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Review

Tansen Sen. *India, China, and the World: A Connected History*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

BOOK REVIEW BY JAMES ROBSON

India, China, and the World: A Connected History is a big book with equally large ambitions. This thick volume of 541 pages (and a rather large typeface) is befitting of the size of the two geographic regions—India and China—that are its primary subject. As if these two sizeable countries, with exceptionally long histories, were not enough to cover in a single volume, the author also extends his reach to situate the book within a broader world historical context. This expansion of the scope of the book was necessitated by the fact that South Asia and China had networks of connections that linked them to other parts of the world. *India, China, and the World* covers everything from the movement of people, objects, and ideas across the ancient Silk Road up to the formation of the contemporary One Belt, One Road Initiative. Rather than simply depicting the flows between South Asia and China as traveling along a one-way street, the author does an admirable job of demonstrating how those movements were circulatory, drawing from Prasenjit Duara's recent work, and expanded to include Japan, Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

As one would expect from a book with such a broad reach, the material is rich, dense, and complicated. To his credit, the author weaves together a vast amount of material to present a compelling narrative of the long-term connections between India, China, and the world that explicitly rejects a simple tripartite scheme that depicted those connections in terms of three stages: "Buddhist, colonial/decline, and revival" (p. 20). Some of the material discussed in this book will be familiar from the author's earlier work[1]—such as the many references to the role of Mañjuśrī in China at Wutaishan—but most of the material is based on new research using different types of archives and sources and extending the time frame up to the present. Each chapter is well researched and packed with detailed information and striking observations. Even though not everything will strike the reader as new, one significant contribution is the way that it brings a vast array of disparate information together into a coherent larger narrative. Not all questions are resolved, but the theories that are implicitly and explicitly forwarded here will no doubt engage future scholars in lively conversations as they challenge, refine, and explore the implications of the material presented in this book.

India, China, and the World begins with a Foreword by Wang Gungwu, and contains an introduction, five chapters that are arranged chronologically, and a conclusion. The book covers a large time span that stretches from the early centuries BCE up to the pres-

1 Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*.

ent. Sen uses four broad goals to delineate the overarching framework for the detailed discussions of each chapter. The first goal aims to impress upon the reader that the study of "pre-twentieth century interactions between these two regions should not be construed within the framework of modern nation-states" (p. 2), since the two did not exist before the 1940s. The second is that "the connections between these two regions, from the early phases . . . to the contemporary period, have been intimately linked to people living in several other regions, including locations outside of the Asian continent" (pp. 3–4). The third is that "the presence of European colonial powers in Asia did not terminate these connections. Rather, the exchanges witnessed significant growth and diversification with the emergence of new sites of interactions; more intensive circulation of knowledge, goods, and people; and close collaborations between Indians and Chinese" (p. 4). The fourth concerns how "the formation of these territorialized nation-states in the mid-twentieth century created wedges in the relations between the ROI and the PRC that eventually resulted in an armed conflict in 1962 and the subsequent contraction of the broader linkages that had defined and fostered earlier connections between the two regions" (p. 4).

Chapter 1, "The Circulations of Knowledge," addresses the circulation of knowledge about geography, manufacturing technologies, astronomy, medicine, and linguistics between South Asia and China from the early years BCE to the sixteenth century CE. How did ideas and concepts travel? How were they translated? How were they transformed? These are some of the ways that the author approaches the complex nature of the circulation of knowledge and technology between South Asia, China, and beyond. Sen details how Buddhism was a key factor in fostering connections across Asia. The concept of circulatory connections is in many ways an appealing model, but certain applications of that theory—such as with medical knowledge and paper-making technology—are only supported by rather speculative evidence.

Chapter 2, "The Routes, Networks, and Objects of Circulation," turns to the circulation of goods and objects and the networks they traveled in the period prior to the arrival of Europeans. In this chapter, the author does well to discuss maritime routes in addition to the more commonly studied overland routes. Sen argues that the three main motivators for exchange between the regions were Buddhism, the Chinese tributary system, and the demand for bulk goods. This chapter is as much about the objects in circulation—including exotic things like frankincense, giraffes, and pepper—as it is about the networks that facilitated their movement not just between South Asia and China, but also out into the wider global flow of things.

Chapter 3, "The Imperial Connections," argues that the expeditions undertaken by the Ming-dynasty admiral Zheng He in the early fifteenth century had a significant impact on the circulation of people and goods between India and China. Here we begin to see more clearly the importance of the maritime flows between those regions and beyond. Throughout this discussion, Sen includes interesting discussions of related topics concerning migrant communities and new places where Indians and Chinese would have congregated during this period that also saw the arrival of European colonial powers. Yet, the period between the sixteenth and nineteenth century was not, the author argues, a period of decline precipitated by the increasing presence of those imperial powers, but should be seen as a period of expanded commercial activity and newly forged connections. Sen ends the chapter by saying that "the period between the fifteenth and the late nineteenth centuries needs to be examined for the vibrancy and the multilayered connections it created. In fact, the discussion above suggests that this period may have been a critical nexus between the pre-Ming phases of interactions and the contemporary bilateral relations between the Republic of India (ROI) and the People's Republic of China (PRC)" (p. 290). This midpoint in the book is also a transition point in the historical narrative since the discussion shifts to consider important developments that led up to the formation of the modern nation-states of India and China. This chapter struck me as presenting a novel thesis, but one that might have been developed further. I suspect that some readers would have appreciated a more sustained discussion and analysis of this period so that the author could further develop his ideas and also engage with other recent research on imperialism and the concomitant rise of nation-states like India and China.

Chapter 4, "Pan-Asianism and Renewed Connections," discusses how, in the aftermath of European colonialism, India and China began to establish stronger connections as a new sense of pan-Asianism developed and they had to face the reality of Japanese imperialism. Sen tracks these developments through to their decline during the 1930s and the period of decolonialization in

the mid-1940s. Much of the focus in this chapter is on the role intellectuals played, including the important Asian Relations Conference convened in 1947.

Chapter 5, "The Geopolitical Disconnect," concerns the latter half of the twentieth century, a period the author describes as one of failed opportunities (such as the principles outlined during the Bandung Conference in 1955), increasing mutual suspicion, and finally the armed conflict of 1962. Even though this phase is marked by significant bilateral relationships (such as the Republic of India being the first non-Communist state to recognize the new People's Republic of China in 1950), the author argues that the connections were largely rhetorical—captured in the phrase "Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai" or "Indians and Chinese are brothers" (p. 409)—and did not lead to any breakthroughs in cultural understanding or concrete action. Tensions between the two countries remained due to ongoing territorial disputes and the status of Tibet. Sen guides the reader through a voluminous collection of interesting books, pamphlets, and newspaper articles that express well the aspirations and vicissitudes of this period of interaction. Sen's focus primarily remains on voices depicting the fate of Chinese in India—such as through the intimate portrait of the artist Chang Xiufeng and his imprisonment and deportation—and only briefly mentions the detention of Makhan Lal Das and Indians detained in China during this period. Perhaps this issue of balance is due to available sources. Sen carries forward the discussion of tensions, from the role played by the philosopher Bertrand Russell as a kind of broker between the Indians and Chinese through to the recent One Belt, One Road Initiative of the Chinese President Xi Jinping. Due to ongoing tensions and territorial issues, India remains the only major Asian country to refrain from signing that initiative.

The conclusion provides a map of the large territory covered in the book, from periods of harmonious connections and fruitful exchanges to mutual suspicion and even outright conflict. Sen sums up the historical connections between India and China well as a "mishmash of complexities stemming from multiregional interconnectedness and indispensable interdependencies as well as detrimental perceptions and geopolitical antagonism" (p. 479). In *India, China, and the World*, Sen makes much of Liang Qichao's welcome address to Rabindranath Tagore on his trip to China, in which he concluded his talk by saying, "the responsibility that we bear to the whole of mankind is great indeed, and there should be, I think, a warm spirit of cooperation between India and China. The coming of Rabindranath Tagore will, I hope, mark the beginning of an important period of history" (p. 2). It has been almost a century since Liang spoke those words. The "warm spirit of cooperation" did come, but it remained short-lived and quickly gave way to a much cooler spirit of distrust and conflict.

Over the years, scholars interested in Sino-Indian relations and world history will no doubt subject many of the details presented in this study to rigorous analysis. It is not possible for me to do that in this review so I will merely raise a few larger conceptual issues. The author rightly begins by problematizing the key terms "India" and "China" in the title of the book (p. 14ff). In the premodern period these terms did not refer to anything like the modern nation-states we now associate with them. It was only in the 1940s that they came to correspond to the current political boundaries of the Republic of India (ROI) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). This is an important point to emphasize. That being said, the author's discussion is rather confusing to follow. For reasons unclear to me, in dealing with the premodern period the author avoids the use of "India," which is replaced by South Asia. Yet, China is retained as unproblematic. It seems from the introduction that the author circumvents the problem of using "China" by providing dynastic specificity. These principles are not strictly adhered to throughout the book. "China" is consistently used without dynastic referents, but the author goes back and forth between referring to "India" (or Indic) or "South Asia" (especially in chapter 2). The author admits that his use of shifting terminologies will be "befuddling at times" (p. 18). I wonder if a different method might have been adopted. Would it have been possible to just stipulate at the outset that the terms "India" and "China" are being used as a convenience and should not be understood as coincident with the modern referents? Then, in each chapter dealing with each period of history the author could define or refine the area that is encompassed by those two terms. One of the reasons for preferring such an approach is the simple fact that even a designation like "South Asia" is itself a modern category that has its own complex set of issues. The author might have been able to avoid some of the befuddlement associated with the complex terminology by referring readers to Martin

W. Lewis and Kären Wigen's work[2] or other works in humanistic geography that have considered the issues related to these labels.

Given the wealth of material that is covered in this book it may seem picky or overly pedantic to suggest that the author could have engaged in further scholarly conversations, but the lack of engagement with some key topics and books will strike some readers as a lost opportunity. Although this is a big book that covers a lot of ground over a long stretch of time, my sense is that it could have also more expansively engaged with some of the ideas of scholars who have been working on similar issues related to regional and global/world history. The author uses the word "world" in the title—ostensibly signaling its place in world history—but does not discuss the upsurge in works on global or world history (a field that has been introduced and assessed by, among others, Lynn Hunt and Pamela Crossley).[3] One of the reasons it would have been compelling for the author to engage with global or world history is that due to his broad linguistic capabilities he does not fall neatly into the empirical researcher or the philosophical interpreter camps. Since the author is interested in the places where South Asians/Indians and Chinese came into contact with each other, one might have also expected some reflection on Mary Louise Pratt's notion of "contact zones."[4] Throughout the book the author has a tendency to cite recent work on a topic, but does not refer to some of the classic older works on which the newer works depend (see, for example, the discussion of the cult of the book on p. 156 which refers to Jinah Kim, but does not mention the seminal work of Gregory Schopen).[5] I would have also liked to read the author's reflections on older works by scholars like Hu Shih, Jan Yün-hua ("Buddhist Relations between India and Sung China") and Wilhelm Halbfass since their works have informed general knowledge on a range of topics related to the interactions between India, China, and other parts of the world.[6] It would be good to know where, in the author's opinion, they made contributions and where they missed the mark or have been superceded. The author might have also profitably engaged with the more recent work of Victor Lieberman in his *Strange Parallels* series.[7] It should also be noted that there is a near complete lack of reference to the voluminous body of Japanese-language scholarship. I raise these suggestions here since the works I mention might have inspired the author to provide more analytic rigor to this heavily descriptive work. Finally, there remain small issues with regard to Pinyin romanization (for instance, Sida should be Xida [p. 85], Saifoding should be Saifuding [p. 166], to note just a couple).

None of these oversights detract from the overall quality of *India, China, and the World: A Connected History* nor do they detract from the pleasure that the reader will enjoy as they learn fascinating new details with every turn of the page. This book will make for engaging reading for specialists and general readers who are interested in the *longue durée* history of exchanges between India and China. Rather than being the end of the story, however, this work strikes me as more of a new beginning that will initiate a new phase of research on the vast, complicated, and continually evolving history of the relationship between India and China in the context of world history.

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2 Lewis and Wigen, *Myth of Continents*.

3 See Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era*; and Crossley, *What is Global History*?

4 See Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

5 See Kim, *Receptacle of the Sacred*; and Schopen, "The Phrase '*sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet*' in the *Vajracchedikā*."

6 See Hu, "The Indianization of China"; Hu, "Rabindranath Tagore in China"; Jan, "Buddhist Relations between India and Sung China"; and Halbfass, *India and Europe*.

7 Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia*; Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Volume 2*.

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