The English Society of Japan

David Vallins, Kaz Oishi and Seamus Perry (eds.), *Coleridge, Romanticism and the Orient: Cultural Negotiations*

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Coleridge is the author of "Kubla Khan," one of the most oriental poems in the English language, but all but the most dedicated scholars are often at a loss when asked to say something significant and new about the relationship between Coleridge and the Orient. *Coleridge, Romanticism and the Orient: Cultural Negotiations* is an ambitious and stimulating collection of twelve essays that takes up a variety of themes relating to cultural influences and interplays between Coleridge and oriental cultures.

The idea behind this book originated in Kobe in the summer of 2011. There, an international conference entitled "Coleridge, Romanticism, and the Orient: Cultural Negotiations" gathered more than 100 people from all over the world to discuss the various aspects of the topic. Indeed, the conference itself was an example of cultural negotiations, having Coleridge, Romanticism, and oriental cultures as its focal point. For those who were unable to attend, or who wish to delve deeper into the topic, this book, containing four of the six plenary lectures, conveys the essence of the conference.

The book consists of three parts. The first section, "Coleridge, Romanticism and Oriental Cultures" gives a broad overview of cultural negotiations between British and Asian cultures during the Romantic period. The second part, "Coleridge, Philosophy, and the Orient" deals with Coleridge's attitudes towards oriental philosophy and religion. The third part, "'Kubla Khan' and Romantic Orientalism," focuses on "Kubla Khan" and presents new readings of the text.

The first part opens with Peter Kitson's "'Bid him bow down to that which is above him': The 'kowtow controversy' and Representations of Asian Ceremonials in Romantic Literature," which discusses how the image of the "kowtow" as a symbol of oriental despotism and an oriental lack of cultivation was formed in Britain. The "kowtow" is a formal ritual that requires kneeling and touching the ground with one's forehead in order to show the greatest respect and most submission to the emperor; it was socially and politically important. Britain's failure to open trade with China in 1793 is commonly attributed to George Viscount Macartney's refusal to perform a full kowtow in front of the Chinese emperor. Kitson, however, draws our attention to the fact that Macartney, the envoy to China, had not flatly refused to kowtow, but had agreed to perform it on the condition that a Chinese official of equal rank kowtow before a portrait of Britain's King George III. Kitson then illustrates how, despite these facts, the kowtow came to be a representation of oriental despotism in Britain, an image formed through a variety of discourses including accounts from Macartney's embassy and literary representations in such works as Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Byron's *Manfred*, and George Coleman's *The Law of Java*. Notably, Kitson outlines

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the resemblance between Macartney and the fictional Manfred. In *Manfred*, Arimanes, the Persian God, orders Manfred to bow down and worship him, but Manfred refuses because it is a form of humiliation if it is not based on one's own sense of guilt and remorse. Kitson points out that the conflict between Manfred and Arimanes is a displaced version of the kowtow controversy. At the very opening of this book, Kitson's chapter illustrates how "Orientalism" in the Saidian sense worked in the Romantic period.

The second chapter, Deirdre Coleman's "The 'dark tide of time': Coleridge and William Hodges's India," introduces a new geopolitical reading of "Kubla Khan." The poem's setting has been chiefly associated with China, Abyssinia, and the Tartars, but Coleman argues that India is another strong source, examining the influences of the Hastings trial (1788–95), Coleridge's loss of two elder brothers in India, and his readings of Orientalist scholarship in the 1790s. As reflected in the chapter title, William Hodges, a painter who travelled in India under the patronage of Warren Hastings, the first de facto Governor-General of India, was a key figure connecting Coleridge with the images of India. Although there is no definitive evidence that Coleridge read Hodges's *Travels in India* (1793), Coleman surmises that Coleridge almost certainly knew some of his works, as Coleridge lived in London from 1782 to 1791, when Hodges actively introduced the British public to Islamic and Hindu architecture through his paintings, including *The Ghauts at Benares*. Moreover, Joseph Cottle, Coleridge's friend and printer, borrowed *Travels in India* from Bristol Public Library in February of 1796. Additionally, Coleridge was a pupil of William Wales for five years; Wales, an astronomer on James Cook's second voyage, was a close acquaintance of Hodges. Coleman's arguments, utilizing multiple sources of persuasive textual evidence, sheds a new light on the source of inspiration for "Kubla Khan."

The third chapter, "Coleridge's Sequel to *Thalaba* and Robert Southey's Prequel to *Christabel*" by Tim Fulford, offers a new appreciation of Coleridge and Southey's collaborative attempt at composing an oriental poem. In the summer of 1797, these two poets planned to jointly compose a poem, to be entitled *Mohhanmed*. Though the composition of the piece was abandoned, this attempt eventually materialized in the forms of "Kubla Khan," *Christabel*, and *Thalaba*. Fulford offers three possible scenarios about the composition history of "Kubla Khan" and *Thalaba*. Among them, the second is the most ambitious and stimulating. Fulford posits that Southey's description of an illusionary garden in Book One of *Thalaba*, "Where high in air a stately palace rose," influenced the "stately pleasure dome" in "Kubla Khan," and envisages a situation which reverses our general theory regarding the influential relationship between Southey and Coleridge. This chapter also makes clear the differences between Coleridge and Southey. Whereas *Christabel* embraces moral and psychological ambiguities by leaving undetermined who is innocent or guilty, Southey nonetheless needed to resolve the moral and narrative suspense of the work. Therefore, he wrote a poem that was intended to be the last book of *Thalaba*. Fulford suggests that this is Southey's unpublished prequel to *Christabel*.

Two subsequent chapters discuss the influence of Japanese culture on an interpretation

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of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and the history of Coleridge's reception in Japan. Seamus Perry's "Coleridge, William Empson, and Japan" highlights the influence of Japanese culture, especially Buddhism, on William Empson's unique interpretation of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Empson, who became interested in the face of Buddha during his residence in Japan, found that incompatible features such as complete repose and active power are combined in images of Buddha. The understanding that this dualistic quality expresses the spirit of Buddhism, which embraces things of a discordant nature, helped Empson develop his interpretation that "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" represents conflicting impulses of life and death. This poem is often regarded as a Christian allegory of sin and redemption, but Paley suggests that Empson understood it beyond the framework of Christianity, and considered Coleridge as attaining the wisdom of Buddhism without having any direct access to the religion.

Kaz Oishi's "Oriental Aesthetes and Modernity: The Reception of Coleridge in Early Twentieth-Century Japan" illuminates Coleridge's early acceptance as a decadent poet who remained in obscurity even in the early twentieth century. Oishi attributes this reception to Samuel Smile's *Self-Help* (a Japanese translation of which appeared in 1870), which established the image of Coleridge as a talented but dawdling poet. At the same time, the literary tastes of the time affected his acceptance, as is represented in the criticisms of Taketomo Sōfu and Hinaz Konosuke, who appreciated the Gothicism of Coleridge's works. Because of this public image, the most popular poems by Coleridge in early twentieth-century Japan were "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," *Christabel*, and, to our surprise, "Love," though critics like Saito Takeshi (1887–1982) were aware of the genuine value of Coleridge's greater body of work. According to Oishi, the orientalism of "Kubla Khan" in the Saidian sense did not yet attract critics' attention because of the lack of authenticity in the poem. This chapter also outlines the progress of English studies in Japan, portraying a process by which various aspects of Coleridge were appreciated.

Four chapters in part two, "Coleridge, Philosophy, and the Orient," develop the topics discussed in part one. Andrew Warren's "Coleridge, Orient, Philosophy" examines the dual role of the Orient: an object and a source for Coleridge's philosophical thought. As a method of examining Coleridge's concept of philosophy, Warren attempts to identify the individual whom Coleridge regarded to be the first philosopher: Pythagoras. Coleridge thought so because he believed a philosopher to be a person who clearly divides subject and object and then attempts to reconcile the division. Warren's argument, culminating in the conclusion of the section "Philosophy as the history of philosophy" and his comments on Coleridge's own muddling of the distinction between the practice and the object of philosophy, is insightful.

In "Immanence and Transcendence in Coleridge's Orient," David Vallins presents "Kubla Khan" as a work that transcends the polarity of subject and object. While the concept of "the East" was used to signify something that was not European or Christian, using a location such as China or the South Pole allowed Coleridge to transcend the boundaries

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between the material and the spiritual. Discussing Coleridge's wavering between pantheism and Calvinism, idealism and empiricism, Vallins argues that the great distance in time and geographical space between England and thirteenth-century China enabled Coleridge to liberate himself and readers from empiricism and avoid a confusion of the subjective and the objective.

"'The One Life Within Us and Abroad': Coleridge and Hinduism," by Natalie Tal Harries, follows Coleridge's changing attitude towards Hinduism by analysing his notebooks, prose works, and poems such as "Religious Musings" and "Dejection: An Ode." Harries recognizes three stages which start with positive enthusiasm for the religion (1793–1802) and lead to a negative perspective after 1822 following a period of ambivalence (1802–21). Her essay attempts to show the significance of Hinduism as a religious and cultural "other" on the development of Coleridge's theological ideas.

Setsuko Wake-Naota's "On Artistic Disinterestedness: Coleridge, Schopenhauer, and Japanese Esoteric Buddhism Compared" presents parallels between Coleridge, Schopenhauer, and Kukai, the founder of Japanese Shingon Esoteric Buddhism, who considered the aesthetic experience of disinterest to be the origin of sympathy. Wake-Naota's chapter develops some points taken up earlier by Fulford and Perry, explaining why Coleridge wrote poems laden with moral and narrative ambiguity and why Empson's interpretation of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is valid. The section entitled "Kukai's Esoteric Buddhism and Coleridge's 'conscious perception,'" in particular, contains a clear and detailed explanation of the basic ideas of Esoteric Buddhism and would be informative for researchers who do not know much about this religious practice.

Part three, focusing on "Kubla Khan," consists of three chapters. Heidi Thomson's "The Integral Significance of the 1816 Preface to 'Kubla Khan'" offers an appreciation of the significance of the preface, which is often regarded as an unnecessary afterthought; Thomson views it instead as an integral part of the poem. She uses the twin concepts of "commanding genius" and "absolute genius," which are discussed by Coleridge in the *Statesman's Manual* and *Biographia Literaria* and are used by John Beer in *Coleridge the Visionary* and *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence*. "Commanding genius" expresses its power in the world of practice, including realms such as politics and war, whereas "absolute genius" manifests in artistic creativity. Kubla himself is a "commanding genius" and, as Beer points out, the verse part of "Kubla Khan," which moves towards the poet's invocation for the revival of the Abyssinian maid's symphony and song, represents the shift from "commanding genius" to "absolute genius." Further, Thomson argues that the addition of the 1816 preface introduces the authority of the author poet (and, I would add, that of Byron, who recommended the publication of "Kubla Khan" to Coleridge), who released the unpublished poem to both contemporary and future readers. This act liberates the poem from the closed circle of the world created by its verse part, initiating a new balance emphasizing the importance of "absolute genius."

In "The Mathematics of Dreams: The Psychological Infinity of the East and Geometric

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Structures in Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan,'" Dometa Wiegand Brothers successfully presents a unique reading of "Kubla Khan" by introducing the influence of two scientists, Isaac Newton and William Herschel; Coleridge was familiar with their ideas during the period when he first composed "Kubla Khan." Newton's calculus, which is characterised by the use of geometric symbols and is able to describe natural systems such as celestial mechanics or fluid dynamics, influenced Coleridge's idea of time and space, especially in its eternity and infinity. Brothers's discussion of the number five, which appears twice in the poem ("So twice five miles of fertile ground" and "Five miles meandering with a mazy motion"), is fascinating. According to Brothers, "five" is a reference to five Chinese mathematicians who observed five different directions and is a metaphor for celestial revelation.

The book's last chapter, "'Kubla Khan' and British Chinoiserie: The Geopolitics of the Chinese Garden" by Kuri Katsuyama, focuses on the first thirty-six lines of "Kubla Khan," examining them in the context of England's political situation in the 1790s. Because the scenery described in the first thirty-six lines is artificial—a self-contained garden where a despotic ruler reigns—Katsuyama posits that this is a metaphor for the despotism of Qianlong China and of the British government of the time, which restricted freedom of speech and press through the Seditious Meetings Act and the Treason Act of 1795, among others. Discussing the geopolitics of the Chinese garden and quoting from *Watchman*, Katsuyama explains how Coleridge criticized British imperialism by contrasting it with the self-sufficient Chinese economic system, which did not require external expansion. Although Katsuyama does not mention it in this essay, I thought that the self-contained landscape might also be a metaphor for the self-sufficiency of the Chinese economic system, to which Coleridge offers a somewhat positive estimation here. Thus, the landscape described in the first thirty-six lines of "Kubla Khan" encompasses conflicting values, as some other chapters of this collection also discuss.

The wide scope and variety of topics and approaches are the strength of this book. At the beginning of this review, I referred to "Kubla Khan" as an "oriental" poem. This poem is "oriental" in that it is based in China and, at the same time, in that it was a product of a Western imagination of the East. However, the chapters in this volume shed light on "Kubla Khan" from different directions: as a piece that reflects Coleridge's own unconscious anxiety over the difficulty of philosophical thinking; as a work that enabled Coleridge to transcend the distinction between the material and the spiritual; as a work that claims the prominence of "absolute genius" over "commanding genius"; and as a poem reflecting his mathematical images. As a whole, this volume shows a broader spectrum than what most post-colonial criticism can offer.

The bibliography at the end of this book is invaluable for those who wish to conduct research in this field. I am also certain that this book, which is a significant contribution to Coleridge scholarship in itself, will inspire readers to further study of cultural negotiations.

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