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Review Of "The Making Of A Hinterland: State, Society, And Economy In Inland North China, 1853-1937" By K. Pomeranz

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the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the editors of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*

Review

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sources for an article dealing with the history of ideas in Bengal a century or more ago.²

More authentically subaltern history are Damodaran's book on popular protest and Indian nationalism in Bihar, 1935–1946, and Das Gupta's on economy, society, and politics in Jalpaiguri, 1869–1947. Both studies are fully documented from available local sources and deal with peasants, share-croppers, unionized workers, tribals, and other marginal groups in Bihar and Bengal. The best that can be said for such work is that it represents a new historiographical school that shifts attention from the national scene of Congress politics, where it has generally been viewed, to the state and local scene, which presents a very different picture. The two scholars depict a conflict between elitist nationalists and the subalterns about broken promises by the Congress leadership. Noteworthy is the role of the communists who organize the subalterns and generate a sense of underclass consciousness among the masses.

These studies were probably written in the early 1980s, when Marxism could still inspire the young as an ideology of salvation with a future. The books cannot conceal the weaknesses that stem from this enthusiasm or the wishful thinking that invariably accompanied Marxism. Both of these monographs expect us to believe, for example, that the communists in Bihar and Bengal were able to convince the Hindu and Muslim subalterns that their unity on behalf of class interest was of far greater benefit to them than their communal identity. It is astonishing that after nearly a century of betrayal, incompetence, and mass murder by the Joseph Stalins, Maos, and Pol Pots of the world-communist movement, Das Gupta can still sentimentalize about communist "compassion for suffering people" (x).

David Kopf
University of Minnesota

The Making of a Hinterland: State, Society, and Economy in Inland North China, 1853–1937. By Kenneth Pomeranz (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993) 336 pp. \$40 cloth \$17 paper

Pomeranz writes about the decline of a region in north China that he calls Huang-Yun because it was at the confluence of the Yellow River (Huang he) and the Grand Canal (Yun he), which had been China's major north-south transport route until the government abandoned it in favor of sea transport. Huang-Yun incorporated the western part of Shandong province and adjacent portions of the Zhili/Hebei and Henan

² Ferdinand Toennies, *On Sociology: Pure, Applied and Empirical* (Chicago, 1971); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983); Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

provinces. Once at the economic core of north China, after the shift of the Yellow River in 1853 this area became relegated to the periphery of the newly emergent coastal economy.

Pomeranz's primary theme is abandonment. The state "abandoned" or officials slighted, sacrificed, or "wrote off" Huang-Yun (120, 123, 153). Chapters 3–5 abundantly document the grim consequences. The area became increasingly vulnerable to serious flooding, fuel shortages were severe, localities competed for scarce resources, and the "opportunity costs" of not maintaining the waterworks were immense.

Yet, in the first half of the book, Pomeranz emphasizes the region's negative and positive responses to new challenges presented by the new coastal economy. In chapter 1, he makes a convincing case for the deliberate manipulation of copper–silver exchange rates by local officials, as well as the unevenness of interest rates across three sections of Shandong. Both factors discouraged the flow of capital and the integration of markets. In chapter 2, he shows how farmers in the northern part of this region rapidly accepted new varieties of cotton, revealing an ability to adapt to new economic opportunities, and how village leaders in the south rejected them.

The author constructs a solid body of little-known information from diverse sources. Although the decline of the Yellow River Conservancy and Grand Canal are relatively familiar historical events, the impact of these changes on the region has not previously been analyzed in such detail; cotton-rushing, deforestation and reforestation, and gleanings are certainly new topics. The author is also clever at measurement, for example, his estimation of interest rates from grain prices and his calculation of the total economic cost to the region of not maintaining the Grand Canal.

Pomeranz advances numerous subtle and complex interpretations, two of which hold up very well. The first—that political choices created, destroyed, or constrained economic choices—seems amply demonstrated. The second—that "for many parts of China, the post-1850 switch to a mercantilist orientation was a more important regime change than those of 1911 or 1928, one with profound economic implications" (4)—is also well supported.

Other points of interpretation are more problematic. For example, the author distinguishes two subregions, north and south, within Huang-Yun, characterizing the first as "permeable" and the second as "impermeable." In the impermeable south, "entrenched rural bosses" rejected new cotton varieties because they "might soon have bothersome new rivals" (80). This fundamental difference in social infrastructure thus assumes a greater importance than the common "abandonment" experience of the one larger region.

In part, this difficulty stems from the definition of Huang-Yun as a region, which, the author admits, was neither "functionally integrated" (27–28) nor physiographically self-contained (12). The "state," which

“abandoned” this area, is also an abstraction, sometimes identified as the Qing state, but at other times as various local, regional, or provincial forces.

The book offers much interesting material and many insights into the complex historical processes of the late Qing and Republican periods, but because the definition of the region is awkward, these insights tend to pull in several directions rather than cohere.

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Kimono: Fashioning Culture. By Liza Dalby (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993) 384 pp. \$30

The term *kimono* has several meanings, but in this book it refers primarily to the elegant “native” costume of present-day Japanese women and to its antecedents in earlier centuries. Dalby, an anthropologist, is especially effective in her description and analysis of the mechanics, cultural innuendoes, and social functions of that modern kimono, which she learned to wear and understand as a doctoral student doing field research on the geisha culture of Kyoto in the 1970s.

To place her topic in historical context, Dalby turns to written sources that illuminate haute couture of the eleventh and eighteenth centuries and the interplay of domestic and European styles of dress, c. 1860–1930. She dwells at some length on the kimono’s dysfunctionality compared with European dress, but her exegesis convincingly shows that the woman’s kimono today is a wonderfully effective device for displaying the wearer’s mastery of good taste and social propriety. Like the tuxedo, but with incalculably more attention to fine distinctions, the kimono affirms its wearer’s right to a place among the conservatively, comfortably correct. For nonwearers (foreigners especially) and also for wearers in foreign lands, it can also serve as a declaration of ethnic self-esteem.

Dalby follows her introductory first chapter with two historical chapters—one that adumbrates the changing form of dress, mainly elite female garb, from about 650 to 1850, and one that looks at the European–Japanese sartorial confrontation. Two of the next three chapters explore the modern woman’s dress-up kimono, the third reporting the disappearance of kimono-style work clothes from the wardrobes of farm women after World War II. Two chapters then illustrate the kimono tastes of eleventh-century aristocratic women and well-to-do eighteenth-century merchant women, as revealed by illustrated fashion texts of the day. The brief closing chapter on geisha and kimono returns readers to the realm of Dalby’s earlier study.