

some adventurous Cantonese took the crisis as an opportunity for status promotion, organizing militias and working with Hunanese provincial-level officials to quell the rebellions.

The relationship between migration and state expansion is another important topic the book explores. Frontier migration as a state-sponsored colonization process has been widely examined in migration studies. *Opportunity in Crisis* contributes to this literature by telling an intriguing story of how one diaspora population became the colonizing force of the state at a time of devolution of political power. The three chapters in the second part elaborate on this process by focusing on the movements of elite Cantonese migrants after the midcentury rebellions. Between the 1850s and 1890s, the Qing state heavily relied on riverine commerce to reestablish control in Guangxi. Taking advantage of favorable state policies, elite Cantonese migrants not only revived and expanded riverine commerce (chapter 4) but also made remarkable advancement in local administration and the cultural sphere. This included Guangdong men becoming the single largest cohort among lower-ranked officials in the bureaucracy of Guangxi (chapter 3) and Cantonese migrants sitting in the less competitive exams in Guangxi to achieve degrees (chapter 5). Eventually, these movements helped to establish a center-periphery relationship between the Pearl River delta and Guangxi, as Cantonese migrants extracted economic resources and acted as agents of imperial power to reintegrate Guangxi into the political and cultural map of the Qing Empire. In this sense, the book joins recent scholarship on the late Qing to illuminate the patterns of state building in an age of imperial decline.

The Cantonese migrants were by no means the only force of social change in Guangxi in the late Qing. Miles shows keen awareness of the roles of two other groups of people—the Hunanese who served as higher-ranking officials and the Guangxi natives—and makes great efforts to situate the Cantonese diaspora in the economic, political, and cultural dynamics in southern China. The narrative contains stories demonstrating the collaboration, clash, and tension between Cantonese migrants and the Hunanese or Guangxi natives. Yet, because the book's narrative strategy and agenda focus on the Cantonese diaspora, the activities of other groups still largely remain in the background.

In the relatively short third part, Miles completes the narrative of the book with the upriver journey of Zheng Guanying, a Cantonese migrant, treaty port comprador, and Qing official with overseas experience, in the early twentieth century. Following Zheng Guanyin's activities in Guangxi, the narrative illustrates the continued expansion of the diasporic networks and organizations in Guangxi amongst the sea change brought about by

the penetration of foreign powers and industrialization. By choosing Zheng Guanying as a representative of Cantonese migrants in the new era, Miles also emphasizes the theoretical implications of his research: internal and overseas migrations shared many commonalities in terms of patterns of migration and the development of diasporic institutions in hosting communities, and therefore should be considered as one unit of analysis.

Shuang Chen University of Iowa

Jessica Namakkal. *Unsettling Utopia: The Making and Unmaking of French India.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. Pp. xviii, 301. Paper \$30.00.

Jessica Namakkal's book, *Unsettling Utopia*, is a fascinating study of how the "messiness of colonialism" can be demonstrated in the complex realities of decolonized nations like India. Namakkal focusses on Pondicherry and its surrounding areas, as an example of how different colonial empires (Pondicherry was a French colony, while India was largely a British colony) and their policies created complex and often contradictory webs of bureaucracy, paperwork, laws, borders, and cultures. This complex legacy continues today, where past and present live in tenuous coexistence and differences often flare into conflict.

The first section of the book, titled "Making" describes how the interaction between French and British colonial regimes in the context of Pondicherry led to convoluted borders, which, depending on one's point of view, can be seen as either shutting *in* or shutting *out* the other. As a consequence of these borders and as a result of France's aim of showcasing her possessions in India as "model colonies" in contrast to the increasing resistance in the rest of India to British rule, Pondicherry became a haven for exiles from British India. The most famous of these was Sri Aurobindo, who, as a British Indian subject with an elite education, could easily mingle with French colonial administrators while garnering the local population's support for his mission. In consequence, Aurobindo went on to attract a number of European and American devotees to his ashram, which he established along with his foremost disciple, Mira Alfassa, a Frenchwoman who would come to be known as "The Mother," and become Aurobindo's successor.

Namakkal's narrative emphasizes the messiness of these coexisting and often contradictory forces. France was a colonial power in India with borders, bureaucracy, and laws for the colony. Yet Anglo-French rivalry, expressed covertly, encouraged French officials to turn a blind eye to exiles from British India taking refuge in French colonies, while at the same time Entente Cordiale meant Anglo-French cooperation globally and that France had to be careful not

to overtly antagonize Britain. Similarly, France could tout the superiority of her colonizing mission by describing her colonies in India as havens of education, liberation, prosperity, and civilization while simultaneously ignoring the violence in Algeria and Indochina. Namakkal weaves the complex narrative of these turbulent forces expertly, making the “messiness of colonialism” the driving principle of her writing.

Even decolonizing French India was subject to similarly complex forces, from the origin of proposals to decolonize to the actual process of joining the Indian union. French colonial officials, the Indian government, and individuals campaigning for the decolonization of French India suggested various plans for the process, and each plan was cast as positive or negative by the vested interests who vetted them. Ultimately though, the residents of French India—the colonial subjects themselves—did not get a vote or a seat at the table, and French India’s freedom and the particulars of the decolonization process were decided for them. The discontent caused by disregarding native opinion burst out as sporadic acts of violence during the official handover, with each side blaming the other for the violence.

Namakkal points out that the fractured process of colonization inevitably led to the dissonance of French India today, where the “white town” exists in complete incongruity with the “black town,” where the bulk of citizens live. While streets in the white town are named after colonial officials and officially approved native figures, these streets, a handful of statues, and a few crumbling buildings are the only reminders of French rule, since the citizens of the Black town, or Pondicherry proper, do not memorialize the same people. There is an abrupt disjunction, therefore, between the French history of Pondicherry and its popular history.

The incongruity is made more apparent by the dominance of the Ashram in the former white town. Since Aurobindo’s ashram included many prominent members of the French colonial service, it was able to purchase much of the land and buildings in the white town. The fact that members of the Ashram were outsiders—Europeans, Americans, or Indians from distant areas in the North and West—made the difference more marked. Namakkal is correct in pointing out that while India may not have experienced settler colonialism like South Africa, it was subject to “settlement colonialism” in the form of mission-driven institutions. The Aurobindo Ashram and The Mother’s grand vision for Auroville, a global city on the outskirts of Pondicherry, are examples of this. Created and populated by outsiders to the area, who occupy land and use the resources of the natives, both the ashram and Auroville represent a kind of modern-day colonial exploitation of Pondicherry and its natives.

The divide between the residents of the ashram and Auroville and the natives is linguistic, economic,

social, cultural, and political. Despite decades of preaching about the need to merge with the local population, the ashram and Auroville have kept separate. Not unlike the colonial rulers—who had their white town with wide streets, spacious homes, gardens, and promenades—the spaces occupied by the ashram and Auroville are not just the actual physical space of the erstwhile colonial government, but are also physically distinct from the local areas surrounding them. Their interaction with the natives is limited to services and labor provided by the latter. A city which once purported to be a utopia of global consciousness and the aware global citizen, Auroville and the ashram are, in so many ways, merely a modern form of colonial rule.

Namakkal’s narrative is persuasive and her research is exhaustive. She provides not just a microhistory of modern-day Pondicherry, but by her skillful use of global theory about colonization and decolonization provides a model of inquiry which can be applied to so many other institutions, from the decolonization process of Native Americans, to Latin America, African decolonization, and the like. The book should be read by every historian of the modern world as a necessary corrective to linear arguments about progress, process, and history.

Jyoti Mohan University of Maryland, College Park

David Veevers. *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia, 1600–1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xvi, 293. Cloth \$99.99.

David Veevers has written an original and stimulating work on the history of the English East India Company in South and Southeast Asia during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The book’s main arguments address the evergreen questions of when and how the East India Company established an empire in Asia. Veevers’s unequivocal answers are that the roots of empire are to be found long before the East India Company conquered significant territory in India during the 1750s and 1760s, which traditionally has been seen as the beginning of the company’s empire, and that the actions of the company’s agents, or servants, in Asia were much more significant in laying the groundwork for empire than political maneuverings, decisions, and events in London.

Veevers divides his book into four parts of unequal length. The first part, “Weakness and Adaptation,” sets the stage for his arguments by examining the company’s early failures to establish successful trade settlements, or factories, on the island of Java and at Masulipatam and Armagon on the east coast of India. He notes the lack of corporate investment, the strength of the Dutch East India Company, and the inability of English servants in Asia to ingratiate themselves with