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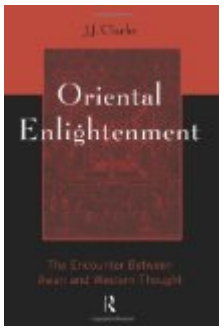

J. J. Clarke. *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought.* London and New York: Routledge, 1997. 273 pp. $80.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-415-13376-0.

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Richey on Clarke's *Oriental Enlightenment*

[Note: This review is part of the H-Ideas Retrospective Reviews series. This series reviews books published during the twentieth century which have been deemed to be among the most important contributions to the field of intellectual history.]

Whether one dates the initial encounter between Asian and Western thought to early, shadowy interactions and migrations between the great river valley civilizations of West, South, and East Asia (ca. 4000 BCE), the lively trading partnerships and exchanges of the Silk Road empires (ca. 100 BCE), or the more programmatic contacts initiated by the first sustained Christian missions to Asia (ca. 1600 CE), its history has tended to be read from the perspective of benighted Asian cultures slowly being led into the light of Western science and civilization. As the much-heralded "Asian century" begins to unfold, J. J. Clarke offers a more complicated, and ultimately more rewarding, historical account of the many and multifaceted encounters between East and West since the European middle ages. His aim is to present these encounters as the means by which Western intellectual history was altered and influenced by the awareness, appropriation, and approach of Asian ideas. Without such an account, Clarke claims, the history of ideas in the West must remain radically incomplete.

As an historian of ideas, Clarke both relies upon and challenges assumptions made by other scholars who have treated the themes of intellectual exchange and cultural alterities. Chief among these foundational ideas are those of Edward Said ("the Orient" as a Western construct of its own "other"), Hans-Georg Gadamer (all encounter as interpretation, and all interpretation as mutual and intertextual), and Martin Heidegger (Europe and Asia as "the two ends of the Old World"). Clarke's intellectual-historical method, however, is careful to avoid the idealist and reductionist tendencies of much previous work in this genre, preferring to focus on ideas and thinkers in their rich social, political, economic, and, ultimately, historical contexts. For this reason, the figures and movements which flood his concise historical narrative include not only the recognizably intel-

lectual (e.g. Leibniz, the philosophes, Buber, psychoanalysis) but also the sometimes-suspiciously popular or esoteric (e.g. Madame Blavatsky, Theosophy, D. T. Suzuki, 1960s counterculture). All are important to Clarke because of his view that literary, religious, and more broadly cultural histories are crucial to the construction of any intellectual history.

Thus, Clarke seeks to accomplish a great deal in this work, and, by and large, he succeeds. After first establishing the theoretical grounds for his kind of intellectual-historical project in Part One, he proceeds along straightforwardly chronological lines, devoting Part Two to formative constructions of the "Orient" between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, Part Three to East-West encounters during the twentieth century, and Part Four to concluding remarks regarding the contributions of Oriental enlightenment to Western postmodernities and the question of the continuing viability of concepts such as "orientalism".

Clarke's major point in his first two introductory and theoretically-oriented chapters, which constitute Part One, is that, while Edward Said's notion of orientalism is crucial for his inquiry, the association of orientalism with colonising power can represent only one part of the story. The Saidian mode of explanation, even treated in its most liberal form, is at once too broad and too narrow for his purposes (p. 26). Clarke's reworking of Said's notion of orientalism helps him, and us, to see how Western interest in Asian ideas has been more than just an expression of a colonialist will to power. In addition to being the "pie of which every one wants a piece," as Mao Zedong is supposed to have said of China, Asia as a broad set of intellectual and cultural traditions also has functioned as a counter cultural, counter-hegemonic resource for Westerners disaffected by the dominance of Eurocentric orthodoxies, whether these have been nineteenth century liberals and romantics or twentieth-century Nazis and hippies.

Chapters three, four, and five inaugurate Clarke's historical narrative and survey the history of Asian-Western interactions from the sixteenth-century Jesuit missions to India, China, and Japan through the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893. After a passing series of remarks on the antique roots of globalization during the expansion of the Persian, Alexandrian, and Roman empires, Clarke turns to three broad arenas of early modern East-West encounter: Enlightenment "sinomania" or fascination with things Chinese, Romantic attraction to the mystical treasures of Indian culture, and the philosophical turn to Buddhism by many American and European thinkers during the 1800s. With well-chosen anecdotes, quotations, and incidental references to broader cultural trends and events (furniture and garden design, literary movements, European colonial ventures), Clarke demonstrates how initial European enthusiasm for Chinese culture as a superior alternative to Christian civilization was transformed into contemptuous regard for China as "the sick man of Asia," how subsequent orientalists placed their faith in India as both the archetypal source of European culture and Europe's primitive and obsolescent predecessor, and how Buddhism became a vehicle for nineteenth-century Western struggles with the emerging disciplines and challenges of evolutionary biology, psychology, and comparative religious studies. Throughout he emphasizes the multiple rhetorical functions of the "Orient"-whether represented by Confucius, Aryan civilization, or nihilism-in Western discourse about religious pluralism, social ethics, racial politics, or sources of meaning. For Clarke, what is important is not the meanings of Asian ideas for their Asian sources or audiences, but their diverse interpretation for the sake of multiple agendas and projects in the West.

The five chapters which make up Part Three focus on twentieth-century East West encounters and their influences within philosophical, religious, psychological, and scientific discourses. The central theme shifts from appropriation, which

governed the encounters described in Part Two, to dialogue, which Clarke uses to characterize the century in which Asian cultures moved toward post-colonial self-determination as well as parity and partnership with Western powers who have relinquished or lost most of their colonial holdings. Clarke shows how dialogical approaches to the relationship between Asian and Western traditions of thought can be found in various Western intellectual disciplines: the philosophical work of Royce, Heidegger, Buber, Hartshorne, and Merleau-Ponty; the comparative religious studies of Mller, Otto, and Eliade; the theological projects of Thomas Merton, John Hick, Hans Kng, and Francis Clooney; the psychotherapies of Jung, Erich Fromm, Hubert Benoit, and R. D. Laing; the cosmological speculations of Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schrdinger, and Fritjof Capra; and the ecological critiques of E. F. Schumacher, Arne Naess, Gary Snyder, and Joanna Macy. In almost every case, Clarke observes a movement from genuine but qualified admiration for the "Orient" (in which one must make a Hegelian transition from Asian servitude to Western mastery, while still making use of Asian resources to critique prevailing Western models) to a kind of reverse ethnocentrism, in which Westerners reject their own cultural traditions in an enthusiastic embrace of Asian alternatives.

Part Four is divided into two concluding chapters, "Reflections and reorientations" and "Orientalism and postmodernity." Here Clarke charts the mixed blessings of the history of Asian-Western encounter, paying special attention to the often-elusive difference between "interpreting across boundaries" and "projecting across boundaries." In the former, at best, one is conscious of one's own limitation by tradition, even to the point of acknowledging the "fused" or polyglot nature of one's own cultural background (e.g., the West = Hebrew Bible + Hellenism + imperial Rome + Christendom + Enlightenment + ?) as well as that of one's "other" (e.g., China = primeval agrarianism/ancestor cult + Daoist mysticism + Indian Buddhism + Confucian bureaucracy + Marxism + ?). In the latter, one simply projects one's own categories, assumptions, and consuming preoccupations, in the manner in which Buddhist traditions have been encapsulated, Westernized, and re-presented as Paul Carus' ***The Gospel of Buddha*** (1894) or David Goddard's ***A Buddhist Bible*** (1936).

Clarke cautions that both approaches, however, are vulnerable to a litany of pernicious influences, among which he includes racism, fascism, irrationalism, quietism, and, of course, colonialism. Each -ism is prone to disrupt encounters across East-West boundaries, and thus not only projection, but also interpretation, is never free of disruptive danger. At the same time, such disruption is becoming more and more difficult to spot, because of the cumulative globalization effect of what Clarke calls "the long historical process of planetary fusion, a process which has given a powerful stimulus 400 years ago at the time when Matteo Ricci was sending back his glowing reports of the Celestial Kingdom for eager European readers" (p. 225). Indeed, Clarke predicts that "orientalism" cannot survive in global postmodernity, for the very reason that this historical moment signifies "the end of the ancient division of East and West, and the end of orientalism" (p. 225).

Clark's book is a compact, nuanced, ambitious, persuasive, and theoretically astute survey of Asian influence on Western intellectual history. Clarke's accomplishment is significant in its effort to represent fully the Western appropriation of and dialogue with Asian ideas as situated within a complex of Asian-Western social, political, economic and cultural encounters. It is surprisingly exhaustive for a work of such broad scope and brief length (273 pages with notes, bibliography, and index). At the same time, if one opens these pages in search of an account of how Asian thinkers and societies were impacted by Western ideas or how Asian intellectuals were conscious of impacting the West in kind, one will be sent away empty. Clarke's focus is almost exclusively on the

Western side and, in spite of its lofty goals of including cultural history into its intellectual-historical account, nearly always concerned with the intellectual aspects of the ongoing East-West encounter.