

2. IRRI researchers conducted the Central Luzon Loop Survey in the wet and dry seasons of the 1966/67, 1970/71, 1974/75, 1979/80, 1982 (wet season only), 1986/87, 1990/91, 1994/95, 1998/99, 2003/04, 2007/08, and 2011/12 crop years.

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Ancient China and the Yue: Perceptions and Identities on the Southern Frontier, c.400 BCE–50 CE. By Erica Fox Brindley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xix+302 pp.

This book is very well researched, with copious detail and documentation. Scholars will appreciate it, but the general reader will find it difficult going at times. As someone who has researched archaeological, ethnographic and linguistic aspects of the Yue (越,

often transcribed “Yüeh”; also the “Viet” in Vietnam) for decades, I found much in Brindley’s book that was useful and informative. Her analysis of textual evidence is impressive, albeit selective, as she contrasts classical Chinese or Huaxia identity with that of the southern peoples collectively labelled “Yue” or “Bai-Yue” (百越, Hundred Yue). Her summaries of the political-military intrigues and clashes involving the Yue kingdoms, fiefdoms, ruling elites and the Central States and Han Empire are well written, though, as with all imperial history, the constantly recurring coups, plots and betrayals eventually become a blur. She skilfully teases out elements of this history that may relate to Yue identity from the narratives, and from the inevitable bias of Chinese writers.

I found it difficult to get started with the book. The introduction will put off all but the most dedicated researcher, with its “Concepts and Frameworks”; frequent lapses into jargon, including a section entitled “Inscribing Difference: Identity as an Ascribed Taxonomic Landscape”; and long-winded discourse on defining various “ethnonyms”. The section on Yue historiography is more readable. But Brindley’s description of one of my favourite works, Schafer’s *The Vermilion Bird* (1967), proved a slightly daunting indicator of what was to come: “while delightful and of great value, [Schafer’s book] does not provide a higher-level interpretive framework for understanding ... dynamic transformations of identity and ethnicity” (p. 19). Another irritant to me was the use of politically correct BCE/CE, an unnecessary affectation. Finally, there was the incredible statement, “As history tells us, the natives of early Taiwan disembarked during Neolithic times from Taiwan and set about on a series of intensive maritime migrations across the entire Pacific and Indian Oceans” (p. 25). This is not just a whopper; history tells us no such thing. But it was also a bad omen, as the next chapter of the book is devoted to “linguistic prehistory” (pp. 45–61). It promotes the current consensus, approaching unmerited status of dogma, on an Austronesian homeland on Taiwan.

Much space is given to Sagart’s wild speculations, contrary to archaeological evidence, about migrations back to the mainland and to the very weak claim that the Tai language family derived

from “pre-Austronesian”. Brindley does not even mention the opposing view — notably that of Solheim and of this reviewer on the archaeological evidence, Oppenheimer and Richards on DNA — that the Austronesians originated to the south, in the present-day Philippines and Indonesia.

And, one might ask, what does all this have to do with the Yue and ancient China? In my view, nothing! Taiwan was not part of ancient or even medieval China, Taiwan aboriginals were never referred to as Yue, and the languages *certain* to have been spoken by the Yue are early forms of Tai, Vietnamese and Miao-Yao. It is odd that the author pursued such tangents in space; in time, back to the Neolithic; and in fancy, locating “pre-Austronesian” on the mainland, but then stopped the Yue story abruptly at AD 50. The thousand years thereafter are a rich vein of ethnographic information on the Yue peoples that she could have exploited.

The book handles the archaeological record better, but speculations concerning Austronesian still intrude on occasion. There are good summaries of key archaeological sites and cultures, but several interpretations are questionable, as when Brindley writes that “the peoples associated with these more complex material cultures to the north had yet to migrate down the coast.... Or, it could be the case that both linguistic and material transfers ... seeped southward [without migration]” (p. 68). And then this surely incorrect claim: “The spread of metallurgy [went from Jiangxi] down the coast of Fujian ... and farther along the coast of Guangdong, Guangxi and northern Vietnam” (p. 76). Such statements recall the major interpretive framework that dominated Chinese archaeology for decades, epitomized by the “Nuclear Area Hypothesis” of K.C. Chang (1968). Ironically, this Central Plains model mirrored — two thousand years later! — the Huaxia self-image of being the centre of civilization, from which innovation and progress flowed to the outer, backward realms, that Brindley continually stresses.

So often does she come back to the theme of self-as-centre/“ethnic other”-as-margin that one wonders, is there coal in Newcastle? Is the Pope Catholic? All civilizations are self-centred, but the ancient Chinese famously excelled at ethnocentricity.

Brindley is at the same time overly generous in some interpretations of texts concerning Yue people, softening the full force of the disgust, disdain and contempt that most ancient Chinese writers had for the southern barbarians. What is insightful is her analysis of various texts setting out just why, to the Huaxia, those people were so primitive and inferior, whereas they themselves represented the height of civilization.

The chapters on ethnographic data are to my mind the best in the book. They include very interesting discussion of close-cropped or unbound Yue hairstyles, uncouth sitting positions, tattooing and “pigeon-toes”. But some of my favourite ancient comments on the Yue are missing: they drink through the nose, the women go bare breasted, young girls ride elephants, they plough the land with fire, their language is like chicken squawking. A valuable addition would have been an appendix listing all ancient texts that describe Yue customs. Surprisingly there is very little discussion on Yue economic or social structures, though man–land relationships are highlighted, as are Yue talents like sword-making and swimming.

Brindley rejects sinicization as a useful interpretive model, despite the evidence that Yue elites were adopting Chinese ways, willingly or by force. And the material culture from even minor Warring States sites throughout South China shows considerable Chinese influence.

The physical book is nicely done, but at US\$96, it includes few photographs and some of disappointing quality. The lack of more detailed maps is also disappointing.

In sum, the work has its flaws but is surely a valuable resource for scholars interested in ancient South China. Ultimately the author does come to the appropriate conclusion about the Yue ethnic identity: “hundreds if not thousands of different cultures and ethnicities ... were encompassed by the term, ‘Bai-yue’” (p. 81).

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Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work. By Kimberley Kay Hoang. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2015. xiv+229 pp.

In her study of the sex industry in Ho Chi Minh City, Kimberly Kay Hoang not only casts gender studies in Vietnam in an entirely new light but also raises a host of challenging new questions. Her book posits that intimate relations between men and women in the sex trade allow them to pursue “hopes, dreams, and desires” (p. 14) along gendered and hierarchical lines, thus reimagining how they position themselves on a changing political, economic and global landscape. She asserts that the sex industry has brokered Asian and global capital entering Vietnam because women and hostess bars have played a crucial role in the creation of trust and bonds among businessmen operating in a risky entrepreneurial environment. New constructions of masculinities appeared in Ho Chi Minh City in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, when Vietnamese and Asian elites adopted rhetorics asserting Asian ascendancy and Western decline. These rhetorics were used in the performance of Vietnamese masculinities as male members of the economic and political elites brokered deals with Taiwanese, South Korean and other Asian investors. These elites must persuade the investors to invest in land, banking, and manufacturing deals in southern Vietnam that, while very profitable, were risky, had little oversight, and enjoyed no legal protection. This was the “Vietnamese way of doing business”.

Hoang undertook fieldwork in Vietnam from 2006 to 2010, focusing on sex work in four bars serving different market niches: a high-end hostess bar where members of the economic and political elite entertained foreign investors, a bar catering to Việt Kiều, a bar