

to absolute contradictory demands. More interesting (and less developed) is Cai's finding that the tripartite stratification of Na society was also created by this cultural imposition. The system of chiefly marriage ended by fiat in 1956, replaced by an even more uncompromising demand on all Na to end "depraved customs" of the mode of visitation and get married, made by a state convinced of "the superiority of socialist monogamy." Though "no other ethnic group in China underwent as deep a disruption as the Na did during the Cultural Revolution"; Cai gives this period less attention than I would like to see, as it is tangential to the main point of his book.

As to the future of the Na mode of sexuality, Cai feels that the education system (in which marriage and nuclear family are taken for granted) and the effects of commerce and industrialization will do more than the "administrative constraints" to eventually end what clearly is a successful human solution to reproducing society. Two current issues are not in the purview of Cai's book but perhaps later studies will address them. The spread of HIV in China is a growing reality, and the Na reputedly already have higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases than their marrying ethnic neighbors (an allegation which makes sense). What will this mean for them? As with other Yunnan minorities, the Na, now more or less permitted to practice their customs, are also a target of Han tourism. How is their unique sexual mode of life being commodified for all those socialist (with Chinese characteristics) monogamous visitors?

So what can we do with this book? It strives for more theoretical cachet than it achieves, but don't all of us? Cai is theoretically conservative in that his principal interlocutors are structural functionalism, Murdock and Levi-Strauss. But like them, he gives us a richly detailed micro-analysis of kinship and sexual custom without flying off prematurely into ego-syntonic cultural critique. Of course recounting stories of kinship and seeking to derive its underlying rules is always more interesting to the writer (for whom it is ultimately gossip about people he knows and likes) than the reader, for whom it is sometimes mind numbing in the way that moves undergraduates to ask "is this important?"

It is exactly this quality that leads me to think that Cai's book is a good ethnography for an introductory anthropology course, as well as one on "kinship and family." Students need to be presented with an ethnography which, sometimes flatfootedly yet consistently and systematically, shows how anthropologists try to derive principles from slowly adduced data. Because Cai also brings in historical and political factors there is a diachronic aspect to his discussion, which stimulates further questions. Finally, though I am dissatisfied by his conclusion that the Na have neither marriage (true) nor family (doubtful), Cai presents enough evidence linked to basic theoretical discussion that students can debate with him from his own evidence and reasoning questions such as What does kinship "do"? Does society need

marriage? What is a "family?" Does sexual exchange necessitate emotional attachment? Are the Na a feminist paradise? Why should anybody need to know who is their father? And what would the Na have to discuss in place of the issue of gay marriage?

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**Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (eds.),** *Catastrophe and Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002, 312 pages.

Reviewer: *Alan Smart*  
*University of Calgary*

This volume illustrates why the School of American Research Advanced Seminar program is so valuable. What might be seen as a specialized topic, the anthropology of disaster, is here revealed as a medium by which the different subfields of anthropology can interact in a synergistic manner. The introductory chapter by the editors makes the case very effectively: "When hazards threaten and disasters occur, they both reveal and become an expression of the complex interactions of physical, biological, and sociocultural systems... Within disaster research, anthropology finds an opportunity to amalgamate past and current cultural, ecological, and political-economic investigations, along with archaeological, historical, demographic, and certain biological and medical concerns" (pp. 5-6). These opportunities, of course, carry with them difficult challenges, requiring work at the interface between the sociocultural and physical worlds, and demanding attention to longer swathes of time than are encompassed in the usual field research. For example, the chapter by Michael Moseley examines the Andean archaeological record to argue that groups tend to be able to cope with regular disasters, but may be pushed beyond the edge of recoverability by the proximate occurrence of multiple disasters, such as a prolonged drought followed by an earthquake. Examining similar issues on a shorter time-scale, Christopher Dyer analyzes the Exxon Valdez oil spill to illustrate his ideas on how such processes of what he calls "punctuated entropy" (crisis followed by crisis) can lead to system collapse. These, as well as most of the other chapters, engage with the ideas of other contributors at a sustained and productive level, something not always found in edited volumes.

Anthony Oliver-Smith provides a magisterial effort at theorizing disasters, integrating the multiple dimensions from which the development and outcome of disasters must be seen. He focusses in particular on how socially produced vulnerabilities are created and influence the disasters that result. In doing so, he deals with cultural constructions of nature, and ways of integrating culture, nature, domination and the technology/nature interface into anthropological

research. Virginia Garcia-Acosta explores the historiography of disasters in Mexico, revealing that the reporting of disasters provides a rich set of data for understanding the spatial and social organization of the past. Robert Paine discusses what he labels the “no-risk thesis”: the cognitive repression of risk by those who continue to live in dangerous circumstances, identifying a variety of cultural forms in which this is accomplished. Sharon Stephens also examines the constitution of perception of risks, but as this is accomplished by professional “radiation protection experts.” Susanna Hoffman examines the symbolism of disaster in the discourse and spontaneous shrines that occurred in the aftermath of a firestorm in Oakland, California, using this medium to generate some interesting insights into attitudes towards nature. Gregory Button describes ways in which popular media reframe man-made disasters, emphasizing the ways in which local knowledge becomes marginalized in this process. Finally, Ravi Rajan examines the failures in responses to the Union Carbide gas leak in Bhopal, India. He argues that the problem was not simply that the state actors failed to act effectively to prevent the situation causing many more casualties than were necessary, but that for a variety of reasons the state had not developed the expertise that would have been required to facilitate an effective response, and that these are related to critical fault lines within the society.

While some chapters build on much more detailed and sustained primary research than others, all of the chapters have interesting stories to tell and important points to make. The volume as a whole is carefully integrated and represents a major contribution. Not only those interested in disaster research or applied anthropology will find the book rewarding, but also those interested in how extreme and tragic circumstances help to understand the nature of societies and the intersection between nature and culture.

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**Sandra Flood**, *Canadian Craft and Museum Practice, 1900-1950*, Mercury Series Paper 74, Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2001, xv + 335 pages, ISSN 0317-2244 (paper).

Reviewer: *Cory Silverstein Willmott*  
*University of Manitoba*

In *Canadian Craft and Museum Practice, 1900-1950*, Sandra Flood investigates the relationship between craft and museum communities in Canada during the first half of the 20th century. Her thesis assumes that museum collections are influential in “assigning cultural and economic value to practice” because they function as the collective memory of a nation’s material culture. She therefore asks to what extent these two communities share an understanding of “craft,” and to what degree Canadian museums recognized craft activity by collecting and displaying craft works (p. 1). She

pursues these two questions through a survey and analysis of contemporaneous published discourse on crafts (chap. 2), a survey of Canadian craft production arranged according to socio-economic contexts of production (chap. 3), a series of detailed case studies of institutions that supported craft production and/or display (chap. 4) and of educational institutions that offered advanced training in craft skills (chap. 5), as well as an overview and case studies of museums that housed and displayed craft collections (chap. 6).

In the first chapter, Flood reminds readers of the fragility and infancy of Canada during the early 20th century. The unification of the fledgling nation was merely a matter of political and economic convenience rather than common cause or enemy. Its development was impeded by vast geographical distances, as well as regional, ethnic and religious differences. It was not until the early 20th century that Canada achieved a cohesive form. Even so, it was still a “Dominion,” that is, a politically autonomous colony of Britain. The sense of “Empire” was reflected in the influence of the British Arts and Crafts Movement on the formation of craft advocacy groups and the immigration of master craft workers from the Mother Country. As well, preferential tariffs and British guilds ensured that the influx of British craft products undersold those produced in Canada.

In order to grasp the meaning of “craft” during the period under discussion, Flood undertook a quantitative analysis of themes that occurred in 92 contemporaneous publications on crafts. These themes are: “concerns about skills and traditions and their loss; the contribution of craft production to the national economy; the contribution of craft to industry through the improvement of design; the benefits of craft as an occupation; handcraft as embracing a universal, participatory community; and craftspeople’s role in the establishment and constitution of a distinctive, inclusive Canadian culture;...the link between craft and rural life;...[and] the changing location of craft in relation to fine art” (pp. 31-32). Flood’s analysis shows that despite rhetoric about the universality of Canadian craft production, the majority of literature emanated from an educated, well-to-do elite centred in Montreal who were primarily interested in the picturesque “folk arts” of the rural Habitants (pp. 54-55).

Recognizing that publications do not adequately represent the extent and scope of craft production during the period, in chapter 3 Flood turns to newspapers, magazines and agricultural exhibition prize lists for additional information. These sources proved fruitful in discovering both the variety and quantity of craft production across the nation. Flood presents her findings for various types of craft, which include textiles, woodworking, metalwork and glass, under several categories of craft production: “Crafts for a living,” “The Domestic Economy [sic],” “Leisure activities,” “General craft education and therapy” and “Community projects.” Flood observes that a disproportionate amount of the craft activities reported in these sources consisted of women’s textile arts. Although these were undervalued in