Asia in the Waning Shadow of American Hegemony

Edited by
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REVIEWS

Wang Hui's China in Twentieth Century

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Wang Hui (edited by Saul Thomas), *China's Twentieth Century - Revolution, Retreat and the Road to Equality,* London and New York, Verso Books, 2016, 361 pp. (ISBN 9781781689066).

Wang Hui is certainly one of the most prominent and well-known scholars in the academic world, and one of the most influential New Left intellectuals in China. Known as the author of *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* published in China in 2004, *The End of the Revolution* (2011), and *The Tibetan Question between East and West* (2011), in this new work, Wang Hui displays his vision on Chinese modern history through an in-depth enquiry into the 20th century political and intellectual Chinese history. The analysis does not follow a chronological line. Actually, it follows a dialectic methodology focused on intellectual debates on culture and politics. Aside from the attention to the 20th century's Chinese political and intellectual history, there is significant focus on the great questions of the current age: the last two chapters (ch. 6 and ch. 7) are indeed dedicated to the transformation of the concept of «equality» and the appendix, which contains an interview for the Chinese journal *Foreign Theoretical Trends*, deals with the Chinese contemporary debate on globalisation, marketization, and privatisation.

The main object of Wang Hui's enquiry is the reinvention of intellectual and political categories in the contemporary world. The enquiry is done by using an historical framework. In his analysis he searches for discontinuities and continuities in history, wherein he places the creative elements that occur in the history-building process. He has been able to identify different conceptualisations across time, but he escapes from the superficial argument of a clash between «old and new thinking» (p. 75).

For the western reader, Wang Hui's reflections on the new meaning of mass-line political project within the current state-party system, and on the determination of new political subjects should be extremely interest-

ing. Who are the masses today? Who currently has the political potential of assuming the creative and innovative function, in face of the blackmailing dynamics of the globalised capitalistic system? Are the current social movements capable of assuming the role of mass-line policy subjects?

In contemporary China, the redefinition of social categories is comparable to the re-definition of the working class between the 19th and 20th century (p. 210). In a similar manner in our current age, those social categories which try to reach an effective political participation and action do not act within the state, because, as far as the state is concerned, they simply do not exist, and state politics does not include them. This is why re-politicisation and a reconstruction of politics of equality are necessary. According to the author, the transformation of the concept of «equality», and the development of different definitions in single historical and geographical contexts, are the true challenges of the 21st century.

The author throws down the gauntlet in the cultural field where contemporary China scholars are involved in the elaboration and re-definition of several concepts: «equality between the city and the country» (p. 251); rethinking the concept of democracy in the global framework of post-political-party policy (p. 164); re-defining the categories that underline the big transformations in contemporary China.

Thus, the originality with respect to his masterful *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*, lies in the fact that, whereas the previous work embraces the years between 1911 and 1978, known as the «century of revolution» or «of extremes», according to Eric Hobsbawm's periodisation, *China's Twentieth Century* not only stretches the timescale as far as 1989, but also makes very meaningful forays into the 21st century.

Hobsbawm is a pivotal point of reference. Wang Hui borrows his periodisation of Western European and Russian history known as «the short 20th century» (1914 to 1991), while inserting in this framework a specific point of view on Chinese history. His periodisation places the beginning of China's revolutionary age at the same time as the beginning of the Chinese People's War of Liberation: the birth of the Chinese «people» (人民) as a political subject, he states, «would not have been possible without the people's war … beginning in 1927» (p. 137).

His starting point lies on a paradox, a paradox of «continuity» which sheds light on the singularity of China's history in comparison with other contexts. The formation of the nation-state in Europe brought about territorial fragmentations. In early 20th century China, on the contrary, the fall of the Qing empire and the formation of the nation-state did not result in fragmentation, but rather reinforced the concept of sovereignty, as discussed by Kang Youwei and other contemporary intellectuals who fed the cultural debate at the time in which the Chinese Republic was born: «While the Habsburg, Hohenzollern, Romanov and Ottoman Empires were disintegrating one after the other, the various old and new political forces in

China were all predicating their varied political goals upon the unification of the state» (p. 14).

At the end of the «short» 20th century, this paradox repeats itself again, at the end of the revolution, and post revolution. While in the west, at the end of the Cold War, socialist countries collapsed, China not only upheld the integrity of its political structure, population, and size, but was also able, to a certain extent, to make a definite shift from a socialist economy to a market economy while maintaining the structure of the socialist state. Here, Wang Hui makes a clear reference to the Tian'anmen mass movement and to its political management (1989). This is a recurring topic in his works. Although it is not dealt with at length here, it is nevertheless present in the lines of the author's theoretical discourse.

The other paradox is a significant *discontinuity* between the revolutionary and post-revolutionary eras of the «long century» in the state-party's attitude towards the working class. Whereas during Mao's era workers were considered the leading political class, the one that epitomised the creative potential of revolutionary politics, «today, the new workers far exceed China's 20th century working class in number and scale, yet as a group they have almost no position within the realm of politics or culture» (p. 188).

The book is organised into seven chapters. The text has a rich body of footnotes providing important bibliographic indications and references to primary sources. An index is provided and it represents an indispensable tool for quick consultation. The first chapter concentrates on the political process of state-building that brought about the Chinese transition from empire to nation-state. Beginning from the paradox of continuity outlined above, Wang Hui underlines how 20th century's China saw the rise of new political categories. The emergence of a conceptualisation of the «Chinese people» as a political subject played a central role. It is a complex category that integrates citizens who are politically, ethnically, linguistically, socially accomplished, and active in the creative process of the new state. Thus, the revolutionary state, a one-party-government state, acts as integrator of complex political forces and is the mobiliser of society. Nowadays, the crisis of politics and history is marked by the shift from a concept of state as political integrator to a non-political bureaucratic system. The question of this shift in the conceptualisation of the state is a key argument in Wang Hui's theoretical definition of «depoliticisation», a process that, according to the author, characterises contemporary China and the crisis of the state-party's capacity of political representation (p. 153).

The second chapter concentrates on cultural aspects. The author reflects at length on the debate concerning the historical significance of the May 4th intellectual and political movement. He interprets the movement as a point of fracture, an innovative and creative event projected towards a new era. Through an original analysis of two of the main publications of the first decade of the 20th century, *Eastern Miscellany* and *New Youth* as well as of

the works of the most representative intellectuals of the time – Liang Qichao (1873-1929), Li Dazhao (1888-1927), Du Yaquan (1873-1933), Qian Zhixiu (1883-1947), Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), Liang Shuming (1893-1988), and Sun Yatsen (1866-1925) – he brings to light the process of intellectual confrontation and debate that brought about political innovation, and interrupted the continuity with the preceding historical paradigm (p. 55).

The third chapter stems from an interview with Zhang Xiang, starting from an analysis on the Korean war. It unveils historical facts that are part of different narratives on that war and that are rarely considered all together. The historical information he provides comes from primary sources and not easily accessible documents: letters, memoirs, diplomatic documentations from China, America, Korea and Japan. Great importance is given to a re-reading of texts by Mao Zedong, from his major essays on the interpretation of history, political theory, and strategy, to the transcripts of his speeches and statements as found in the *Mao Zedong Selected Works Collection* of 1965, 1977, and 1999. The Korean War is interpreted not as a mere military enterprise, but as an event of political significance for the state-building process, equivalent to the anti-Japanese resistance.

The fourth chapter examines the current world-wide depoliticisation process. He singles out three elements of this ongoing process: 1. a crisis in the representation of political parties; 2. the transformation of the role of media from performing a public service to becoming instruments of politics; 3. the crisis of law, which becomes the expression of special interest groups. The depoliticisation process enacted after 1989 brought about a shift from a concept of class, as a political subject, to its «objectification» bound to a social stratum externally defined as an «objective structure without any internal political capacity» (p.163). The task is reconstructing new forms of representation, and identifying creative and innovative political forces for the post-party politics of the future.

The focus of the last three chapters is on contemporary issues and on the changes of concepts and definitions. The fifth chapter is dedicated to the transformation of Chinese labour in its integration within the new international globalisation framework. The sixth and seventh chapters focus on equality. Wang explores historically the concept of equality in the contemporary global world, reaching the conclusion that it is necessary to analyse «equality» on a global scale, not only within the nation-state. Talking about the new working class and the equality issue, he introduces the vast issue of migrations in the 21st century, and the new subjectivities that are being created within them. «A labor force that is able to move, doesn't move aimlessly» (p.241). The vast migrations of working people, on a national and international scale, are constructing a generative new framework of «class», «equality» and «labour» concepts. In other words, people on the move in massive migration waves are, at the same time, symbols and creative engines of the historical event.

As a conclusion to this review, what is outstanding about this book is the complexity of thought that the author displays, and his profound analysis that extends both chronologically and spatially through a great wealth of information. We are used to his historical and cultural approach, which stems from a traditional Chinese one, where there were no boundaries between different disciplines and where the scholar played the role of historian, philosopher, politician and in some cases also poet and painter. If I may point out one issue that comes to my mind as a reader of the book, it would be the fact that, inasmuch as it is a collection of independent articles and interviews, some concepts are repeated and are therefore difficult to follow and reconstruct. But this is a very stimulating and highly recommended work that provides useful insight and incentive to the research on contemporary China for all areas of research.

Culture and ideology: The making of the special Thai-American relationship during the Cold War

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Matthew Phillips, *Thailand in the Cold War*, New York: Routledge, 2016.
xiv + 217 pp. (ISBN 978-1-138-01416-9).

Matthew Phillip's *Thailand in the Cold War* is a welcome addition to the growing historiography on the Cold War in Southeast Asia. A key political ally of the United States, Thailand was a major player in the Cold War. At the height of the American war in Vietnam, it was not only a principal military base for the United States to contain the spread of communism in the region but also the primary centre for American covert operations throughout Indochina. More than merely offering passive support, Thailand was also an active participant, sending its troops to support the United States militarily in Korea and South Vietnam. Why and how did this Thai-American relationship develop?

The prospect of such a partnership was not all that apparent in 1945. At the end of the Second World War, Thailand was in a vulnerable political position. It had backed the losing side in the global conflagration that had by the early 1940s wholly engulfed the countries in Southeast Asia. Worried about the nation's security in a world ostensibly heading towards collision by the end of the 1930s, the military-backed government, which assumed power in the 1932 coup that ended the absolute monarchy, abandoned the country's time-honoured policy of ambiguous neutrality and hedged its bets on a rising Japan. After allying itself with the latter shortly after the onset of the Pacific War in December 1941, Thailand declared war on Britain and the United States in January 1942 and proceeded, with Japanese help, to recover territories not only from the French in Indochina but also from the British in Malaya and Burma. The defeat of the Axis powers by 1945, however, compounded Thailand's ill-fated venture. Fearing that the victorious allies, and the British in particular, would have good cause to exact retribution for its wartime opportunism and betrayal, a chastened Thailand quickly adjusted to post-war developments, disavowing its declaration of war and alliance with Japan and returning territories it acquired since the outbreak of the conflict.

If Britain showed little sympathy for Thailand's post-war predicament, the United States, however, quickly emerged as the country's new best friend and saviour. Efforts by the British to impose punitive sanctions were accordingly blocked by the United States. As the world's most powerful nation at the end of the war, the United States saw itself assuming a

more active global leadership role but found its ability to play such a part in Southeast Asia severely limited by the returning European colonial powers, which were eager to restore imperial credibility and perpetuate the survival of their empires. However, as the region became increasingly mired instead in the messy politics of post-war decolonisation – a de-stabilising recourse that soon conflated with equally volatile forces brought by the turbulent winds of the encroaching Cold War – the United States saw Thailand as a potential ally and prospective bastion from which it could rebuild western credibility, mitigate the taint of imperialism, and combat the onslaught of resurgent communism ominously portended, from the late 1940s, in a spate of seemingly co-ordinated outbreaks of communist-inspired insurgencies in Indochina, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines. Apart from its geo-strategically significant location at the heart of the Southeast Asian landmass, Thailand was also perceived by Washington as a relatively stable state. Having never been colonised, it did not have to contend with the disruptive effects of colonialism or the divisive struggles of independence that afflicted its neighbours. The homogeneity, conservatism and religiosity of the Thai population, it was believed, also made them less vulnerable to communism than people elsewhere in the region. Best of all, while Thais were wary of the British and French, they were not similarly suspicious of the United States, their new-found friend and advocate. Hoping to exploit the Cold War for its own ends, and besotted by the huge attraction of lucrative American financial and military aid, Thailand had, by the late 1940s, become politically allied with the United States, despite initial efforts to steer a more independent path.

The making of this special Thai-American relationship is the theme of *Thailand in the Cold War*. The monograph, however, is less about high politics or the diplomatic history of the Cold War from Thailand's perspective, a first impression that might be mistakenly drawn from the book's succinct but intriguing title. As perhaps better reflected in the designation of Phillip's doctoral dissertation ('Oasis on a Troubled Continent: Culture and Ideology in Cold War Thailand') submitted to the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies in 2012, on which his book is based, *Thailand in the Cold War* is more a study about the cultural and ideological dynamics of that special Thai-American relationship, albeit set against the backdrop of the Cold War.

At the heart of Phillips' argument is the contention that Thailand's integration into an American-centred world order, forged and sustained during the Cold War, was much more than the mere establishment of a political, economic or military relationship; it was set also in cultural terms and carefully adapted to keep Thailand within the American sphere of influence. Using an array of Thai and American sources, including newspapers and periodicals, and archival materials from the National Archives of Thailand and the National Archives at College Park, Phillips shows from the book's

six core chapters how this Thai-American cultural engagement emerged and subsequently underwent transformation as both sets of cultural narratives converged and interacted during the course of the Cold War. In Phillips' view, American 'cultural producers' in the aftermath of the Second World War, through their representation of Thailand as a unique nation in Southeast Asia (having never been colonised) and an 'oasis' in a troubled region, played no small part in facilitating American reception of Thailand as an ideal ally and Cold War bulwark against communism. Likewise, for Thailand, the promotion of a Thai nationalist ideology by the post-1932 military regime, with its legitimising assertions of exceptionalism, modernity, and internationalism, was not entirely irreconcilable with the popular, and probably over-simplified, American image of the country or the allure of American modernity and 'civilisation' to members of the small but influential urban-centred cosmopolitan Thai community. Nevertheless, by the latter half of the 1950s, as the Thai state's role in the Cold War deepened (with Bangkok serving, for example, as the headquarters of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization [SEATO], the American-sponsored anti-communist front), Thailand struggled to maintain ownership of such ideological assertions, as perceived subservience to the United States brought to the fore the latent anxieties of urban-centred nationalists about their country's hallmark 'independence' and 'sovereignty'.

Both Thai and American state propaganda responded to such disaffections by emphasising 'distance from the other' and producing new cultural narratives that would enable Thailand to maintain its profitable alliance with the United States 'without drawing attention internally to the consequences for Thai sovereignty'. Following the coup of 1958, for instance, the new military regime re-oriented 'Thainess' along more 'traditional' lines, emphasising instead a rural-based, pre-modern culture 'embedded in nostalgia and in ways of life that could be viewed as distinctly Thai' as the key site of the nation's identity. In addition, by exploiting the urban elites' fears of a faltering development, which would impinge on their ability to partake in an American-centred consumerist lifestyle, the new military regime, by promising unfettered progress for as long as the alliance survived, deftly reconciled internal tensions and ensured the participation and instrumentality of this urban cosmopolitan class in supporting a cultural shift and securing American hegemony in the country.

After discussing how Thailand was presented by the US media in the first chapter, the next five core chapters reflect on how cultural productions shifted between the 1930s and the 1960s and assess their impact and significance. Notwithstanding the vicissitudes of an analytical framework based on the fluidity of culture, and the resultant need for mediation through fastidious linguistic interventions, Phillips has presented a multi-layered and plausible version of cultural interactions that contributed to the making of the post-war Thai-American partnership, even if more fundamental politi-

cal calculations might eventually prove more decisive in influencing the Thai nation's choice of alignment. Considering popular culture, Thai silk, dress, literature, film, tourism, fashion and attitudes towards Buddhism, *Thailand in the Cold War* provides an original and fascinating perspective on the making of this special Thai-American relationship during the Cold War and makes an important contribution to the historiography of the cultural Cold War in Southeast Asia.

Not a community, but a multilateral institution: A Korean perspective on the East Asian International Society

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According to In-Sung Jang, the East Asian international society is both real and imagined. This is reflected in the original Korean language title which juxtaposes the two subjects of imagining East Asian international society and East Asia. In the English title, international society is imagined within the context of the actual East Asia.

In the 1990s, as the economic development of the East Asian countries coincided |with the end of the Cold War and globalisation, a discussion began within East Asia on the concept of an East Asian community. In Korea and Taiwan, which both experienced extreme forms of state violence which arose from the incongruences of division during the Cold War period, the discourse on East Asia, which was an alternate view of the post-Cold War era, captured the introspective nature of those intellectuals who formulated it. This discourse gained prominence especially quickly in Korea. This is because a desire was emerging within the East Asian community to achieve concrete «gains», identify «values» worth pursuing, and devise a «way» to realise these gains and values (pp. 7-9).

However, this discourse called for the restructuring of East Asia by applying the theory of «rationalistic regionalisation» which is based on the European experience. This in turn led to the problem of regarding the distinct characteristics of East Asia, which lacked the experiences of Europe, as an irrational phenomenon. Therefore, there is a gap between logic and experience in the East Asia discourse. Here, the author suggests «reflecting on the historic form of imagining irrational East Asia». The East Asia discourse is more active in Korea than any other country in East Asia. This means that the inherent logical gap is that much larger in the Korean version of the East Asia discourse, and it also signifies that the research on the Korean perspective of East Asia is all the more important in clarifying both the real and imagined East Asian international society (pp. 10-13).

Another reason for the popularity of the East Asia discourse in Korea may be the «post-imperialism» phenomenon in East Asian international society which is driven by the modern sovereign state system. East Asia ex-

perienced three different imperial systems, the Sino-centric tributary system, the Imperial Japan system, and the Cold War system, each with its own characteristics and order. The end of the Cold War also meant the end of imperialism (pp. 19-23). Korea consistently faced an uneven balance of power under the various imperial systems and was forced to pursue survival and development as a small nation. In this respect, it is understandable that the introspective Korean intellectuals would look to the East Asia discourse when looking towards the post-imperial period. The author's analysis, therefore, naturally starts with the discourse on East Asian international society.

In the first part of the book, the author contemplates the concept, composition, and dynamics of the East Asian international society. In the first chapter, while actively accepting the pioneering research of the English School scholars who developed the theory of international society based on the European experience, the author suggests that there is a need to consider the significance of incorporating the experience of non-western regions into the European-centric theory of international society. Consequently, we can see that a characteristic of the formation of the East Asian international society is sociality which comes from the collision of the principles of European international system and the practices of the East Asian international society (pp. 67-71).

Meanwhile, as the author points out in chapter 2, the regulating structure and operating dynamics of the East Asia region are different from those of other regions, and thus it can be said that an East Asian international society exists and can be imagined and conceptualised as such. Perceptions on the differences between inter-regional structure on the global level and intra-regional structure on the East Asian regional level are derived from this.

Chapter 3 discusses imagination and identity. Imagining that the operating principles of international politics are different on the global and regional levels has led to an identity in which the East Asian international society feels real (pp. 103-107). This represents the author's basic research framework which deals with the interpenetration of the actual East Asian international society with the imagined East Asia.

In the second part of the book, the author introduces Korea's conceptualisation of East Asia during the East Asian international society's formative period in the modern era of the late 19th century, and analyses the characteristics of this conceptualisation. Chapter 4 provides a topos of Korea's geopolitical location in the conceptualisation of Asia and introduces the conceptualisation of East Asia in modern Korea which is developed between Asia and the Orient. During the process of transferring European international laws to East Asia, Korean intellectuals imagined a political code for Asia and empathised with weak nations that shared a similar fate as Korea. However, regions outside of Northeast Asia were, at those times, too far

away for Korean intellectuals to communicate with them. As a result, the entirety of Asia, including Southeast Asia, were not perceived to be partners with whom they could discuss their shared fate. It is here that the idea of East Asia, consisting of Korea, China, and Japan, originated (pp. 174-175).

Next, the author traces the process of Korean intellectuals embracing the main concepts of international politics through the medium of the East Asian international society. These concepts include sovereignty and the public (chapter 5), the balance of power (chapter 6), peace (chapter 7), race and identity (chapter 8), among others. Chapter 9, the last chapter of the second part, takes a look at Japanese intellectuals' view of international society and the East Asia discourse based on the concepts of «order and justice». The views of modern Japanese politicians and intellectuals contrasts sharply with the Korean perspective presented in chapters 5 to 8, the former having a much more distinct Hobbesian (that is, power politics) approach to international society with the latter being a more pacifist project.

In the third part of the book, the author skips forward one hundred years to the post-Cold War period. To the Korean scholars of the early 20th century, East Asia was divided into spaces seized by Japan and spaces resisting that invasion. East Asia in the latter half of the 20th century was again divided by the Cold War. After exiting the Cold War, the world was rocked by globalisation and the information age, and for the first time in nearly a century Korean intellectuals viewed East Asia as one integrated space.

However, as the author shows in chapter 10, due to the persistence of cracks and conflicts within East Asian international society, the imagination of East Asia in Korea continues to overlap with that of Northeast Asia, and vagueness in the conceptual differentiation between the two remains (pp. 390-397). Yet, Northeast Asia is more than just a concept. That is because real economic interdependence and political rifts and conflict exist among Korea, China, and Japan.

When Korean scholars tried to walk the line between the real Northeast Asia and the ambiguously imagined East Asia, «a spectre» in the form of the Japanese East Asia discourse was haunting East Asia. Here we can find the reason that the author chose to place the discussion on the Japanese East Asia discourse in chapter 11. Prodded into action by the Japanese discourse on East Asia, Korean intellectuals in the 21st century have widened their conceptualisation from Northeast Asia to East Asia. Therefore, «a new conceptualisation of East Asia» is still an unrealised «plan» or «intellectual experiment» (pp. 452-455).

In chapter 12, while recognising the contributions to the conceptualisation of East Asia in Korea by the introspective East Asia discourse, the author also criticises the discourse's proponents for their vertical notion of space between the broader world and individual states as well as pointing out that for them East Asia remains a plan only. As a result, they have missed the fact that horizontal spaces exist in which mutual communication can

take place on a variety of topics. The author argues that the introspective imagination of East Asia needs to be supplemented within the pages of the distinguished Korean journal *Creation and Criticism* with an analysis of the actual East Asian international society and the functions of international politics which have unfolded within that arena (pp. 458). At this point, the cooperation and tension between Korea and Japan is an important factor to watch when estimating the formation of East Asian international society.

The author examines the dynamics of the conflict and cooperation in Korea-Japan relations in the post-Cold War period within the context of the East Asian international society in chapter 13. And according to the author, the structuralised tensions between Korea and Japan in the post-Cold War era are proof of a social relationship, and signifies that an international society on the East Asia level is visible. Therefore, rather than using a «chronology of memory» which expects the two countries to overcome their conflict as time passes, a «topology of memory» which sees the institutionalisation of the expression of tensions is a means to feel the existence of the East Asian international society (pp. 501-502).

In chapter 14, the final chapter of the main contents, the author questions the possibility of establishing an East Asian international culture. The author argues that the discussion of a «cultural community» on the East Asia regional level is mere fiction as the East Asia discourse is blanketed with the idea of «state citizen culture». However, the author is not completely denying the prospect of establishing an East Asian «international culture». Just as culture exists in any society, the East Asian international society, as a real entity, can develop an «international culture» on the regional level. Such a culture could develop at the intersection of the centrifugal forces for global universality and the centripetal forces for national distinctness (pp. 517-523).

In the concluding chapter, the author declared the following: «the people of East Asia are witnessing the advent of a regional space unparalleled in history», and that this signifies the «beginning of history» in East Asia (pp. 527). This also casts doubt on the relevance of the mainstream international relations theories which prophesised «the end of history» (pp. 529). Now, the work shifts from «theory to history» (pp. 529-530). This is an antithesis against the hasty attempts to draw theories from a dearth of historical experiences of East Asia. The author is interested in the experiences born from the development of the East Asian international society, and is expecting that the experiences of East Asia will cause the theories of International Relations, which are based on lessons learned from Europe and the United States, to crack under this new evidence. This also strongly implies that the creation of a «community», which was the final stage of the European experience, cannot be generalised.

When the existence of an East Asian international society has been recognised, and while the likelihood of it developing into a community is

uncertain, a possible direction may be the «institutionalisation of multilateralism». The author, as his final conclusion, emphasises that a firm foundation needs to be built on the modern state paradigm for the publicness of the East Asian international society to be secured. This sounds like a warning against the «post-modern» discourses on East Asian community. But as Brexit and Trump's «America First» policies show, the world is seeing a regression from «community», and even «multilateralism» is in a precarious state. Korea's imagination of East Asia has moved beyond East Asia and has started to include global undertones.

Media coverage and mediatic strategies of Japanese new religious movements

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Erica Baffelli, *Media and New Religions in Japan,* London/New York: Routledge, 2016, 191 pp.

Erica Baffelli introduces the reader to her highly engaging research book on *Media and New Religions in Japan* by quoting the final sentence from a commercial shown on Shibuya giant video screens related to the globally-known Japanese new Buddhist movement Sōka Gakkai: «Possibilities are endless.» Indeed, the possibilities explored by Japan's new religions in order to gain success, authority and support, seem, if not endless, at least plentiful. These possibilities, or rather resources and strategies, are particularly associated with the world of media, including books, manga, journals, magazines, television, cinema, and, of course, the internet.

Before delving into the core of her research, Baffelli provides the reader with useful preliminary clarifications, especially with regard to the term «new religions» (*shin shūkyō*), as well as to the socio-historical context of Japan's modernisation and urbanisation from the first half of the 19th century onward, in which religious movements able to attract a great number of members emerged and developed. The difficulty in finding a clear-cut definition as to what constitutes a new religion in Japan has been addressed by Ian Reader, one of the most influential scholars on Japan's contemporary religious dynamics and practices, with whom Baffelli often collaborates (she also edited a volume with Reader and Stämmler in 2011).[1]

Reader has pointed out that new religions may fall in any of the four categories mentioned within the annual guidebook to religion in Japan, issued by the Ministry of Education's Agency for Cultural Affairs: Buddhist, Shinto, Christian, and «other». One would assume that new religions might dislike being labelled as belonging to Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity, or, even worse, to an indefinite «other». However, it seems that what some of them (Sōka Gakkai, for example) disapprove of most is being called New Religion, a title that collides with their need for legitimacy and authority, since it conjures up uncomfortable «images of instability and a lack of historical roots».[2]

1. Erica Baffelli, Ian Reader, Birgit Stämmler (eds.), *Japanese Religions on the Internet: Innovation, Representation, and Authority*, New York: Routledge, 2011.
2. Ian Reader, «Japanese New Religious Movements,» in Mark Juergensmeyer (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p.142.

Baffelli stresses the partial inadequacy of the label «New Religions», along with the controversial nature of the term *shin shūkyō*, employed «apologetically in the post-war period to grant new movements legitimacy» (page 5), but convincingly explains that «new religions» remains to this day the most feasible term to employ when addressing an Anglophone readership about Japan's «new» religious groups.

The relevance of media participation and representation is the focus of the book, a crucial aspect which is by no means confined to Japanese new religions alone. As Stewart M. Hoover has pointed out,[3] interaction with modern media is the one aspect that cannot fail to be considered when looking at religions in the 21st century on a global level. The use of modern media by religious groups, however, is not exactly new. To quote a renowned example, around the 1970s-80s, televangelism spread tremendously in the United States, to the point that scholars could no longer neglect the importance of the electronic church and of religious broadcasting in the configuration of the changing American religious landscape.

Turning to more traditional media, already in the 1740s, revivalist and evangelical preacher George Whitefield (1714-70) conquered the mediatic (colonial) world through his creative communication devices.[4] In the early national period, new religious movements, such as the Millerites, made strategic use of newspapers, posters, and books to get their message across,[5] and, later, the Megiddo Church, a rather small sect founded in 1880, developed into a larger community thanks to the publication and circulation of the *Megiddo Message* and the *Megiddo News*.[6]

In an analogous fashion, in early and mid-20th century Japan, as Baffelli points out, print media proved vital, in order for new religions to gain a wider audience and a higher number of followers. Oomoto, a new religion founded in the late 19th century, relied on the publication of magazines and even bought a newspaper; Seichō no Ie, founded in 1930, created a prolific market by publishing its leader's books. Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō, better known as the «dancing religion» (*odoru shūkyō*), analysed in a recent study by

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3. Stewart M. Hoover, «Religion and the Media in the 21st Century», *Trípodos*, número 29, Barcelona, 2012, pp. 27-35; Stewart M. Hoover (ed.), *The Media and Religious Authority*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016.

4. Carla Gardina Pestana, «George Whitefield and Empire,» in Geordan Hammond & David Ceri Jones (eds.), *George Whitefield: Life, Context, and Legacy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 82-97.

5. Paul S. Boyer, 'From Tracts to Mass–Market Paperbacks: Spreading the Word via the Printed Page in America from the Early National Era to the Present', in Charles L. Cohen & Paul S. Boyer (eds.), *Religion and the Culture of Print in Modern America*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008, pp. 27-28.

6. Gary-Ann Patzwald, «The Select Few. The Megiddo Message and the Building of a Community,» in Charles L. Cohen & Paul S. Boyer (eds.), *Religion and the Culture of Print in Modern America*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008, pp. 131-155.

Benjamin Dorman,[7] was also widely covered, critically or otherwise, by the Japanese print media in the late 1940s and 50s.

This is to say that, while media have no doubt developed and multiplied along the trail of time, contributing to the easier and faster spread (or decline, for that matter) of a religious group within and beyond a country, the relationship between media and religions can be considered as both «old» and geographically diffused.

Despite the number of global parallels one can draw with regard to the dynamics tying media with religions, it borders the obvious to remind that a comparative research should never be carried out at the expense of the specific geo-cultural and historical contexts in which the interaction between religious groups and media is produced. As a matter of fact, while sharing the conscious employment of image and communication strategies via the media, even religious groups active in the same context of contemporary Japan display notable differences. As the painstaking analysis carried out by Baffelli through her case studies demonstrates, each religious group deals with media in different degrees, with diversified methods or purposes, and with dissimilar outcomes or responses.

Baffelli makes this clear form the very beginning of her book, thanks to the effective titles given to the three chapters referring to the new religions chosen as case studies (Agonshū, Kōfuku no Kagaku and Hikari no Wa).

The chapter focusing on Agonshū, a Buddhist movement founded by the late charismatic leader Kiriyama Seiyū (1921-2016), emphasises the group's mediatisation of rituals, especially the *Hoshi matsuri* (Star Festival), and its image strategy centred on satellite broadcasting. Further distinctions are made throughout the chapter, especially regarding Agonshū indoor and outdoor events, in order to account for the complexity of media strategies, and their varied effects on the participants and on rituals themselves.

The chapter on Kōfuku no Kagaku, or Happy Science, founded by Ōkawa Ryūhō in 1986, focuses on the mediatisation of its leader image and on the communication strategies employed in the 1990s. Print media, including the numerous books authored by Ōkawa, seem to hold a special position within the devices adopted by the group to disseminate its message of salvation and to sacralise its leader. Print media do represent a crucial tool towards the sacralisation of the leader, but, at the same time, they have also contributed to undermine or even demolish it, through aggressive forms of criticism which, in turn, have required an equally aggressive response, involving the mobilisation of Kōfuku members and the realisation of new strategies able to safeguard the (moral) authority of the leader and his image as a somewhat supernatural figure.

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7. Benjamin Dorman, *Celebrity Gods: New Religions, Media, and Authority in Occupied Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012.

The chapter on Baffelli's third case study is centred on Hikari no Wa (Circle of Rainbow Light), the group started in 2007 by ex-Aum member Jōyū Fumihiro. Directly linked to the (in)famous Aum Shinrikyō, founded in the 1980s by Asahara Shōkō, Hikari no Wa is, as a consequence, also the group with the strongest necessity to distance itself from it, both in terms of religious identity and actual practices. The peculiar and controversial context of Hikari no Wa understandably affects the online interactions of the group, problematising the strategic dynamics of media visibility, and demanding, within the process of mediatisation, Hikari's constant mediation with the public, due to people's residual scepticism related to Jōyū's previous affiliation with the group that perpetrated the nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway in March 1995.

In closing, *Media and New Religions in Japan* represents an extremely precious resource for those interested in Japan's cultural history and anthropology, for it provides a solid historical and social analysis of Japan's contemporary religious landscape, and meticulously delineates both the internal dynamics of Japanese new religions vis à vis their media strategies, and the multi-layered processes involved in their media representations. Baffelli also offers interesting and valuable research suggestions which can be useful to scholars of religious and media studies from a comparative perspective. In particular, she emphasises the need to work out a fitting methodological hook able to cast light on the internal and external audience response to religious materials available in print or digitally, a key aspect so far overlooked by scholarship.

Global Maoism and the long 1960s as a Turning Point in Asian Studies: the committee of concerned asian scholars in retrospective

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The End of Concern. Maoist China, Activism and Asian Studies, Fabio Lanza - Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017, XII-262

In the last few years, interest in global Maoism and its impact on the West in the 1960s and 1970s has been one facet of the current rewriting of Cold War history after the «global turn» in historical studies. The multiple histories of the Maoist movement outside China have attracted increasing attention, as they were a significant part of the wider change in political culture and social values in that pivotal age. Nevertheless, most works have assumed that, outside China, intellectual and political interest in Maoism had little to do with a thorough understanding of China and its Revolution. One example is Richard Wolin's *The Wind of the East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), where the author analysed the appropriation, use – and misuse – of Maoist ideology by French intellectuals. In Wolin's view, at any rate, there was an important legacy of Maoism in France, namely the transformation of intellectuals' identities and attitudes, who developed a new sensibility towards social justice and human rights.

Convinced that no global analysis of the 1960s and the 1970s could ignore the role of Maoist China, Fabio Lanza addresses the intellectual and political radicalism of those years from a different perspective. His *The End of Concern* is a rich and detailed narrative of the history of an organisation of radical young scholars and Asian studies students in the United States, the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS). This organisation was active from 1968 to 1979 and published the influential journal, *The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. Its activities developed alongside the Vietnam war, the Cultural Revolution in China, the rapprochement between the United States and the People's Republic of China ending with the shift in Chinese economic policy and the demise of Maoism in the early 1980s. During its lifetime, the CCAS was an important laboratory of ideas in American academia. Contesting previous American scholarship on Asia – and especially on the Chinese Revolution – it sought a different intellectual and scholarly approach. The CCAS' attitude was characterised by the implicit rejection of any orientalist or 'othering' posture and by the belief that Asian and especially the Chinese Revolution (the core of the CCAS scholars' political and academic interests) had a global relevance and should be taken seriously. With their intellectually self-critical attitude,

these scholars were also destined to reshape their field and, according to Lanza, even anticipated several theoretically-grounded issues in Asian studies which emerged in the 1990s.

Lanza's book includes an introduction, four chapters and an epilogue. In the introduction, 'Of Ends and Beginnings; or When China Existed' the author explains the genesis and concerns of his research work. He defines his book as 'an investigation into that political and intellectual break' (p. 2) which made him, as a young Italian student discovering the CCAS *Bulletin* in 1987, puzzled by 'the collective statement of a position of «concern» inscribed in the *Bulletin*'s title' (p.2). The gap between his own experience of Asian studies in the late 1980s and the political commitment of CCAS scholars stimulated him to better understand what made the militancy in the CCAS possible, how it was practised and how it came to its end. But his goal has also been an effort to assess the CCAS' historical importance and its political and intellectual legacy.

In the first chapter 'America's Asia: Discovering China, Rethinking Knowledge', the author has reconstructed the origin of the CCAS, placing it in the contestation against American foreign policy in Asia, and especially the Vietnam War, and emphasizing how this political position generated strong disagreement with previous scholarship, especially regarding the pretence of political neutrality and scientific objectivity of older scholars (whose position was historically connected to the heavy costs paid by Asian scholars in the United States due to McCarthyism in the early 1950s). Attacks especially addressed the intellectual hegemony determined by modernisation theory as the only rational approach to understand (and foresee) modern Asian pasts and present times. At the same time, these debates implied a novel self-reflective attitude towards the problematic relationship between knowledge and power.

Chapter 2, 'To Be, or Not to Be, a Scholar: The Praxis of Radicalism in Academia' illustrates the tensions generated by the CCAS scholars' wish to satisfy the 'twin commitment to scholarship and activism' (p. 87), in light of the Chinese Cultural Revolution's and Maoist influence on the relationship between culture and politics. Lanza focuses his attention on some exemplary cases, as the debates about the foundation of a new academic journal, *Modern China*, that aspired to become the elective place for the publication of innovative academic research and whose agenda suggested, contrary to the belief of the CCAS, that professional scholarly work was something distinct from political activism. Quite interestingly, the debates also touched upon the still unresolved problem of the connection between scholarly specialisation (pursued by *Modern China*) and concern for global issues (pursued by the CCAS).

Chapter 3, 'Seeing and Understanding: China as the Place of Desire', analyses the impact the CCAS's trips to China in 1971 and 1972 had on the organisation's internal debates. The relation with China became a divisive

factor in the Committee, as it is testified in divergent memories of those events. But Lanza has also traced the contradictions and problems in the CCAS's contemporary discussions and debates.

Chapter 4, titled 'Facing Thermidor: Global Maoism at Its End', describes how the need to come to terms with the demise of Maoism in early 1980s in China put an end to the CCAS (disbanded in 1979) and the *Bulletin*'s agenda, as the change in China weakened the concepts and notions (from class, to the meaning of culture in everyday politics) that formed the basis of political activism and novel scholarship in the previous decade.

Finally, the epilogue 'Area Redux: The Destinies of «China» in 1980s and 1990s' retraces the evolution (or better, 'devolution', as Lanza writes at p. 176) of 'China' as an object of specialised study, but also gives an outline of the theoretical paths opened by a younger generation of scholars, committed to Subaltern and Post-Colonial Studies. According to Lanza, these new orientations, though quite distinctive due to their stronger theoretical engagement, echo several assumptions and beliefs of the CCAS. Lastly, he offers a critical reflection on the debates about the place of theory in critical Asian Studies and beyond.

There are several points in Lanza's rich volume that deserve attention. First, by choosing to study a scholarly organisation dedicated to Asian studies, Lanza implicitly refutes the idea that 1960s and 1970s intellectual and political engagement with Maoism was evidence of Western intellectuals' tendency to project their own expectations and hopes onto China in the absence of any solid knowledge of it. Most young scholars involved in the CCAS were attracted to China for political reasons, and were experts in Asian history, languages and culture; several among them became important academicians in contemporary Chinese studies. Secondly, Lanza argues that the CCAS's will to develop a novel perspective towards Asia was initiated by the recognition that 'Asian people had become the subjects of their own politics, and by so doing they had stated the possibility of alternative solutions to issues not confined to Asia' (p. 35). Asian revolutionary experiences and ideas were not only taken seriously, but also recognised as a source for rethinking global modernity from a different perspective and envisioning alternative paths for development and progress. In this sense, the CCAS's radical intellectual challenge reshaped the relationship between academic work and political engagement. Lastly, he put the CCAS's history and intellectual enterprise, somehow distinctively tied to the American academic and political context, in a global framework, making continuous references to the coeval phenomenon of French Maoism, which provided theoretical grounds to fully analyse the issues debated in the *Bulletin*.

Lanza was at pains to contextualise the experience of the CCAS and the agenda of the *Bulletin* in time and space. His research was based on an accurate reading of the journal and the oral histories, personal memories and letters of the CCAS members. But his book is not just a detailed por-

trait of a generation or a historical narrative of an interesting time for Asian studies in the United States, nor is it mainly an intellectual enquiry into the genealogy of critical thinking in Asian studies. Reflecting the author's personal commitment, it is also a call to look at that past as an inspiration for a shift in perspective and attitude in the scholarly profession. As Lanza suggests in the epilogue, rescuing CCAS's experience from oblivion is a reminder of the political and intellectual possibilities open to all Asian scholars, in this age of relativism and 'academic impotence' (p.192), by thinking not *about*, but rather *with* the people they study.

Another Vision of Pakistan: Islam and society in a South Asian environment

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Michel Boivin, *Le Pakistan et l'Islam. Anthropologie d'une République Islamique*, Paris : Téraèdre, 2015, 223 pp., (ISBN 9782360850648).

In comparison with India, Pakistan has received less extensive attention from scholars. In addition to this disadvantage, there has also been the misfortune that a large part of the research dedicated to the country after 9/11 has focused on violence and terrorism. Pakistan has variously been depicted as a «failed state», a place dominated by religious fanaticism, and constantly on the verge of collapse. Without denying the complex issues relating to its political dimension, it is possible to speak of an over-representation of violence in the literature on Pakistan. Instead, very little is known of its rich culture and its society, apart from a small group of specialists. It is a curious paradox that, while the study of the «everyday» is increasingly gaining ground among historians and social scientists, in Pakistan the lives of the millions of inhabitants who lead a peaceful existence are largely neglected.

This said, nowadays a growing number of social scientists have begun to fill this vacuum. A new generation of scholars has started to engage with the lives of those human beings who call themselves Pakistanis, even re-reading the political history of the region «from below».[8] The volume under review by Michel Boivin, *Le Pakistan et l'Islam. Anthropologie d'une République Islamique* constitutes a relevant contribution to this endeavour. The main point of strength of the volume is that not only has the author contributed to a «decentring» of the discourse on Pakistan – as the author himself declares in the introduction (p. 14) – but that he has done so in a very accessible style and synthetic form. Michel Boivin is one of the main representatives of a lively school of French scholars at the Centre d'Études de l'Inde et l'Asie du Sud in Paris, whose studies focus on various aspects of South Asian societies. This volume is based on long periods of research conducted by the

8. Some recent examples are: Elisabetta Iob, *Refugees and the Politics of the Everyday State in Pakistan: Resettlement in Punjab, 1947-62*, London & New York: Routledge, 2018; Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, *The Politics of Common Sense. State, Society, and Culture in Pakistan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018; Naveeda Khan, *Muslim Becoming. Aspiration and Scepticism in Pakistan*, Durham & London: Durham University Press, 2012.

author in the field, mainly in the province of Sindh, especially on Sufism and popular culture.

Various important themes run through this volume. The most important – and the one around which the whole narrative is built – is the relevance of «diversity» as an essential tool for our understanding of Pakistani society. This concept is intended by the author not only as a criticism of the «essentialist» interpretation of many western observers; he also affirms that diversity, and the difficulty of accepting it, constitutes the root of a series of ambiguities in Pakistani collective identity, which the author defines as the territory of the «unsaid». The first of these issues is the plural character of Islamic religion. Paradoxically enough, for a state that calls itself an «Islamic Republic», religion is the most problematic domain. Michel Boivin points in particular to the complex coexistence of various layers of religious identity, both inside and outside the fold of Islam: *sunni/shi'i, deobandi/barelwi, ismaili/zikri* or *ahmadi*; and, of course, to the different religious communities, like Hindus, Christians, Parses, Sikhs, Buddhists, Baha'i, and Jain.

Obviously, the author's anti-essentialist approach makes direct reference to an interpretive vein that arose in the 1980s and 1990s, and that had in Mohammed Arkoun, among the francophone scholars, and in Aziz al-Azmeh, in the English-speaking world, two influential examples.[9] However, it is a vision that has been more often applied to Middle Eastern societies than to Pakistan.

The volume is divided into four chapters. The first chapter analyses the management of religious diversity. Here the author explains in detailed, yet easily accessible style, the complex layers of the Pakistani religious scene. Central in Boivin's analysis of the local forms of Muslim belief is the concept of «vernacularisation» of the Islamic tradition; a concept that he borrows from the work of Sheldon Pollock, and that the author develops further in the concluding section. The second chapter focuses on the historical construction of the idea of Pakistan. Moving from the original elaboration of a distinct political identity among the Muslims of India, from Sayed Ahmad Khan to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the author proceeds to discuss how, after 1947, the Pakistani state has negotiated the place of Islam with the holders of religious authority, in the first place the *'ulama*. The third chapter extends the analysis to the social structures, in particular to those of the rural society. Here, Boivin's contribution is to relate the concepts of *biradari* («brotherhood») and *zat* («caste») with the religious dimension. The author emphasises the impossibility of analysing these forms of hierarchy without taking into consideration their sacralisation. Thus, social stratification and Islam are not conceived by the author as distinct, but related areas. It is important to note that, in the analysis of the Pakistani rural society, the author offers a

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9. Mohammed Arkoun, 'L'Islam et les Islams', *Hèrodote*, n. 35, 1984, pp. 19-34; Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, New York: Verso Books, 1996.

clear description of the system, without hiding the main aspects of inequality. At the same time, the reader will find a thorough analysis of the origins and social functions performed by the various figures. It is a well-balanced approach, obviously consistent with the Weberian lesson of socio-political study. Something that, unfortunately, we do not always find in other analyses on Pakistan society.

The fourth chapter, which is perhaps the most interesting of the entire volume, brings the discussion made in the preceding chapters to the elaboration of the concept of Islam as a «vernacular culture». The chapter opens with a discussion of the meaning of ethnicity in the Pakistani context, and of its relations with Islam. The author distinguishes the reality of the ethno-linguistic composition of the population from the process of ideological transformation of these identities. In particular, the chapter describes the emergence of sub-national movements from 1947 onwards, focusing in particular on the Pashtuns, and on the role of *pakhtunwali* or tribal code. In the latter part of the chapter, Boivin takes up and expands the concept of vernacularisation, defined as «the process by which agents, in particular the traditional producers and transmitters of a tradition, have appropriated notions or concepts from other linguistic and cultural areas» (p. 163). The author applies this concept to the historical process of Islamisation in the Indian subcontinent, giving ample space to non-*sunni* and popular Islam. Likewise, the author discusses the process of popularisation and syncretism between Islam and Hindu culture under the Muslim power, from the Turkish-Afghan dynasties to the Moghul Empire. Equally interesting is the discussion that the author makes of the role played by local elites during the British *Raj*.

Here, Michel Boivin is able to refer to his own vast knowledge of Ismailism and on Sufi cults in Sindh. The reader finds an in-depth, yet intriguing, discussion of the religious rituals at the graves of the Muslim saints of Sindh, that attract large numbers of believers. Rituals such as the visit to the tomb (*ziarat*), the annual celebration of the death of the saint (*urs* or «marriage» to God), and the ecstatic dance (*dhamal*) are described with special attention to the cult of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar of Sehwan Sharif, perhaps the most renown Sufi saint in the province, and one of the most celebrated in Pakistan. The author concludes the chapter with two very interesting paragraphs dedicated to iconography and material culture, an area that covers a very important space in the Pakistani popular devotion.

The first part refers to the art of drawing sacred paintings on trucks and rickshaws, and to the art of religious posters – known as *poster-e dini* – which are normally sold in *bazaars* and Sufi sanctuaries especially in Sindh and in Punjab. The second paragraph is devoted to the discussion of religious popular music, such as *qawwali*, a genre that has been popularised at international level by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and the sufi poetry or *kafi*.

In conclusion, the book by Michel Boivin is an important contribution to our knowledge of Pakistani society. As the author himself admits,

the volume does not constitute a strictly historical nor a political science analysis. Nevertheless, it may certainly be considered a successful attempt at «decentring» the interpretation on Pakistan. The volume offers an in-depth and accessible analysis of Pakistan society and its religious life «from below». It is recommended reading for any academic interested in South Asia, and the non-specialist reader, who wishes to go beyond the stereotypical and superficial narratives which are frequently offered on Pakistan.