James Hevia begins this ambitious and far-reaching book by invoking Daniel Dravot and Peachey Carnehan, the plucky protagonists of Kipling’s famous novella *The Man Who Would Be King*. Armed with a motley collection of old books, outdated maps and encyclopedia entries, the two ex-soldiers announce their plans to reject their limited prospects in British India and venture beyond the northwest frontier into unknown „Kafiristan“ to become kings in their own right. Against this popularized conceit about the gathering of information at the boundaries of empire, Hevia launches into his study of the professionalization of military intelligence and logistics in the Indian Army, the building of an imperial security state, and, more broadly, the European formation of knowledge about Asia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He argues persuasively that gathering intelligence not only advanced European geopolitical goals in the East, but actually „produced“ Asia, at least in European eyes, as „the very object of intervention itself“ (p. 16).

At the outset, Hevia describes at length the impact within the British Army of the technoscientific and organizational revolutions taking place in the armies of its European rivals in the early nineteenth century. In France, the army officer corps was transformed by revolution and Napoleonic conquests from an *ancien régime* bastion of aristocratic privilege into an open meritocracy and bureaucratic machine. Meanwhile in Prussia, the army developed a highly professional General Staff, one that fused organization, logistics, supply, intelligence and training through a holistic approach that became the envy of the world. The more conservative British officer corps was aware of the changes but took longer to respond to them. Eventually these developments, combined with disasters of incompetent leadership in Crimea (1853-6) and the upheaval of the Indian Revolt (1857-8), prompted major military reform both in Britain and India. The rising importance of staff officers selected through competitive examination was concurrent with the diminishing influence of the old aristocratic elite and their purchased commissions. The restructuring of the Indian Army that replaced the three presidency armies of the East India Company led, among other things, to the creation of the Military Intelligence Branch headquartered in Simla. Its chief concern remained the gathering of information and maintenance of external security beyond India’s northwest frontier in Afghanistan.

Throughout the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth, British intelligence officers amassed a vast archive of route books, statistical surveys, maps, reports, handbooks and ethnographic studies in the service of both the colonial state and the military and diplomatic leadership in London eager to use these as leverage against European rivals. These forms of knowledge allowed British India to maintain a high degree of control and surveillance over Afghanistan and other parts of Central Asia, but without the liability of formal colonization or military occupation (previous attempts at which had failed spectacularly). They also signaled a gradual shift in the culture of the officer corps away from the gentlemanly amateurism of those born to command and instead toward technical mastery, a tireless work ethic and self-discipline honed through constant training and advancement by merit - a shift reflective of larger social and political transformations underway in industrial Britain and its empire. Hevia goes as far as to characterize this phenomenon as a „new kind of imperial masculinity, one associated with intense study and the capacity to manipulate complex technologies skillfully“ (p. 51). Moreover, his descriptions of the professional expertise and systematic precision of intelligence gathering on India’s northwest frontier offer a valuable corrective to tales of dashing adventure and Kiplingesque romance that still animate popular imagination about the „Great Game.“

Apart from describing the inner workings and objectives of the intelligence branch of the Indian army, Hevia demonstrates how the orbits of military intelligence and diplomacy
often overlapped in regions of Central Asia
where European colonial control was either
indirect or altogether non-existent. He also
reveals that, in many ways, professionaliza-
tion in the Indian army reflected similar re-
forms taking place elsewhere in the subcon-
tinent among the civil service and which, as
a Europe-wide phenomenon, had long exis-
ted among diplomats. Quoting Timothy Mit-
chell, he characterizes this growing „rule of
experts” (p. 14) as one of the central features
of military reform and the accumulation of
knowledge along the frontiers of British India.

Among the many strengths of this book
is the description of how the Indian Army,
and the imperial security state more generally,
shifted away from traditional European mili-
tary conventions and codes and faced up to
the challenges, in Afghanistan and elsewe-
here, of what today is known as „asymmetrical”
warfare. Indeed, much of the work of British
intelligence officers focused on knowing this
new type of „savage” enemy and engaging
him effectively - and, in the process, creating
the stereotypes that would shape European
perceptions of Asia while informing the impe-
rial policies that would have such far-reaching
impact on Asians themselves. Hevia leavens
his extensive archival work with Foucaul-
dian theories of governmentality and discipli-
ne while invoking Said’s arguments about the
West’s „orientalizing” of Eastern cultures (the
latter more compelling than the former). Even
more noteworthy is the extensive treatment of
China and its importance in imperial Britain’s
larger project of knowing Asia. Hevia’s earlier
research gives him an enviable command of
this topic and, more importantly, draws toge-
ther British India and Qing China as parts of a
larger strategic whole, with regard to imperia-
list and knowledge formation, rather than as
the more common study in contrasts: the for-
mer being the „Jewel in the Crown” of empire
and the latter a string of treaty ports and set-
lements that, at best, exerted indirect control.
Instead, Hevia describes how military intelli-
gence fused China with the rest of Asia „into
a terrain of calculation and surveillance” (p.
151). This is the book’s most original contribu-
tion to the historiography of British impe-
rialism.

For all its strengths, however, The Imperi-
al Security State gives surprisingly little con-
sideration to the enormous influence of In-
dian society and culture on British adminis-
tration in India, including the military. The
reform and reorganization of the Indian Ar-
my after 1858, even with regard to intelli-
gence and logistics, drew heavily upon prac-
tices that had evolved over centuries under
the Mughals and their princely successors (in
whose service more than a few Europeans had
learned much) and which owed little or noth-
to European traditions. Moreover, for all
its later failures, the East India Company had
long excelled at adapting itself to Indian me-
thods of surveillance, diplomacy and combat.

Hevia refers to the path-breaking scholarship
of C. A. Bayly and Bernard Cohn about the
formation of colonial knowledge, but over-
all the book’s engagement with South Asian
sources and historical scholarship is limited.
In fact, the overlap in India between military
and civil power with regard to informati-
on gathering, especially in the nineteenth cen-
tury, was longstanding and deep. Paramili-
itary policing and the use of informants, in
particular, had served chiefly as the eyes and
ears of the colonial regime well before 1857.
They often drew on Indian methods and their
successes owed to brilliant individuals like
Charles Napier and William Sleeman (neither
of whom is mentioned). Such practices re-
mained especially effective in frontier zones
where the colonial government exercised tenuous
control over restive and alienated popula-
tions. This Indian inheritance played a crucial
role, alongside European military reform and
technological innovation, in shaping British
military intelligence and security in the nor-
thwest frontier and Central Asia in the late ni-
eteenth century.

These limitations, however, detract little
from what is an impressive and important
book. It is rigorously researched, well organi-
zed and accessible (though given its topic it
would have benefited from the inclusion of
a few maps) and has much to offer to schol-
ars of British imperialism, military adminis-
tration and geopolitics and the production of
knowledge.

David A. Campion über Hevia, James: The Im-
perial Security State. British Colonial Knowledge

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