# Introduction
## Historicity, Power Relations and Visuality as Perspectives on Asian Contexts

This volume contains a selection of my publications on the shaping of colonial, postcolonial and late socialist modernity in India and Vietnam, two great Asian societies with contrasting experiences of empire, decolonization, and the rise and fall of the twentieth-century socialist world system.[1] My interests have developed in diverse ways over the years, beginning when I made my first trips to India as a PhD student, hoping to go beyond conventional missionary-centred narratives in researching the workings of religious conversion under colonial rule. The items presented here include some of my work on religion, as well as my subsequent publications on nationalism, caste, and colonial knowledge production. There are also more recent works reflecting my decision to embark on research in Vietnam, where I have been pursuing projects on marketization, moral citizenship and visuality. I bring these essays together now in the hope that the approaches I have taken in exploring issues of modernity, morality and collective identity in historical and contemporary ethnographic contexts will excite interest among scholars of today working within and beyond our fast-growing fields of comparative inter-Asian studies, as well as those engaged in the anthropological study of moral life, state socialism, and the legacy and afterlife of empire. What I offer in this Introduction is both an overview of the book's concerns and themes, and an account of the ways my aims and methodologies have developed over time in relation to the big debates and shifts in disciplinary perspective that have been important for my past and recent research and writing.

The first two chapters of the book focus on aspects of Asian modernity that are still significant concerns in my work, as well as being topics of ongoing debate in anthropology and many neighbouring fields. Chapter 1 explores a distinctively translocal strand in twentieth-century imaginings of modern

Indian nationhood; and Chapter 2 deals with the views and practices of Indian and Vietnamese religious modernizers.

The next four items highlight my engagement with the issues of moral selfhood that have become a central feature of my research in Vietnam. Chapter 3 is an entirely new essay, addressing a topic I have been exploring for some years in the course of fieldwork, but have not previously dealt with in my published writings. The ethical challenges faced by Vietnamese women in the contemporary white-collar workplace. This is followed by three more chapters dealing with personal and national understandings of achievement, success and aspiration, which have also been key elements of my Vietnam fieldwork. Chapter 4 explores the issues of visuality that I have sought to relate to the ways both families and the state construe the leading of a morally sound and successful life in today's Vietnam; in Chapter 5 I seek to show how a distinctively Vietnamese ideal of achieving selfhood is understood and taught within the home and classroom. Chapter 6 discusses national narratives of heroism and virtuous beneficence on the part of Vietnam in the context of what I have called the global socialist ecumene.[2]

The parallel strand of my work dealing with comparative colonialism has included research on the troubled yet distinctively syncretistic forms of colonial knowledge production generated out of interactions with cultural revivalists and religious nationalists in both India and French-ruled Algeria, which is the focus of my contribution to a joint volume on comparative modernities in a variety of worldwide colonial settings (Bayly 2002). The last two items presented here, Chapters 7 and 8, deploy a mix of historical and anthropological perspectives to explore issues that speak to my continuing interest in colonialism and the painful afterlives of empire.

All the items included here reflect the extent to which the contexts where I have conducted research have shaped my attempts to engage with past and current scholarly debates. This has included our still active disputes about 'derivative discourses' (Chatterjee 1986), especially those framed around the widely held view of Asia's nationalist modernizers as perpetual prisoners of the colonizer's post-Enlightenment knowledge systems. Intersecting with these debates are those disputing the extent to which the pervasive rifts and tensions within the Asian postcolonies including those of caste and ethnoreligious community in India, and Vietnam's sensitivities about the perceived civilizational backwardness of its ethnolinguistic minorities, are to be seen as immutable givens of tradition and culture, or instead as contingent features of the historically dynamic here and now. If the latter, through whose agency do these fractures arise and endure: that of the colonizers and their elite heirs and successors, or as products of more complex interpenetrations between a multitude of differently situated actors and causalities?

Of course these have all been issues of great contention in the societies where I have worked. My work on religious conversion was very much an attempt to engage with the battles that are still being waged in India about the

legitimacy of the secular nationalist ideals on which the post-independence constitutional order was framed. They are thus the concerns that shaped my thinking about the Muslim and Christian minority populations of the country's far south as practitioners of faiths that they and their forebears had comprehensively reshaped and vernacularized. It was an approach intended as a challenge to a number of widely held views of the region's convert groups, notably those of the Hindu supremacists who still portray the non-Hindu minorities as enemies of Indian nationhood whose faiths forever align them with the crimes of invaders and colonizers.

My subsequent work on caste took shape against a background of the equally sensitive debates taking place in India about how to preserve the country's fragile national unity in the face of growing 'caste war' violence (Bayly 1999: 342–64), and the militant campaigns for reparational justice waged by Dalits (ex-untouchables) and other non-elite groups using caste identity as markers of inherited deprivation and social disability (ibid.: 268–305). Once again, what I saw and heard in those turbulent times had a significant impact on my research agenda. I wanted in particular to understand how India's caste-like ways of life could entail such striking yet perpetually entangled divergences between the notion of caste as a scheme of rigidly oppositional exclusions and hierarchies, and its manifestations on the ground as an array of flexible and open-ended status markers and mobilization tools.

In Vietnam, matters of equally serious concern cannot be articulated in the public arena in the open way that such issues have long been debated in India. But in the course of fieldwork I have come to appreciate the many ways by which citizens in the urban settings I have explored may gain a sense of what it is that is being widely contested and reflected on well beyond their family and friendship networks. This includes the lively world of online blogs and chatrooms. Despite periodic crackdowns on netizens who post incautiously about the state and its elites, these are fora where notably frank discussions are pursued, much more so than in present-day China. State media coverage of such things as official corruption scandals and unhappy stories of domestic violence and family breakdown therefore give rise to vigorous if discreetly voiced contestations about the things that challenge and divide people as they experience the ups and downs of the country's giant leap from high socialism to the turbulent marketization processes that were first initiated in the early 1990s.

The place of women in this story of unprecedented change and upheaval is a key feature of these debates. They are often most heated in regard to the demands placed on wives and mothers to live as stainless moral exemplars within and beyond the home, while simultaneously boosting their families' living standards by developing the skills of the cannily entrepreneurial dealmaker (Leshkowich 2014). And as it became clear that these were matters of great concern for my interlocutors, I sought to explore these sensitive aspects of family and workplace life as a key topic of my Hanoi research. Chapters 3

and 4 document the ways such a woman can be both praised and vilified when she uses her marketplace know-how to advantage those in her care. And of course in doing so I also hoped to engage with our ongoing academic debates about whether to categorize today's Vietnam as yet another site of corrosive neoliberalism destructively embraced by uncaring state and global elites, or whether a more nuanced perspective is required to make sense of its distinctive modes of late socialist postcoloniality (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012).

## Methodologies and Research Agendas

What I provide below are some reflections on the topics and concerns I have addressed over the years. I have been encouraged to do this by friends and colleagues on grounds that the issues I have explored are still of much scholarly interest today, hence the hope that an account of how my approach and methodologies have taken shape will be of value to those developing their own present and future research agendas. As an anthropologist originally trained in history, I have had a particular interest in developing points of interface between the two fields, employing archival and oral-historical methodologies as well as those of on-site ethnographic fieldwork. I began my research at a time of keen debate about issues that have both differentiated and connected the work of historians and anthropologists, including the question of whether to expand the disciplines' repertoires by embracing one another's perspectives and methodologies.

The answer to this was a nuanced and creative 'yes' from some of the most original thinkers in both fields. In history, the engagement of Keith Thomas and Peter Burke with anthropologists' work on topics ranging from magic and witchcraft to the communicative force of public ritual generated compelling accounts of early modern social transformations in Britain and continental Europe. I was also excited by the work of Nancy Farriss (1984), whose accounts of Amerindian encounters with Christianity in Spanish-ruled Mexico told a story of indigenous agency and appropriation under colonial rule that greatly inspired my thinking about both caste and popular religious practice.[3]

As I became evermore enthused by my move to anthropology, I was equally drawn to the moves being made by anthropologists to add issues of temporality and historicity to their concerns, thus overturning the long-standing view that history-mindedness in anthropology could entail only the discredited framings of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century evolutionists and diffusionists (e.g. Fabian 1983; Mintz 1985). Edmund Leach's groundbreaking 1954 ethnography of Burma's Kachin highlanders was and still is widely read, and rightly so, given Leach's radical rethinking of the concept of structure, a core reference point for the anthropology of his day and beyond. Leach's account of Kachin political order as a dynamic of recurrent transformations between the contrasting principles of chiefly hierarchy and egalitarianism

was an intriguing anticipation of the structure versus agency debates of the 1980s.[4]

The work of Renato Rosaldo (1980) was a landmark for me in those battles about whether human cultural life should be understood as the product of timeless, predetermined scriptings or as dynamic improvisations, continually refashioned in contexts of world-altering entanglements, including the catastrophes of empire-building and colonial conquest. So too the rich literature using colonial 'first contact' case studies for reflections on the nature of temporality as experienced in diverse cultural contexts. I was particularly gripped by the writings of those both attacking and defending Marshall Sahlins's demand for anthropologists to become practitioners of what he called structuralist history, by which he meant charting the enduring but never immutable 'cultural orderings' of human action over time in such contexts as Pacific islanders' early encounters with Western colonizers (Sahlins 1985: vii).[5] What struck me most about Sahlins's work was its bracingly global reach, as in his celebrated 'Cosmologies of Capitalism' tracking the giant flows of commodities linking China, Britain and the Pacific islands in terms he saw as dynamically world-altering, but with appropriation and agency on the part of all those involved, rather than the obliteration of local worlds and indigenous conceptual anchorings (Sahlins 1988).

Transformational for both fields was, of course, the call to make the 'epistemic violence' of colonial power-knowledge (Spivak 1988) the central concern of much or even all historical and anthropological research. So too was the bombshell effect of postcolonial critique, with its insistence that the toxic legacy of Western empire was the animating principle of global modernity in all its modes and forms (e.g. Barlow 1997). These were critical developments for Asia specialists (e.g. Chandra 1971 and 1980; Bhabha 1994), and were important for my own thinking about the ways in which competing ideals of modernity were conceived, personified and contested in the Asian contexts I was seeking to understand. So too were the works of the subaltern studies scholars, whose use of updated Gramscian Marxism to chart what they identified as hidden histories of anticolonial resistance did much to reshape the study of empire and nationalism within and beyond the subcontinent, prefiguring the field's subsequent 'discursive turn' (Chaturvedi 2000).

The subaltern school scholarship I particularly admired was Dipesh Chakrabarty's subtly nuanced 'provincializing' of Europe's modernist historicizing tools, with its reflections on what he saw as the painful 'heterotemporality' of colonial and postcolonial India's modern lifeworlds (Chakrabarty 1992; 2000: 83–96).[6] That vision of colliding or disjunctive temporalities contributed significantly to my thinking about the tensions between scientized evolutionism and cosmological epoch theory in the battles between self-styled Hindu modernizers debating the place of caste in the value system of the new, free and spiritually enlightened India they were seeking to create (Bayly 1999: 144–86). It was also important for my attempts to understand the

intertwinings of temporal and spatial registers in my Vietnamese interlocutors' engagements with the ups and downs of their homeland's revolutionary past and troubled contemporary experiences of globalized market socialism (Bayly 2013; and Chapter 8 of this volume).

What I did not find persuasive, however, were versions of postcolonial critique that posited a homogenizing two-sidedness in the entanglements of imperial power. I preferred the approach of Engseng Ho (2004), whose research on the traversings of Indian Ocean religious and commercial networks over many centuries on the part of diasporic Hadramawtis paints a picture of evasions and subversions taking shape across multiple imperial frontiers, rather than a binary delineation of domination and subjugation within the confines of a single empire. So too Cooper on the many forms of mobility and interaction that shaped the dynamic processes of 'imperial state-making and unmaking' (Cooper 2005: 154), and Sugata Bose's account of the Indian Ocean as a domain of 'multiple and competing universalisms' in the age of global empire (Bose 2006: 270). These visions of plural cosmopolitanisms came much to mind as I began to think comparatively about the dilemmas faced by the men and women who regarded themselves as twentieth-century 'socialist moderns' in both India and post-independence Vietnam. They were key sources for my notion of a global socialist ecumene forged and experienced by many Asians in interactions with their counterparts from other global regions, taking dynamic shape as an arena of shared though often inharmonious moral imaginings both within and beyond the boundaries of individual 'postcolonies', as will be seen in Chapters 1, 6 and 8.

Of course it is now widely held that the structure/agency question was decisively settled by the rejection of some if not all forms of structural analysis, including classic Marxism. For many anthropologists, questions about class position and human intentionality have been replaced by the projects we label poststructuralist, notably those exploring human and non-human entities connecting and disconnecting through the open-ended processes of the assemblage or network. Yet I have found much to connect with in the work of scholars who have taken structuralist thought seriously, though not uncritically, in its various strands and manifestations. As can be seen in Chapter 7 of this volume, my attempt to construct an historically informed understanding of India's caste system sought to historicize its norms and lived experience by asking how a nuanced array of class-aware political economy perspectives could be brought into conversation with the insights of those for whom Louis Dumont's structuralist account of Hindu moral thought was the critical jumping-off point.

This includes those attacking as well as defending or creatively modifying Dumont's vision of caste (1966) as the product of enduring civilizational values expressed and manifested throughout the subcontinent by the structuring oppositional principles of purity and pollution as its core conceptual categories.[7] And when I began working in Vietnam, I found it fascinating that my Hanoi interlocutors were clearly accustomed to moving back and forth

between conceptions of agency and selfhood that come from both sides of the structuralist–poststructuralist divide. What I have in mind is the mix of tensions and interactions to be observed between the two forms of morally salient perception that citizens of the Vietnamese party-state learn to tack between from early childhood. As I explain in Chapter 5, the first of these orientations is the hard-edged Marxist social structure theory which is still taught as incontrovertible scientific truth in every Vietnamese state school and university. Its visions of class and temporality are the staples of the classroom 'morals subject' teaching discussed in that chapter. These principles of structured social order are also given ubiquitous visual life in the giant official slogan posters that pervade the country's public spaces. In Chapters 3 and 4, I attempt to show how this kind of state iconography can be used as a source of insight into the personal moral quandaries and subjectivities of a contemporary late socialist life.

In striking contrast is a second form of perception that invites comparisons with the accounts of partible personhood and structureless sociality provided by anthropologists we think of as poststructuralists (see e.g. Strathern 2018). What I am referring to are my Hanoi interlocutors' understandings of the everyday world as a flow of continual interpenetrations between the realms of mortal and non-mortal moral agency. The Hanoians I work with have generously included me in events such as soul-callings (*gọi hồn*), which are occasions when the living can access departed kinfolk through a psychic or seer (*bà đồng*) with the ability to initiate penetrative possession (*nhập*) by the dead. And my friends have been keen to share with me the understandings they bring to these interactions, notably their sense of the human self as porous and readily penetrable by the ancestral dead and other supramortal beings who play an ever-active role in human affairs.

Important work that has helped me to appreciate how this conception of dynamically permeable selfhood may challenge yet also harmonize with the sensibilities of the science-loving socialist modern includes that of Lambek (1993) and Yang (2015). What my Hanoi interlocutors have also shown me is that this is a highly visual realm of experience, with photographs and other filmed images playing critically agentive roles at moments of connectivity between these parallel domains of temporality and affective space. What I have learned in the course of fieldwork is that there are many tensions and difficulties in the ways these divergent forms of perception may be experienced in Hanoi life. But the experiences I document in Chapter 3 and elsewhere (Bayly 2023) suggest something intriguingly different from the painful disjunctures discerned so compellingly in Chakrabarty's account of the Hindu modern's predicament, this being a view of Marxist analytical thought as a framing that need not necessarily unsettle or clash with a Vietnamese understanding of an auratic temporal life within and beyond the human realm.

Visuality has also been a highly productive domain of interest in the still very active field of colonialism/postcolonialism studies. Running parallel to

Bernard Cohn's widely read claims about the imperial Census of India as an objectifying tool of colonial power-knowledge (Cohn 1987) was Cohn's reading of a celebrated exchange of views about portraiture in an encounter between the seventeenth-century Mughal emperor Jahangir, and the English ambassador to the imperial court, Sir Thomas Roe (Cohn 1996: 111–19). Cohn saw this as a moment of epistemic incommensurability, with the emperor's perceptions emanating from a 'substantive' or boundaryless theory of objects and persons, and Roe the embodiment of crude Western commodity logic. But this radical alterity framing was convincingly challenged by Pinch, who saw the encounter as a dynamic exchange in which the two participants' differences of perception proved to be at least partially translatable across the cultural and racial divide (Pinch 1999).

As issues of state power became increasingly central to my work, I came to believe that a similar rethink was in order for another of Cohn's concerns, this being his account of the giant spectacles of ritualized imperial power-politics known as *darbar*s (fealty ceremonies) staged in the latter days of the Raj (Cohn 1983). The largest of these was the great Delhi *darbar* of 1911 at which the client rulers of India's once independent princedoms paid homage to the King-Emperor seated high above them on a giant dais.

Cohn saw this as an enactment of wholly one-sided panopticism, the news photos of each prince bowing to the enthroned British monarch to be understood as humiliating materializations of their subjugation and disempowerment.[8] But I felt that a different reading was in order for at least one key participant, the Begum of Bhopal. The many images of this female Muslim dynast, face and figure completely concealed by her burqah are not mentioned by Cohn. But what I think they show is the gaze of power repelled and even reversed in ways suggestive of a much more ambiguous and open-ended dynamic of visuality than his argument allows. The Begum makes herself invisible to the colonial gaze: she sees and they do not; she is at least to some degree a figure of power or at least an agentive participant in the politics of this particular 'scopic' moment (Jay 1988).

Early on in my Vietnam research I encountered a 1925 colonial police photo of an imprisoned female shaman reproduced in a French Orientalist journal, and I came to think of this image in much the same terms. The picture is undeniably an artefact of colonialism's gendered brutality: the woman's body has been stripped bare to show the set of tattoos inscribed across her torso. Yet as in the work of Strassler (2010), who explores the agentive dynamism of people's visual lives in her Indonesian research contexts, I believe we have yet another source of insight into the gains to be made from taking the study of visuality beyond issues of one-sided subjugation and hegemony.

The most dramatic feature of this prison image is the woman's large central tattoo spelling out '*Liberté Egalité Fraternité*' in boldly legible French. This would surely have been a deeply menacing spectacle for any French viewer: an appropriation of France's own revolutionary ideal at a time of great alarm at

the prospect of insurrectionary violence among the empire's turbulent Asian subject populations (Salemink 1994; Zinoman 2000; Thomas 2017: 211–44). What this also called to mind were the studies I had engaged with for my India research, notably Silverblatt on Spanish witchcraft panics in colonial Peru, focusing on Amerindian women accused of witchcraft who terrorized their inquisitors by declaring that they were indeed in league with the Devil and would use their powers to curse and destroy their Spanish persecutors (Silverblatt 1987). Hence my reading of that French image as another token of the leaky subjectivities engendered by colonialism, producing for the viewer one of those mimetic moments when the boundaries of language and gendered racial hierarchy are breached and subverted by those subjected to the colonizer's gaze (Bhabha 1994; see also Taussig 1986; Stoler 2002).

## Engagements and Collaborations

I was immensely fortunate that as my research focus shifted from India to Vietnam, I found a new academic home in the Cambridge University Department of Social Anthropology, then as now a place of exceptional collegiality and scholarly brio. Its staff were making bold interventions in all the big debates of the day, doing so as they do today in a spirit of lively eclecticism and open-mindedness about the research and teaching they undertake. I benefitted enormously from colleagues' support and encouragement as I sought to bring my long-standing interest in colonialism into conversation with the department's key areas of expertise, including its powerful contributions to the study of socialism and postsocialist transformations within and beyond Eurasia. My research was further energized by its novel collaborative ventures. These included the 1989 shamanism and state power project, which allowed me to try out my early thoughts about how to connect anthropological and historical perspectives as I sought to situate the study of caste in a context of inspirational religion and its interactions with the power of rulers and other political elites (Bayly 1994). There was also much to learn from my colleagues' interest in enriching anthropology's input to the study of modernity through engagement with the idea of multiple or vernacularized 'modernities'.[9]

In the work I wanted to do on Vietnam as a site of late socialist transformations and boundary crossings, I found much to admire in the perspectives of scholars concerned with other complex and colliding historicities. I was particularly gripped by Donald Donham's (1999) exploration of competing temporal narratives at play in the context of Ethiopia's turbulent twentieth-century experiences of Christian missionizing and violent revolutionary change. What I found in Donham's work was something more nuanced and compelling than an oppositional, broad-brush pairing of just two contrasting models of historicity: one linear and the other cyclical, each to be mapped onto a single cultural whole in the form of a simple 'ours' vs. the non-Western

Other's 'theirs'. Donham's account of the multiple interacting temporalities impacting the world of his Ethiopian interlocutors is very different from the two-sided historicity models employed by so many other history-minded ethnographers. His approach was particularly valuable for my Vietnam research, helping me to spot the distinctive ways in which a sense of personal and familial life can in time both clash and interpenetrate with public narratives of the nation's ongoing life, especially as they are materialized in state iconography. It also contributed significantly to my thinking about the comparative questions I have sought to address in exploring both Indian and Vietnamese experiences and dilemmas in contexts of colonial and late socialist modernities and cosmopolitanisms.

I return to the issue of comparison in this volume's Conclusion, reflecting on the ways my own comparative concerns compare with those that have been placed under scrutiny in our discipline's recent revival of interest in the ethics and purposes of anthropological comparison (Candea 2019; Schnegg and Lowe 2020; Pelkmans and Walker 2023).

## Embracing Fieldwork

Rereading these essays for publication has evoked memories of many kinds. The first two chapters and also Chapter 8 call to mind my earliest India research trips, and the excitement of being allowed to make use of family papers and other documents in private hands in the port towns and pilgrimage centres of the subcontinent's far south. My attempts to understand the historic shaping of the caste system, and the ways the leaders and followers of popular religious movements conceptualized their own and other people's spirituality, were much enriched by those long days spent poring over fragile texts and struggling with their faded handwriting and tricky vernacular syntax.

Yet what I recall even more vividly are my conversations with the community members who generously invited me into their homes and devotional spaces. The accounts they shared with me about everything from the ups and downs of the local fish trade to the complexities of staging big religious festivals in localities with turbulent intercommunal histories were windows into a world of living actors and contemporary concerns. I also began to appreciate how much one may learn by attending to what happens around and beyond the spoken and written word, foreshadowing my interest in non-verbal communication and what I have called agentive silence, a notion explored in Chapter 4.

The appeal of seeking knowledge at first hand rather than archivally became ever more compelling during those trips. So even before I decided to shift my focus to Vietnam, I realized that the path I wanted to follow was in the ethnographic here and now, though always with an eye to issues of historicity and change over time. Chapter 2's account of religiosity in modes both championed and derided by self-styled religious reformers builds to a

significant extent on what I learned about contemporary matters of belief and practice in the company of devotees and shrine officiants in southern Kerala and Tamilnadu. But it is the chapters based on my research in Hanoi that most fully bring to mind the fascination of fieldwork, as well as the uncertainties and missteps that make the moments of mutual trust and connectedness all the more rewarding.

Yet while developing these new concerns, I never thought of my move from history to anthropology as a disavowal or a severing of ties. I remain grateful for the training I received in history, and for the many fruitful exchanges I have had with historians, especially those who have advanced our understanding of the making and unmaking of global empire and the enduring afterlives of colonialism. And I continue to share with many like-minded anthropologists a belief in historical awareness as a critical reference point for our discipline. The presence of the past in contemporary lives is a key theme of the items presented here, as can be seen in the chapters dealing with the intertwining of familial and individual microhistories with the historicizing claims of imperial polities and postcolonial nation states.

I have gained enormously from engaging with the work of distinguished scholars from both Vietnam and India. Notable among those from the subcontinent whose friendship and learning I have particularly valued are Professor Sugata Bose, Professor Seema Alavi, Professor Tapati Guha, and my former students Dr Sukanya Sarbhadikary and the late Dr Maya Warrier. In Vietnam, I owe a tremendous debt to the late Professor Đặng Phong, long-time doyen of the social sciences in Hanoi, a pioneer in his homeland in the use of oral history methodologies to illuminate his wide-ranging research on the country's twentieth-century economic history (Đặng Phong 2002). I am equally indebted to the wonderful network of anthropologists who have done so much to advance the discipline in Hanoi and beyond: Professor Nguyễn Văn Huy, Professor Lâm Bá Nam, Dr Lê Thị Minh Lý, Mrs Nguyễn Thị Thu Hương, and my former student Dr Lâm Minh Châu.

I have also retained my interest in bringing history and anthropology into conversation in ways I have sought to make productive for both fields. The extract from my caste book provided in Chapter 7 asks questions that I hope have been of value for those seeking historical as well as anthropological understandings of the subcontinent: how and why the great changes in Indian political life in the centuries before and after colonial conquest fostered the appeal of caste-like ways of life as a basis for personal self-fashioning and collective identity, and with what effects that appeal has been contested and perpetuated in more recent times. Questions about historical change are addressed in other chapters too, including Chapter 1, which considers how twentieth-century commentators from within and beyond the French and British colonial systems applied appropriated versions of evolutionist 'civilizing mission' theory to their understandings of the giant transformations that were believed to be taking place in the relationship between the West and its

'awakening' interlocutors. This suggests a degree of cognitive traffic between colonizers and colonial subjects that I hoped would provide food for thought for both historians and anthropologists seeking to enrich and nuance our understanding of colonialism's 'epistemic violence' (Spivak 1988).

There are also chapters that deal with the historicizing of personal and national self-understandings in the two Asian contexts I have focused on. Chapter 6 explores the differences between past and present understandings of socialism in Vietnam, and how these have connected the party-state's portrayals of the enduring force of Vietnamese nationhood to wider narratives of revolutionary bonds as forged and sustained in the spaces of what I have called the 'global socialist ecumene'. And Chapter 8 asks how the big changes in national self-understanding that took shape in both India and Vietnam in the post-independence period impacted the distinctive groups of people whose high-profile embodiment of modern 'culturedness' came to be both exalted and vilified in their homelands.

The concerns of the research I have conducted in Vietnam's national capital, Hanoi, have taken ethnographic and theoretical shape in a variety of ways. My first project in Vietnam was a study of how revolution and its aftermath were experienced by one of the country's key networks of globally active nation-builders. These are the members of the Hanoi intelligentsia families who both benefitted and suffered from their ability to negotiate the troubled legacies of empire and revolution in the far-flung spaces of the former socialist world system. This was a project in which I also sought to make comparisons with the case of twentieth-century India's own globally active 'socialist moderns', as can be seen in Chapter 8.

My subsequent fieldwork in Vietnam has taken place in a very different milieu, that of the inner-city Hanoi neighbourhood I call West Lake, where I have been working with people of much more modest economic and social circumstances than those of my intelligentsia interlocutors. This work in Hanoi has involved participant-observation in family homes and at the shrines and spirit-possession venues now crucial to the lives of market-conscious families, thus expanding my interest in Asian religion in a variety of new directions. A key feature of this research has been my attempt to add a novel perspective to our discipline's fast-growing interest in the forging of new anthropological approaches to the study of moral life and ethical selfhood.[10]

What I have sought to add to this scholarship is an attempt to bring the anthropology of visuality into fruitful conversation with our recent anthropological studies of ethics and morality, doing so in the context of Vietnam's turbulent experiences of life as a one-party Communist republic committed since the early 1990s to the principles of globalized consumerist marketization, while still communicating to its citizens in the verbal and visual idioms of classic high socialism. The chapters that deal with aspects of Vietnamese moral selfhood are therefore also concerned with both personal and official iconography, documenting the ethical dilemmas my interlocutors experience

in regard to these forms of image use in today's Vietnam. In attempting to connect my interest in moral life and agency with my equally keen interest in visuality, I have hoped to offer something new and valuable to our field, perhaps encouraging those exploring questions of morality and ethical practice to consider how the verbal, reflective and embodied practices that provide such important clues to our interlocutors' experiences moral selfhood may be related to the ways they engage with the affective and sensual promptings of the visual, symbolic and representational.

## Debts and Anchorings

Apart from Chapter 3, 'At Home in the World of Work', the items presented here have been published elsewhere, and I am grateful to have received permission to reprint them. Chapters 1, 4 and 5 appeared in *Modern Asian Studies* – 38(3) 2004, 54(5) 2020, and 48(3) 2014 respectively; Chapter 2 in *Ritual and Memory: Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion*, edited by H. Whitehouse and J. Laidlaw (AltaMira, 2004); and Chapter 6 in *Enduring Socialism: Explorations of Revolution and Transformation, Restoration and Continuation*, edited by H. West and P. Raman (Berghahn Books, 2009). Chapter 7 is an extract from my monograph *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the 18th Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Chapter 8 was published as the Introduction to my monograph *Asian Voices in a Postcolonial Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

I am indebted to the many colleagues both past and present, in Cambridge and further afield, whose unfailing support has done so much to sustain and encourage me over the years. They are too numerous to list here, but in the chapters that follow I pay tribute to many of them individually. To those both named and unnamed in the works presented here I offer my heartfelt thanks and appreciation.

In addition to my department, the other great institutional anchor of my working life has been my Cambridge college, Christ's. It too has provided me with boundless warmth and friendship, and a perpetually exhilarating commitment to the highest standards of excellence in research and teaching, tempered by humanity and an ethos of care.

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colleagues in both India and Vietnam whose many kindnesses have made my work unceasingly rewarding and pleasurable.

The greatest of all my debts is to my late husband, Christopher Bayly. I hope and trust that he would have approved of this book, which I dedicate to his memory, with my deepest love and gratitude.

## Notes

1. I am deeply grateful to Jacob Copeman, James Laidlaw, Nick Long, Rosie Jones McVey, Matei Candea and the Press's two anonymous peer reviewers for their stimulating and insightful comments on earlier drafts of this Introduction.
2. As I explain in Chapter 8, my notion of ecumene is borrowed from the work of scholars of premodern diasporic cosmopolitanism, most notably the Sanskritist Sheldon Pollock. I believe their use of the term offers a fruitful means of characterizing the distinctive form of translocality explored in my work on both India's and Vietnam's intelligentsia moderns, this being a sharing of broad moral aims and values in an arena of contact and interaction shaped by commonalities of ethical purpose, rather than those of capitalist commodity flows or globalized communication technologies. In an ecumene, particularities are not lost, and those who meet and mingle in its common spaces need not renounce their distinctiveness in favour of an all-embracing uniformity of ideals or comportment (from Bayly 2007: 223).
3. As did that of Peter Brown on the Christianization of ancient Rome (1971), which helped to shape my understanding of religious conversion as a process of open-ended interactions and indigenizations; also my work on caste, which I came to think of as another apparently authoritative system of principles and teachings that turned out to have a much more fluid and negotiable on-the-ground life in everyday thought and practice. There were also the influential writings of historians, notably Robert Darnton and Natalie Zemon Davis, pursuing what A.L. Stoler called ethnography in the archives (Stoler 2002). Among Africa specialists there was the novel work of Vaughan (1983), Peel (1984), Lonsdale (1981), and Comaroff (1985); and for the subcontinent Thapar (1978), Stein (1977), Cohn (1980), and my PhD supervisor Eric Stokes (1978), and of course the brilliant scholarship of my late husband Christopher Bayly.
4. Also giving rise to the immense literature seeking to establish whether social actors possess the capacity to evade, challenge or reconfigure constraining structures of power and oppression, doing so from a host of opposed and interacting perspectives including those of Black and postcolonial feminist thought and practice. The work of Caroline Humphrey (2008) contributed greatly to my thinking about anthropology's historical concerns; see also Kelly 1992; Strathern 1992; Luhrmann 1996; Hirsch 1999; Gow 2001; Kelly and Kaplan 2001; Lambek 1998 and 2002; Sneath 2007; more recently Mosse 2012; and Humphrey and Ujeed 2013.
5. And by the emergence of important work on the anthropology of the event, notably Strathern 1992; Fausto 2002; Humphrey 2008. There are still anthropologists with an interest in Sahlins's methodological tools, e.g. Niehaus 2013.
6. 'Heterotemporality' is to be understood as a plural sense of time in which the world is experienced as both a domain of gods and spirits coexisting in the same temporal plane as that of mortal humankind, and one in which the dynamic of history is that of scientific rationality and disenchantment. Hence the predicament of those 'Hindu moderns' (Chakrabarty 1995: 752) living uneasily with their subaltern fellow citizens as unhappy heirs to colonialism's legacy of disenchanted 'hyper-rationalism' – this being painfully paralleled, says Chakrabarty, by the Hindu modern's own ongoing orientation to the

equally compelling historicity of humans and non-humans coexisting and interacting in the same domain of numinous temporal space.

7. Das 1982 is a notable landmark in these engagements with Dumont's work. For an overview of other key literature, including works both building on and challenging Dumont (e.g. Marriott 1989), and also the important work of the subaltern studies scholars who raised important questions about issues of material deprivation and the extent to which those defined as low or ritually impure, in caste terms, have shared or rejected the hierarchical moral orderings of caste, see Bayly 1999: 12–23.
8. Similar to the 'hollow crown' argument in Dirks 1987, and portraying what happened at the Delhi *darbar* as greatly at odds with the logic of the *darbar* staged in the preconquest period, which Cohn saw as much more even-handed moments of exchange between rulers and feudatories.
9. Englund and Leach 2000; also Osella and Osella 2006, and Thomassen 2010. I also learned from our department's exciting range of more recent projects on such topics as morality, achievement and visuality. The ideas about Asian religious modernizers explored in Chapter 2 owe much to the project on modes of religiosity developed by Harvey Whitehouse of Oxford, with important input from my Cambridge colleague James Laidlaw.
10. Laidlaw 2013, 2023; Keane 2016; Robbins 2016; Mattingly and Throop 2018. On the official ethical projects forged and propagated under state socialism, see Yan 2023; also Minh T.N. Nguyen 2018.

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