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Foreword

Sunil Amrith

In the late 2000s, I found myself in the town of Nagore, along the Tamil Nadu coast, in search of a saint I had first encountered in Southeast Asia. Stories of the saint, Shahul Hamid, recount his journey from the plains of North India to Mecca and back across the Indian Ocean, stopping in the Maldives and at Adam's Peak in Ceylon before settling in Nagore, where he died. When I visited, the shops that line the passageway leading to the main Nagore shrine sold small pieces of foil imprinted with the images of boats, which devotees offered at the shrine when they prayed for the safety of their voyages. My own path to the shrine had originated in my study of circulation of people, ideas and culture across the Bay of Bengal. Intrigued by the social and cultural world of the shrines to Shahul Hamid that still stood in Singapore and Penang, I was curious to see where they had originated. A trustee of the shrine told me that alongside the surviving Nagore shrines in Singapore and Penang, there were once shrines to the saint of Nagore dispersed in Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Everything I needed to know, to understand what I was seeing in Nagore, I found in just a single paragraph of Susan Bayly's work (Bayly 2004). In her 2004 essay, 'Imagining "Greater India"', Bayly opened with the Nagore saint to remind her readers of the expansive moral and spiritual geographies that continue to shape people's lives in contemporary Asia. She argued that the Nagore saint and his cult were always situated 'in a wider world of *haj* pilgrimage, trade, and teaching, which his devotees still visualized … as a living and expansive arena in which the saint continued to radiate his presence' (704). It took me about a decade of thinking and writing to fully incorporate that one profound insight.

I returned to the same essay, some years later, and found in it something completely different. By this time, I was working on a history of the South Asian monsoon – a history of monsoon science, and of how deeply concern with, even fear of, the monsoon had shaped postcolonial India. Returning to Bayly, I found a bracing and surprising intellectual history of the notion of 'monsoon Asia', a category that I found being used without self-consciousness in climate science. Bayly showed that Durkheimian anthropologists in colonial Indochina had embraced the notion of 'monsoon Asia' in their quest to

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understand what they saw as the vanished civilization of Champa. In the work of Paul Mus, above all, 'monsoon Asia' constituted a civilizational zone. He discerned an underlying core belief system, 'animism', that united the sweep of 'monsoon Asia', atop which Buddhism, Islam, Christianity sat lightly. As Bayly showed, the significance Mus attributed to climate drew on the French notion of *terroir*, climate and soil shaping individual and collective life. This is classic Bayly: seamlessly does she bridge intellectual and conceptual history with the history of lived experience, linking colonial meta-geographical categories that still shape how we see the world, with the paths of pilgrimage and migration that bridged the Indian Ocean.

Bayly's 2004 essay was written at a moment of transition in her intellectual trajectory. If Susan Bayly had published nothing beyond *Saints, Goddesses and Kings* (1989) and *Caste, Society and Politics in India* (1999) her place would already have been assured among the most insightful and generative scholars of modern India. Bayly's restless curiosity, however, led her to other shores. 'Imagining "Greater India"' was the first published hint of Bayly's growing engagement with the country that she would turn to study over the following two decades: Vietnam. Bayly's work on Vietnam drew upon her earlier experience in India; and in her focus on parallel and intersecting experiences, she was a true pioneer of what would come to be known as Inter-Asian scholarship.

This volume's focus on the anthropology of intellectual exchange is fitting acknowledgement of how central a theme that has been in Susan's work. Bayly, and the contributors to this volume, emphasize the importance of both individual and collective agency in shaping intellectual exchange. They insist that intellectual exchanges have an open-endedness and capacity to surprise, even in situations of unequal power and constraint. They conceive of intellectual exchange in a capacious way, going beyond the conventional focus on canonical texts or eminent thinkers ('intellectuals'). In the pages of this stimulating book, we glimpse the intellectual exchange embodied by the 'strikingly bold insistence' of Vietnamese architects that Soviet models of housing needed to adapt to local conditions, as in the chapter by Nguyen and Nguyen. We see the trans-regional scale of intellectual exchange, in Marsden's chapter, shaping profoundly local visions of how to live as a good Muslim in South and Central Asia. And we grasp the horror of what happens when intellectual exchange falters and fails, as in Christopher Goscha's moving account of French settlers clinging on to 'imperial time' in a Vietnam that had been transformed by war.

The roster of contributors to this book speaks volumes about Susan Bayly's influence not only as a scholar but also as a teacher and colleague. A generation of academics – now working in Europe, Asia and North America – owes a debt to Susan Bayly as a supervisor and mentor. I am privileged to count myself among them. Twenty years into my academic career, I have enough perspective to say that Susan has had a formative influence on all of the work I have done as a historian.

I encountered her not as a graduate student, but as a first-year undergraduate at Christ's College, Cambridge, where she was Fellow in History and Social

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Anthropology. The first time I met her, at a formal dinner early in the term, I was ill at ease and still reeling from the culture shock of arriving at Cambridge from hyper-modern Singapore. Susan took me completely by surprise, and put me at ease, with a few words in Tamil. The following year, she taught me on the course that was still then called 'The West and the Third World'. I could not have imagined then that I would go on to become a professional historian of Asia.

What I learned from Susan in those weekly meetings in her college rooms has shaped everything I have done subsequently. As a graduate student I worked more closely with Susan's husband and intellectual partner, the late Sir Christopher Bayly; but for many years Susan's was – and perhaps still is – the voice in my ear demanding greater rigour, asking whether every dimension of a concept has been explored, whether all perspectives have been considered. Susan's depth of learning, the profusion of references that spilled forth from memory, the leaps and unexpected connections she would make in every conversation – these were then, and remain now, a profound inspiration.

It is fashionable to talk about boundary-crossing scholarship; Susan Bayly embodies it. Her oeuvre sits at the fruitful intersection between History and Social Anthropology – deeply archival yet richly ethnographic; conceptually sophisticated, yet never losing sight of the everyday. It has also crossed the borders of area studies – between the study of South and Southeast Asia – earlier and more boldly than many others. This volume is a tribute to her enormous influence on multiple fields. In keeping with the spirit of Susan Bayly's work, it is a volume that looks forward as much as back: it is pushing the frontiers of inquiry, towards a new history and anthropology of intellectual exchange.

Sunil Amrith is Renu and Anand Dhawan Professor of History at Yale University. He is a historian of South and Southeast Asia, and his work has covered environmental history and the history of public health. Amrith is the author of four books, most recently *Unruly Waters: How Rains, Rivers, Coasts, and Seas Have Shaped Asia's History* (Basic Books, 2018). He is a 2017 MacArthur Fellow and received the Infosys Prize in Humanities in 2016.

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Above all we thank Susan Bayly for her guidance, inspiration and exceptionally generous intellectual gift-giving. This book – dedicated to Susan, a masterful practitioner of open-handed intellectual exchange as well as analyst of it – is our small counter-gift.

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