

Comaroff, Catherine Hall, and others. Exactly how Taneti would do this is unclear, given the nearly exclusive focus among postcolonial scholars on alterity and difference rather than on collaboration and hybridity. What comes to mind when reading Taneti's story is the potential usefulness of Mary Louise Pratt's concept of a "contact zone" as outlined in her *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1991). In their attempt to construct an indigenous form of Christianity in the non-Western world, women missionaries and Dalit Christian women alike were forging a new identity, one that transcended the binary of the West and the Other that dominates postcolonial studies. One does not have to share Taneti's celebratory theology to find this story one of broad significance to the history of imperialism, religion, and gender.

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RUPA VISWANATH. *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India*. (Cultures of History.) New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. Pp. xviii, 396. Cloth \$60.00, e-book \$59.99.

Rupa Viswanath's *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India* is a remarkable feat of historical scholarship and a nuanced theoretical intervention in the new field of Dalit Studies. Viswanath concentrates on the redefinition and transformation of the spheres of religion, politics, and the social to examine why and how the Pariah problem emerged between 1890 and 1920. She explores the varied reactions the problem evoked. This investigation is important, she argues, to understand the "idea that caste itself, and caste discrimination, are religious phenomena, the prioritization of the 'social'" (p. 2), and that "the social" is the site to engage with both Dalits' political claims and the state and elite's evasion and denial of structural change. She tracks the ways in which the Depressed Classes' actions and efforts—and responses to them by the members of Madras's first non-Brahmin political party, known as the Justice Party, as well as by Brahmin nationalists and other elites—transformed the relation between the notionally distinct spheres of the social, religious, and political.

Viswanath focuses on the political economy of land and labor to demonstrate the ways the "caste-state nexus" (pp. 14, 38), India's elites, and the colonial government worked together to redirect and contain the problem of "unfree Dalit laborers" in Tamil Nadu. She investigates how local elites and British agents colluded to contain the Pariah problem and restrict it to the realm of the social and the religious, thus seeking change through gradual reform rather than state intervention. They admitted that a solution to the problem was both morally and politically necessary; however, they also adopted certain measures to evade the problem. Beginning with agrarian slavery, Viswanath draws upon Timothy Mitchell's formulation of the "state effect" to demonstrate that, although local village

landlords, munsifs, tahsildars, and collectors were at times conflicted among themselves, they stood united in relation to the Pariah and systematically controlled Pariah labor (p. 14).

Most significantly, Viswanath convincingly argues that Pariahs' own initiatives and financial exigencies resulted in mass conversions and impelled missionaries to attend to the Pariah. Pariahs worked diligently on many fronts to make their subordination visible, to question their doubly colonial status, and to seek redress. Moreover, they engaged in careful strategies to seek out missionaries, entering into alliances with them as well as with the state. Through such actions as well as others, for example, demanding a whitewashed schoolhouse (p. 75) or ownership of a housing site in their *ceri* (chaps. 4 and 7), Pariahs transformed their relations with local elites and colonial officials and brought about a change for themselves.

Departing from scholarship that often places agency with the missionaries, Viswanath provides compelling historical evidence to challenge the popular representations and scholarly discourse of "missionaries as staunch opponents of caste and as promoters of egalitarian ideology." Missionaries, she argues, often accommodated the request of their higher caste non-converts and reminded the Pariahs of their "duty" to respect their "social superiors" (p. 45). Thus the missionaries never supported full social equality and instead underscored a harmonious and hierarchical social order. They did denounce caste and also sought its banishment, but only based on its religious features. In so doing, the missionaries actually brought about the "spiritualization" of caste. In a similar vein, the British colonial state cunningly tweaked new liberal welfarist policies at different times to prioritize the social and as a matter to be solved among natives themselves. The government also allowed discrimination to flourish under the cover of religious neutrality. This, as Viswanath persuasively demonstrates, resulted in the shaping of the Dalit question as a religious disability rather than as a "political" problem, a "national," or "an international problem" as the famous leader and intellectual B. R. Ambedkar had argued. By contrast, the hegemonic missionary discourse was reinforced by Indian reformers and nationalists, including M. K. Gandhi, who struggled to show that the Dalit problem was a "social" problem that could be solved inside the "home" and within the precincts of the "family" of Hindus, rather than in constitutional legislatures or through legal rights (Shailaja Paik, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination* [2014], 84). This viewpoint also underscores a gradual training and management of Dalits and their assimilation by non-Dalits, and it denies a systematic redistribution of wealth or real political power to the marginalized.

Such tensions between "the political" and "the social," "rights" and "sentiments" have continued to plague the discourse of the postcolonial Indian state as well as scholarly responses to the Dalit question. Viswanath could have strengthened her argument by analyzing

the actual realm of “the social” and explicating how it was created by different social actors in specific historical conjunctures. The other limitation I would note is that the book fails to make connections with similar movements in different parts of India, even if in a cursory way. It functions as if Pariahs in Madras were acting in a vacuum. This is significant because some important leaders traveled, discussed political strategies, and had relationships with Dalits in other regions, particularly in Maharashtra. Also, although the book seeks to represent “ordinary” Dalit women and men; we hardly hear Dalit women’s voices.

Nevertheless, Viswanath untangles the historical roots of the “colonial trope of gentle servitude” (p. 243), challenges missionaries, some mischievous Brahmins and non-Brahmins, colonial officers, elite reformers, and some scholars who argue that Pariah laborers were “quiescent” or “content” with traditional arrangements, that they “lacked interest,” and that they saw their masters’ treatment as “legitimate.” *The Pariah Problem* reveals an ambitious and different story that challenges the paternalistic attitude toward Dalits. Viswanath demonstrates vividly the ways in which ideas can have consequences, how changes in thinking and practices can legitimize and delegitimize practices, and that by “making the Pariah a problem” (p. 258), Dalits actually sought to put their rights in place.

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LIANG CAI. *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire*. (SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture.) Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014. Pp. xii, 276. \$85.00.

While the immensity of the Han Empire and its complex history have not been lost to historians of China and the world, in American or European academic circles in the past 50 years, only a couple dozen historians have been trained in the political and social history of the Han; of these, but a handful have made it to positions of prominence in the field. Given the sparse arena for discussing this essential history in Western circles, it is refreshing when a talented historian from China joins the ranks of Han historians in the West, and, with one fell swoop, rekindles debate about the core structure and mechanisms by which certain trends in Han governance came to be.

Liang Cai’s book, covering a period of about 100 years from Emperor Wu’s reign (beginning in 141 B.C.E.) through that of Emperor Yuan (ending in 33 B.C.E.), drastically and persuasively revises assumptions about the iconic reign of Han Emperor Wu and his role as the pivotal figure who welcomed and inaugurated Confucian officials and their influence at court. By using quantitative and qualitative methods to compare the backgrounds of high officials during the time of Emperor Wu to those of officials prominent during the period of three emperors immediately after him, Cai is able to document a significant sociopolitical

transformation. Counter to the standard narrative about Emperor Wu’s favorable policies toward the recruitment of *ru* (Confucians), Cai shows that the face of imperial officialdom was changed not during Emperor Wu’s reign, but after, in the wake of a vicious witch hunt involving the extermination of tens of thousands of court figures and high officials. Sweeping clean the ranks of officials from entrenched families, the witchcraft scandal created a power vacuum that allowed for a fundamental transition in rulership (the rise of the regent, Huo Guang, and his allies) as well as the rise of an alternative means of acquiring government office.

Chock full of sharp insights and information regarding imperial systems of recruitment, avenues to official power, the political strength of intellectual identities, and political uses of religious beliefs and intellectual discourses, this book deftly historicizes the rise of *ru* officials and the manipulation of ideology during the Western Han period. Cai reinterprets standard readings of the histories and presents an overarching narrative that stresses the agency of individual actors. For example, we see how ancient historians such as Sima Qian and Ban Gu shaped discourses on the importance of *ru* officials by presenting an idealized vision of access to higher office and by forging a series of master-disciple relationships between otherwise obscure figures. We see how higher-ranking state officials deployed the power of their positions to favor their friends and peers in recruitment, and how clerks trained in *ru* learning ambitiously followed administrative protocols to advance in rank while often neglecting their moral training as *ru*. We learn that the ascendancy of *ru* learning as a coveted means of accessing administrative power was in part a consequence of Regent Huo Guang’s attempts to curb the powers of clans that had dominated court politics since the founding of the empire, not of the conscious policies of Emperor Wu. These are but a few examples of how the author focuses on explanations that frame historical actors as agents with a variety of desires, goals, agendas, and reasons for acting the way they do.

Cai’s account offers a detailed, on-the-ground glimpse of Han history that no other current scholarly rendition offers. Even the standard account in the *Cambridge History of China* (1978) tells little of the witch-hunt story that is told here, and does so with merely a fraction of the background details regarding the key figures and the nature of their political relationships to each other. Cai not only displays an awe-inspiring knowledge of such anecdotal data, but she also employs a quantitative, comparative framework to great effect, allowing her to debunk standard arguments and lay anew the foundations for her counter-narrative.

While the particular argumentative strands that make up Cai’s elaborate counter-narrative are too numerous to outline here, this reader was thoroughly convinced by Cai’s presentation of the book’s main theses: the absence of a strong *ru* contingency at the highest levels of Emperor Wu’s court, the sudden growth of a more robust *ru* identity and group of scholars trained in the Five Classics during the period immediately after