and “non-Western” history in general, as an integral rather than a subsidiary part of the discipline of history. Bayly also argues that historians can preserve the heuristic tools of general arguments about class and state-formation while attending to “the specific features of Indian social processes” (Marshall, ed., 173). It takes a historian of Bayly’s great skill, however, to avoid rendering India as somehow “deviant” from a dominant European or “Western” model of historical development. The tendency of Bayly’s work, in particular, has always been to diversify potential historical frameworks, showing many different yet linked regional trajectories into the modern, rather than to fit “India” into a European-derived straightjacket.

Nonetheless, the concept of “Indian agency,” as deployed by the eighteenth-century revisionists, was often frustratingly general, referring to broad classes of “intermediary groups” who were seen to have found a precarious form of shelter, at least temporarily, under the colonial state. As with all invocations of “agency,” there was also an implicit tension between the notion of “choice” shadowing the term, and the structural limits on the “self-determination” of particular agents. At the same time, even while some writers foregrounded the concept of “Indian agency,” other revisionist work appeared to challenge the distinction between “Indian” or indigenous forces of change, and colonial or external ones. This is particularly evident in Frank Perlin’s essay, “The Problem of the Eighteenth Century,” reprinted in Marshall’s volume. For the later eighteenth century, he argues, the concept of an involuted “Indian history” is effectively redundant, such was the pace of commercialization and interregional integration. “Well before the colonial conquests of the early nineteenth century, South Asian history, Company history, and the history of growing international commerce have become inextricably entangled, even fused.” Furthermore, it was “no longer possible by the middle of the eighteenth century to conceive of South Asian states as functioning independently of the effects and forces of European intervention.” In this view, the “open and violent frontier with the Europeans” reverberated well beyond the formal boundaries of European territorial control and complicated conventional barriers between indigenous and foreign, precolonial and colonial (59).

Another possible point of critique, well represented by Ajay Skaria in Marshall’s volume, is the way that emphasizes on apparent continuities in state practices may overlook “the profound transformations in the semantic and conceptual fields within which these practices occur” (“Being Jangli: The Politics of Wildness,” in
Marshall, ed., 312). In Skaria’s view, the imagined continuity between the efforts of precolonial and colonial states to expand the frontiers of “settled agriculture,” by imposing their power over nomadic or forest peoples, actually conceals important shifts in the way that the “wildness” of so-called tribal peoples was apprehended. He argues that precolonial rulers saw nomadic forest dwellers not only as dangerous raiders to be attacked and disciplined, but also as essential adjuncts of power to be respected and incorporated into the frame of sovereignty. The oppositional aspects of precolonial relations between plain and forest peoples were cut across by shared strategies of rule, and an understanding of mutual interdependence. The colonial state, on the other hand, tended to cast “wild tribes” as the “Other” of civilization, by apprehending them through a distinctive referent of evolutionary time. Colonial officials aimed, therefore, to push back the “inner frontier” of civilization by extirpating wildness. The danger here is that in foregrounding colonial difference colonialism is too easily read as the “Other” of the precolonial. It is not entirely clear, for example, that the “paradigm of growth” is entirely anachronistic when applied to precolonial India, as Skaria argues, or that in eighteenth-century India “growth did not exist” (Marshall, ed., 294–95). Mughal political language had ways of conceptualizing “growth” through increases in trade and industry, and most importantly through the expansion of the population and the cultivated area. It is true that “growth” came to have distinct referents in terms of the progressive history and political economy of the nineteenth century, but it remained fractured concept even within colonial discourse. Nonetheless, Skaria’s point about the need to understand how precolonial practices could take on new valences and significance in a restructured colonial context is well taken.

Despite these problems around the colonial transition, it is important to resist simplistic views of the debate on early colonial India as framed by the simple binaries of “continuity” or “change.” One of the great strengths and lasting contributions of the work of Bayly, Washbrook, and Stein, for example, is to break down the notion of colonialism as a monolith, and to track significant changes within the history of colonialism. Thus, Stein argued that indigenous capital, which initially found protection within colonial mercantilism, eventually lost out in later stages of colonial domination, being forced down to the “most risk-full levels of village production” and exchange (“Eighteenth-Century India: Another View,” in Marshall, ed., 68). Bayly and Washbrook, meanwhile, suggested how the influx of British manufactures, allied to colonial taxation regimes and the dismantling of regional and local kingdoms, shattered older patterns of Indian political economy in the early nineteenth century, leading to a “peasantization” and “traditionalization” of the Indian economy (C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, Cambridge, 1988; D. A. Washbrook, “India, 1818–1860: The Two Faces of Colonialism,” in Andrew Porter, ed., *The Nineteenth Century*, Oxford History of the British Empire vol. 3 [Oxford, 1999], 395–422).

The sense of a coherent project of revisionist approaches to the eighteenth century, to the extent that it ever existed, has by now dissipated. This is partly because the forms of social and economic history that animated this project tended to give way in relation to cultural history and new forms of theoretical critique. It followed partly also, perhaps, from a collective drawing of breath within the field, and a perceived need to move beyond the old battle lines. Yet exciting new work has continued to appear, which both benefits from and modifies the bold but sketchy road maps created by the different kinds of earlier revisions, while opening up new angles of vision, and especially new sources. The remainder of this essay does not attempt a comprehensive survey of new work about the eighteenth century in South...
Asia, but looks at a small selection of new books to suggest how some old issues are being rethought, while some new lines of research are opening up.

The work of two historians included in Marshall’s and Alavi’s volumes respectively, Rajat Datta and Prasannan Parthasarathi, continues the tradition of economic history and brings a welcome depth and specificity to debates over the colonial transition. Both authors have produced important monographs, drawing mainly on colonial archives, each dealing with one of the epicenters of late-eighteenth-century colonial expansion, Bengal and Madras. Both address the proposition, which began to take shape in some older revisionist work, that the consolidation of Indian capital within eighteenth-century states was accompanied by new forms of control over labor. They also seek to clarify the relationship between the colonial state and Indian merchants and producers.

Datta’s book, *Society, Economy and the Market, Commercialization in Rural Bengal, 1760–1800*, focuses on the grain (mainly rice) trade in rural Bengal. He argues that previous historians have persistently neglected this aspect of Bengal’s economy, instead focusing too much on Bengal’s foreign trade in cloth and cash crops. (See also the work of Sushil Chaudhury for the suggestion that Bengal’s intra-Asian trade actually dwarfed its trade with Europe at least until the middle of the eighteenth century. Chaudhury has used his findings to question the idea that Bengal merchants naturally gravitated toward the East India Company during the mid-eighteenth-century crisis in his book *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal* [New Delhi, 1995].)

Rather than a model of “dependent commercialization” under the colonial sway, Datta proposes that Bengal’s agriculture was already highly commercialized by the middle of the eighteenth century, and that monetization, regional price integration, the proliferation of markets, and agricultural expansion were driven largely by urban and rural demand for food products within Bengal. Datta sees a large degree of continuity in the late eighteenth century, despite the major famine of 1769–70 and the disastrous floods of 1786–7. Indeed, the vulnerability of peasants to famine is explained partly in relation to the spread of the cash-nexus, which meant that peasants were dependent on buying and selling in the marketplace to meet both their own subsistence needs and the demands of moneylenders and the state. At the same time, volatile grain prices forced grain producers into the arms of grain merchants and moneylenders, leading to an increase in rural indebtedness. Datta’s book is not, therefore, a celebratory view of commercialization but shows how the growth of commerce both fed off and created new forms of vulnerability for peasants.

A feature of Datta’s work, which ties him with earlier “revisionists,” is that the colonial state plays a less decisive role in economic change than in earlier accounts. Nationalist economic histories often saw the colonial intervention as disastrous for Bengal’s commercial economy, because of the contraction of the money supply through the colonial “drain of wealth,” and because of oppressively high taxes. Datta follows other recent historians in doubting the capacity of the early colonial state to raise taxes dramatically on peasants, although he thinks the colonial power’s desire to base taxes on actual measurement of lands and its unwillingness to accept payment in kind were significant innovations. He also uses evidence of local exchange rates to suggest that the so-called contraction in bullion after the colonial conquest has been much exaggerated.

Datta deals with these crucial issues in rather short appendices. Given their overriding importance in the conventional literature, it might have strengthened
his case to give them more attention in the earlier chapters. Moreover, his work seems to carry mixed messages about the limits or capacities of early colonial government to enact significant change. For example, while he questions the old notion of a taxation squeeze or a bullion crisis, and notes the impotence of the colonial state in managing grain markets in times of crisis, he ascribes significant agency to the colonial state in terms of its abolition of landlord tolls on the traffic in grain, which he sees as creating favorable conditions for a further expansion of agricultural markets in the late eighteenth century. This raises questions about the institutional strength of the early colonial state that are not fully addressed here. Despite these problems, however, this is a pathbreaking work on a critical and underexplored theme, which also contains a wealth of detail about the economic lives of the Bengal peasantry. (For two other important works, which emphasize rather more the colonial disruption of precolonial patterns of political economy, see Kumkum Chatterjee, Merchants, Politics and Society in Early Modern India: Bihar 1733–1820 [Leiden, 1996], and Sudipta Sen, Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Market Place [Philadelphia, 1998].)

Prasannan Parthasarathi’s crisply written, deeply researched, and analytically powerful study of South India, The Transition to a Colonial Economy: Weavers, Merchants and Kings in South India, takes a more consciously critical attitude to the emphasis on continuity across the precolonial/colonial divide. He accepts the need to understand the indigenous origins of colonialism by showing how “Indian social groups lent their support to the emerging Company and later colonial state” (see his essay “Merchants and the Rise of Colonialism,” in Alavi, ed., 210). Yet he argues that some Indian merchants supported British expansion because the colonial state was actually radically different from its precursors. In one sense, this argument is a development from Stein’s thesis about the tensions between militarizing patrimonial “sultans” and merchants/financiers. Yet Parthasarathi lends the argument greater precision, distinguishing between different kinds of mercantile interests, and exploring the changing place of laborers in this process.

The crux of his argument is that the East India Company used its political power decisively to reorder relations between merchant procurers and the artisans who manufactured cotton cloth in South India between 1760 and 1800. Parthasarathi argues, against the grain of received views, that South Indian weavers enjoyed high real incomes, which they sustained through bargaining for high prices with merchant procurers. Bargaining strategies included weaver solidarity, reducing cloth quality, breaking contracts with merchants if better offers came along, and, crucially, labor mobility. Precolonial states, meanwhile, tended often to support the customary rights of weavers in their negotiations with merchants. The relatively strong bargaining position of laborers, in both agriculture and industry, encouraged states and merchants to invest in capital projects and high wages as the best means of attracting laborers.

In Parthasarathi’s view, the position of weavers rapidly declined as the East India Company expanded its territorial power in South India after 1760. The Company abolished older customs of contractual flexibility, using coercive methods to force weavers to produce cloth only for its own agents. Cloth merchants supported the Company because it was willing to strengthen their hand in negotiations with weavers. As the Company’s sway expanded, weaver mobility, or playing off merchants against each other, became less effective. Parthasarathi measures these developments in terms of declining incomes for labor, as well as the growing incidence of weaver protests. Thus, the decline in the position of Indian weavers predated by some decades the advent of British manufactures in South
India. Moreover, Parthasarathi suggests that the declining position of labor in colonial India was an important factor in the low levels of saving and investment in the nineteenth century. The precolonial link between investment and command of labor was sundered by the Company’s willingness and ability to throw its political weight behind the propertied classes. “Therefore, the accumulation crisis in nineteenth century India was not created by low savings, but rather by a lack of investment demand” (Alavi, ed., 220).

Parthasarathi’s study of the colonial transition is a major intervention in broader debates about “the great divergence” between European and Asian economies in the modern period, and it deserves a wide readership. (See also Kenneth Pomeranz, The Great Divergence: Europe, China and the Making of the Modern World Economy, Princeton, 2000.) It runs counter not only to earlier emphases on a relatively smooth “colonial transition,” but also to a revisionist tendency in Indian economic history to play down the influence of “colonialism” as a crucial variable. (See, for example, Tirthankar Roy, Economic History of India, 1757–1857 [New Delhi, 2000].) Company rule in South India had a rather narrow revenue base and was often asserted through forms of “indirect rule” in association with local powers, yet it appears to have exercised quite close controls over certain communities of weavers and merchants. Parthasarathi’s work, like Datta’s, suggests the need to rethink broad characterizations of the early colonial state as relatively “weak,” and to consider where exactly its strength resided.

An important contribution of Parthasarathi’s book is that it makes politics and political norms central to our understanding of social and economic change. Parthasarathi draws a stark contrast between English political culture in the eighteenth century, which he suggests generally favored state intervention in labor markets to restrict wages, and South Indian conceptions of polity, in which rulers were charged with protecting the customary rights of labor. While this contrast is presented with great skill, it also raises certain problems. Apart from the problem of privileging “norms” over institutional capacities, this argument tends to represent “British” and “Indian” political cultures as relatively static and monolithic wholes, rather than as dynamic and contested. (On the British side, Adam Smith was only the most famous British economist in the late eighteenth century to espouse the benefits of a high-wage economy.) It also tends too easily to conflate the “domestic” British state with the colonial state, without considering the lines of transmission in much detail. Nonetheless, Parthasarathi’s questions about the politics of labor in precolonial and colonial India should open up important lines for further research.

Norbert Peabody directly addresses the problem of overly monolithic conceptions of “British” and “Indian” political cultures in his stylish and erudite history of the eighteenth-century Rajasthani kingdom of Kota in the eighteenth century, Hindu Kingship and Polity in PreColonial India. His book is expressly designed in part to modify what he sees as ahistorical characterizations of precolonial Indian states as “internally consistent, thoroughly integrated, and largely consensual” (2). His version of “ethno-history,” by contrast, tries to attend to fissures or contests within the political culture of Kota, and to see these tensions as sources of significant changes in the immediate precolonial period. At the same time, extending a now familiar critique of post-Saidian, post-Orientalist scholarship, he uses the case of Kota to argue that “colonial power did not impose itself monolithically from outside, but arose much more dialogically from within the conditions that were manifest locally, with local agents often able to redirect the potentialities of
colonial power to serve agendas at a tangent from, if not diametrically opposite to, the agendas of colonialism” (3).

Peabody brilliantly elaborates the complex entanglements between the Rajput rulers of Kota and the devotional (bhakti) sect of the Vallabha Sampradaya, showing how devotionalism, patronage of particular deities, and pilgrimage created not so much a “shared culture” of authority, but rather a space for competition between different kinds of authority figures in the kingdom. Peabody’s work adds to the emerging picture of a state system characterized by multiple, overlapping, and competing hierarchies of rule, in which sovereignty was dispersed, uneven and plural rather than singular and neatly bounded. He also contributes to the literature on precolonial military-fiscalism, showing how an energetic chief minister used diverse ways to expand the central revenues of the kingdom of Kota to meet the costs of a standing army.

The last chapter offers a nuanced reading of the colonial subordination of Kota in the early nineteenth century and explores how the British aimed to enforce their paramount power by imposing treaties on local kingdoms. Although this system of indirect rule appeared to preserve the various forms of local rule, in fact the treaties tended to redefine the scope of local politics, creating territorially bounded forms of sovereignty and privileging some local interests over others. Peabody shows how competing local factions strove, and sometimes succeeded, in shaping this version of “empire by treaty.”

Although it is important to analyze how colonial power inserted itself into the fault lines of local disputes, whether this amounted to a “dialogical” process of state-formation (as Peabody suggests) is less clear. Presumably no polity is entirely “monolithic,” and all authority is to some degree “negotiated,” yet the perceived need to counter overly deterministic post-Saidian accounts of colonial dominance may push us too far in the other direction. One plausible way of reading Peabody’s material is to suggest that British “empire by treaty” made local elites into agents of colonial hegemony, generating new and potentially more authoritarian forms of sovereignty under the guise of indigenous tradition. (For a similar argument in relation to Kashmir, see Mridu Rai, Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir [Princeton, 2004].) It is also worth noting that these Rajasthan kingdoms fell outside the major zones of British strategic and economic interest, which was why they were allowed to survive as subordinate states. There were many forms of colonialism in South Asia, and new historical literature may need to attend more closely to these different configurations of power.

Datta’s, Parthasarathi’s, and Peabody’s books in different ways suggest the pressing need to learn more about the languages of politics in eighteenth-century India and about changing understandings of the state. Older revisionist works made bold claims about the changing political economy of precolonial India, around the themes of layered sovereignty, military-fiscalism, and commercialization, but they tended to be less interested in the intellectual history of politics, and in how the conceptual framework of politics was implicated in structural change. Instead, revisionists often suggested in very broad terms that “Mughal ideals and practises” were often carried on and deepened within “successor states,” without really exploring the tensions and transformations involved in this process.

Revisionists have been interested, to some degree, in changing forms of patriotism and especially in the idea of emerging “regional patriotism” within eighteenth-century states. (See, for example, C. A. Bayly, Origins of Nationality in South Asia.) Some very fine works, notably Susan Bayly’s and Kate Brittlebank’s
pathbreaking studies on South India (parts of which are reprinted in Marshall’s edited volume), also explored the symbolic articulation of eighteenth-century kingship in South Asia, looking, for example, at the intersections between the self-presentation of different rulers and emerging religious and caste identities. Historians such as Burton Stein, Nicholas Dirks, and Michael Fisher have also theorized the ritual elements of rulership, and especially the central place of gifting in precolonial political culture. Yet in recent times there has been relatively little attention to changing conceptions of state/subject relations or to precolonial theories of taxation, commerce, or legality. Where these themes have been explored, this has often involved reading certain “norms” out of precolonial institutional practices, as much as in exploring textual sources for political debate and argument.

This is a particularly striking lacuna because early British rulers commissioned many texts on statecraft from Indian scholars and officials, which suggested a diverse terrain of indigenous debates around the rights and responsibilities of rulers and ruled. (For important recent treatments of these materials, see Kumkum Chatterjee, “History as Self-Representation: The Recasting of a Political Tradition in Bengal and Bihar,” *Modern Asian Studies* 32 [1998], 913–48; and C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India 1780–1870* [Cambridge, 1996].) In this context, the recent publication of Muzaffar Alam’s marvelous book, *The Languages of Political Islam in South Asia*, marks a huge step forward. Alam works on a large canvas with sweeping brushstrokes, seeking to relate the political theory of Muslim states in South Asia, principally the Mughal empire, to the broader sweep of medieval and early modern Islamic thought. His book highlights the accommodative, assimilationist or “liberal” dimensions of pre-Mughal and Mughal politics, connecting these back to earlier traditions of accommodation and innovation born out of the interaction between Arabic speakers and non-Arab cultures in the Persian-speaking world, and during the period of the Mongol invasions. Alam argues that the multiple interactions between Indo-Muslim rulers and non-Muslim peoples in India promoted a “non-sectarian and open-ended cultural politics, with the endeavour of balancing the conflicting claims of different communities” (168).

Alam studies Indo-Muslim languages of politics through three major thematic lenses. First, and most innovatively, he demonstrates the central importance in Mughal India of the tradition of political and ethical writings known as *akhlq*. These texts, he argues, tended to redefine and broaden the concept of *sharia*, beyond the conventional framework of Islamic jurisprudence, to incorporate norms derived from eclectic philosophical inquiries about political justice. Second, he describes the critical role of different Sufi orders in promoting new forms of cultural and religious accommodation. And third, he suggests that the emergence of Persian as the Mughal imperial language in South Asia was related to its distinctive capabilities for creating a climate of accommodation between rulers and ruled. Alam’s argument is strengthened by his discussion of the contests that the politics of accommodation sparked off in Indo-Muslim intellectual life, and the multiple tensions and resistances within the broad trajectory of theoretical innovation. While only the final sections of Alam’s book address the eighteenth century directly, for example, in a fascinating discussion of late Mughal patronage of Hindavi or Urdu literature, Alam has created a powerful framework for rethinking not only the creation and spread of Mughal political culture but also its ramifications into the eighteenth century and beyond.

One of the impressive features of Alam’s book is the wide range of texts that are considered, including “Mirrors of Princes” literature, biographies, histories, legal
and administrative treatises, and poetry. Alam has also, together with Seema Alavi, edited and translated a little-known set of Persian letters written by a European resident of late Mughal north India, the Franco-Swiss soldier and engineer, Antoine Polier (Alavi and Alam, eds., A European Experience of the Mughal Orient: The Ijaz-i-Arsalani [Persian letters, 1773–1779] of A. H. Polier [New Delhi, 2001]). Polier’s letters, written in the fine style cultivated by learned munshis (scholars and scribes), suggested how the courtly manners and polite culture of the Mughal empire exercised a powerful allure not only for a wide range of Indian participants, but also for the growing band of European travelers, traders, and invaders moving into the Mughal orbit. Recently, there has been a growing interest in the potentialities of cultural exchange in eighteenth-century India, especially at the interface between the cultural worlds of elite Europeans and Indians. Important recent works by William Dalrymple and Maya Jasanoff have reemphasized the fluid cultural frontiers of the eighteenth century, before the onset of stronger conceptions of national, civilizational, and racial hierarchies in the nineteenth century (see William Dalrymple, White Mughals, Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India [New York, 2003] and Maya Jasanoff, Edge of Empire: Lives, Cultures and Conquest in the East, 1750–1850 [New York, 2005]). In the contemporary intellectual and political context, this ground of argument offers a way both to recover an image of Indo-Muslim cosmopolitanism to counter hardening notions of a monolithic and hostile “Islam,” and also to suggest the distinctive meanings of “empire” in the eighteenth century, before the term “imperialism” had yet been coined.

Rosie Llewellyn-Jones’ presentation of the collected letters of Claude Martin, a prince among the eighteenth century’s array of “Indo-European” adventurers, represents an important contribution to this line of research. (Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, A Man of the Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century India: The Letters of Claude Martin, 1766–1800 [New Delhi, 2003]; see also her biography of Claude Martin, A Very Ingenious Man: Claude Martin in Early Colonial India [New Delhi, 1992]). Claude Martin (1735–1800) was born the son of a vinegar maker in Lyon, entered the military service of first the French then the English East India Companies, and ended his career as superintendent of the Nawab of Awadh’s military arsenal in Lucknow. The Nawabs of Awadh were major tribute payers to the British in the late eighteenth century, and Martin was valued by both Awadh coutiers and British empire-builders as a useful go-between in the complex negotiations that underpinned the growth of British power. Martin owed his lucrative position in Lucknow to powerful contacts in the British capital of Calcutta, and he was lucky to survive a policy of growing exclusivity within the British military and civilian services that tended to regard “aliens,” especially the French, as unreliable allies.

Llewellyn-Jones, the editor of the letters, is a noted expert on Lucknow, the capital of Awadh. Awadh was one of the “successor states” of the Mughal empire, which became a focal point of a vibrant Indo-Islamicate culture in the era of Claude Martin. Llewellyn-Jones has done a tremendous service in gathering together Martin’s letters from disparate sources and presenting them with an informative introduction and annotations. Some of the letters were written in a rather idiosyncratic if energetic English, some were written in French (and translated by the editor), and some, perhaps the most intriguing, were written in Persian to Martin’s Indian servants (and were translated by Dr. S. A. Zafar, Reader in Persian at the University of Lucknow). These Persian letters mainly concern the management of Martin’s landed estates at Najafgarh in Awadh and consist of exhortations to deal firmly with troublesome zamindars (local landlords and taxpayers) and to supervise and extend the cultivation of valuable crops, notably indigo.
The editor’s introduction makes a strong case that Martin was a significant outrider of the European Enlightenment, with a library filled with European works on science, history, and philosophy. In keeping with his military expertise, Martin was an inveterate builder of machines and gadgets, who had a particular fascination with electricity. He was also a noted patron of the arts, patronizing visiting European painters drawn to the courtly honey-pots of north India, but also Indian miniature painters, craftsmen, and builders. In pushing the “Enlightenment” theme, Llewellyn-Jones’s introduction may underestimate the extent to which Martin’s letters, especially the Persian ones, are also a valuable source for the composite intellectual life of late Mughal north India. The frequent exhortations to cherish the peasantry, for example, and to discipline their oppressors were not so much the outgrowth of an enlightened European sensibility as they were familiar motifs of Indo-Persian political ethics. Meanwhile, Martin’s reportage on the activities of the Awadhi court, often composed for his British friends, offer extraordinary insights into the politics of a Mughal successor state. Notable here is his vivid account of a satirical play about the “Sophy of Persia,” performed in Lucknow to a full house in 1777; according to Martin, this play revealed “the pomp and bombast of India princes, giving orders which are not obeyed,” the immorality of the courtiers (“natural and unnatural posture were acted”), the cruelties enacted on the peasantry by grasping overlords, and finally the overthrow of the pathetic ruler (23–4).

As new scholarship is just beginning to show, the challenge of writing the intellectual history of eighteenth-century India, which would include but not be confined to the history of “political thought,” will require attention to a new range of sources not just in “imperial languages” like Persian and English, but also in the vernacular languages that were undergoing development in this period. (See, for example, the special issue of Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, 24.2 [2004], on “Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern South Asia”; also, Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanym, eds., Textures of Time: Writing History in South India, 1600–1800 [Delhi, 2001].) A fascinating volume of essays edited by Indrani Chatterjee, Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia, further demonstrates (among many other things) how historians of social and cultural practices are bringing new kinds of sources to light. An array of literary and historical texts in different regional languages appear alongside the familiar staples of Persian chronicles and colonial archives, and they are variably used to uncover the diverse and contested nature of family in South Asia from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

In her challenging introduction, Indrani Chatterjee suggests that family history has been oddly lacking in South Asian history, and she relates this lacuna to multiple occlusions enacted within the colonial and nationalist imaginaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Chatterjee emphasizes the need to think beyond the “simple conjugal family of nationalist male aspiration,” which was even in the late nineteenth century “a historically contingent ‘site of desire’ and not everywhere an accomplished fact” (17). Instead, Chatterjee urges historians to consider the intersections between state-formation and family-formation, the highly stratified nature of family relations (associated especially with slave-concubinage), and the politics of knowledge production within and about families. Chatterjee suggests that an implicit argument connects the “snap-shot” method of the various essays in this volume, which is that the “boundedness of the category——family,” was itself a historically produced effect, “generated in part by the policing of the borders of the kin group as a strategy of state-formation (33). This policing of
kinship animated state policy and prescriptive literature in multiple contexts, from Rajput and Maratha kingdoms of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the colonial state in the nineteenth century.

Apart from a fascinating discussion by Satadru Sen about convict families in the Adaman islands, the essays collected here are mainly concerned with elite family formation, and especially with the intersections of the politics of kinship and kingship. Family emerges in this volume as a theme that ties together everyday cultural practices and the political economy of state-formation. Ramya Sreenivasan and Sumit Guha show how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century states were constructed in part through the management of familial marriage alliances and family feuds, and Michael Fisher argues that diverse social and political relationships were conceived through the flexible language of kinship. As Fisher and William Dalrymple demonstrate, British officials in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also sought to manipulate both the affective ties implied by familial discourses and the tensions produced within diverse family structures. Britons even entered into mixed-race families; though in the context of an increasingly nationalistic form of imperialism, this kind of familial tie was fraught with danger and difficulty.

A number of the essays, notably by Sylvia Vatuk, Pamela Price, and Indrani Chatterjee, attend to the ruptures and contradictions produced within the colonial politics of family. Not only did the colonial state eventually seek to limit forms of mixed-race intimacy, but it introduced new definitions of family, for example, in relation to the scope of “legitimate” affiliation, which reflected both pragmatic needs to cut off certain circuits of exchange within Indian society, but also culturally produced differences in British and Indian conceptions of family. Chatterjee writes that “colonial law and education” tended to privilege “uniliny, patriliny, the sacralized marriage, primogeniture, and ties of blood over relationships established through the bestowal of food, cloth and land” (250–51). This narrowing of the field of “family” generated new tensions around the issue of “caste” status, and new efforts at genealogical purification overwrote earlier patterns of family formation.

This is a path-breaking volume that issues an important challenge to South Asian historians to pursue the history of the early modern family as a critical node of change and contestation. A rare disappointment is that relatively few attempts are made in this collection to relate South Asian materials to other parts of the world. This is especially striking now, given that one of the most important achievements of revisionist writings on the eighteenth century in India has been to enable new points of connection between South Asian history and the wider history of the early modern world. Rather than a persistent “medieval” period in Indian history, eventually overcome in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century by the colonial intrusion of modernity, revisionist histories have tended to promote the idea of a distinctive “early modern” period in South Asian history, as the periodization of Chatterjee’s volume implicitly acknowledges. Indeed, South Asian history is now playing a prominent role in the elaboration of early modernity as a significant category for understanding world history.

Instead of a “third world-in-waiting” in Asia and Africa, patiently preparing for the “spread” of Western modernity, an image is taking shape of a dynamic spectrum of connected changes in the early modern world, which would only later be transformed, refracted or closed-down by the processes of colonial modernity. (For a recent multicentered view of the origins of global modernity, see C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* [Malden, Mass., 2004].) It is useful
in this context to compare revisionist work on eighteenth-century India with the concurrent revival of the eighteenth century in British history. These two historiographies have come to share certain critical themes, notably military-fiscalism (made famous in British history by John Brewer's account of the "fiscal-military state"), the emergence of new forms of patriotism (cf., for example, Linda Colley's "Britons" with C. A. Bayly's "regional patriotism"), and the rising prominence and power of "intermediary groups" within increasingly commercialized societies (figured in British history as the "middling sort" or "gentlemanly capitalists").

Such coincidences may be put down to the connected fashions of contemporary academia as much as to apparently similar trajectories across historical regions. They could also, however, reflect a pattern of distinctive yet connected forms of early modernity that demand to be studied on a global scale. Victor Lieberman, in Strange Parallels, whose pioneering work on comparative history posited shared patterns of political, commercial, and cultural integration in early modern South East Asia and Europe, has promoted the concept of Eurasia as a vehicle for breaking down the assumed ontological differences between different regional histories. Sanjay Subrahmanyam ("Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," Modern Asian Studies 31.3 [1997], 735–62), by contrast, has suggested a more thoroughly global approach, by positing the increased connectedness of the local and the supra-local, through travel, commerce, conflict, and intellectual/cultural exchange, as a critical and widespread feature of early modernity.

This review essay began with van Leur's impulse to accord Asian history its independence from Europe. Yet the desire to give Asia its own history, as distinct from the "rise of the west," may eventually have contributed to the gradual destabilization of the distinction between Europe and Asia so fundamental to van Leur's analysis and worldview. The radical separateness of these histories can no longer be taken for granted. In this sense, at least, revisionist social history can be seen as working in tandem with the post-Saidian, post-Orientalist attempts to challenge the ontological binary between "east" and "west," although their ways of approaching this issue are quite different. Meanwhile, new histories of South Asia, like other regional fields, will likely be more open to broader comparative and connective perspectives as they address the persistent problems of historical interpretation as well as new questions thrown up by a globalizing age.