

In This Issue

The five articles in this issue deal, in a variety of ways, with local cultural forms in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although concerns with colonialism and modernity play an important role in the conceptualization of the articles, what distinguishes them is their concern with particulars—fictional narrative, religious ritual, theatrical space, painting and performance, and religious narrative—and the way that attention to particularities illuminates larger questions.

ALEXANDER DES FORGES examines installment fiction in Shanghai published at the turn of the last century and connects the aesthetics of the narrative to the material conditions of its production. He argues that a fine-grained attention to time and to space is essential to the narrative form. He shows how not only the city spaces themselves but also the distinction between Shanghai and its hinterlands are written in the fiction and the ways in which it is produced and read.

KAMA MACLEAN argues that the great Kumbh Mela at Allahabad is not in fact an ancient ritual, but was created in the nineteenth century as a ritual in which pilgrims would come and bathe at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers. There were annual Magh Mela celebrations in Allahabad and Kumbh Mela celebrations at Hardwar, but the Kumbh Mela at Allahabad was something to which Maclean finds no reference prior to 1870. She argues that the British sensitivities about not intervening in religious affairs meant that festivals such as the Kumbh Mela offered a kind of space for local autonomy. She further suggests that British discourses of religion as well as the infrastructure supplied by the British in fact facilitated pilgrimage, an irony, given that these discourses and facilities were intended to control it.

PIKA GHOSH presents a detailed analysis of a narrative scroll from Bengal in the late nineteenth century featuring an incident from the *Ramayana* and suggests that some particular characteristics of the scroll (particularly the manner in which Rama and Durga are portrayed) indicate that the artist-storyteller (*patua*) is interjecting himself into the scroll. She connects this new sensibility to the growing competition that the *patua* faced from the theater and movies.

JOSHUA GOLDSTEIN looks at theaters in Shanghai, Beijing, and Tianjin during the early Republican period and suggests that the transformation of theatrical space from teahouses where patrons, vendors, and actors intermingled into theaters where various arenas of activity were clearly demarcated suggests a change in the nature of representation. He shows ways in which the new Western-inspired theaters were seen as part of a modernizing and civilizing project.

ANNE HANSEN looks at a story from the *Gatilok*, a Khmer vernacular Buddhist ethics manual first published in the 1920s, to discern ways in which the narrative suggests possibilities and problems of the ethical life. She deals with the relationship between the vernacular and the canon and argues for a conceptualization which does not marginalize the vernacular but, rather, sees the interaction between the two as dynamic and two-way.

In some senses, all of these pieces are interested in the problem of narrative, and in some senses they are all written in the shadow of colonialism (but different colonialisms cast different shadows). These are narratives which are interrupted, narratives which are transformed, narratives which are newly constructed, and narratives into which new elements are interjected. Concern with colonial power is never absent from these pieces, but colonial power is not the central concern of any of these authors: what they are interested in is how people tell their stories in a variety of media—installment fiction in Shanghai, theaters in Shanghai or Beijing, narrative scrolls in Bengal, the festival of Kumbh Mela at Allahabad, and the narrative of the orphan in the Khmer *Gatilok*.

As is now my habit, I sent all of the articles to all of the authors in this issue and asked them to comment on commonalities and resonances that they saw in the various pieces. I was rewarded by a richness of commentary. Des Forges links the pieces in the following way:

Three questions—to a certain extent mutually related—seem to provide useful approaches to these articles as a group: (1) the relationship between the colonial project and “native culture” or “tradition,” (2) the creation and management of desire and consumption, and (3) the implication of narrative aesthetics in ideological and material production.

(Des Forges, e-mail, 20 May 2003)

Goldstein also notes three similarities among the pieces, although in rather different terms than does Des Forges. He articulates the similarities as follows:

(1) All of these articles translate texts into spaces, spaces into texts, or—as Alexander Des Forges does so brilliantly in his article—they describe a mutually constituting dialectic between spaces and texts. (2) Intertextuality is a second guiding thread here, with Pika Ghosh’s piece demonstrating with great elegance how sculpture, painting, text, and performance all register and respond to changes in the social environment and other representational forms. (3) And finally, we all seem to be arguing, in one way or another, a version of what Kama Maclean finds with regard to the Allahabad Kumbh Mela, which she concludes is “an example of the way in which Indian actors appropriated and manipulated colonial discourse to their own ends: by extending from their own established customs and utilizing the tools of the British state, the Indians found an arena of sovereignty.” Although perhaps the clear sense of opposition that Maclean invokes here between colonized and colonizer may be less starkly evident in the other articles, it seems to me that the gist of her point motivates all of the articles here in one form or another and that we are all describing textual/spatial arenas in which artisans/actors/readers/priests could experience or express their agency within and against the structures of colonial modernity.

(Goldstein, e-mail, 12 May 2003)

Hansen expresses the similarities as follows:

The articles for this issue are closely connected in thematic and methodological ways. All are studies of the articulation of Asian modernity, and all use the strategy of exploring the expression of modernity not just within a particular historical moment but also within a particular site: the architecture of a teahouse, a scroll, a text, a literary genre, or a ritual performance. Historically situated within the colonial period (although this takes on a different significance in China than in British India or the indirectly ruled French protectorate of Cambodia), all of these studies contribute to a more nuanced and heterogeneous understanding of the ways in which Asian

(Chinese, Indian, and Cambodian) communities responded to the ideas and aesthetics in circulation during this period. All of the articles illustrate the complexity of this process—that it was not a one-sided kind of appropriation of ideas and aesthetics connected with European modernity but, rather, the simultaneous production of many different expressions of modern values and identities. By examining these sites of expression in terms of their continuities and growth from previous genres or traditions, they demonstrate ways in which these Asian constructions of modern expression and identity were independent of European influence. In the case of Khmer Buddhism, although French colonial discourses had an impact on the development of modern Khmer Buddhist identity, the more important issue was the negotiation between local interpretations and cosmopolitan Theravadin ideas (often mediated through Siamese influence during this period).

(Hansen, e-mail, 7 May 2003)

Hansen goes on to note the ways in which the articles by Maclean and Ghosh show how colonial subjects “work within the constraints imposed by colonial social and political control to subvert it in ways that Ghosh describes as ‘subtle expressions of dissatisfaction, denial, and rejection.’” Hansen continues:

In Ghosh’s examination of a *Ramayana* scroll, she concludes that the patua’s unusual insertion of the depiction of Rama as an artist in the scroll is significant in a number of ways. First, it asserts and affirms the importance of patua identity and artistic expression in the face of changing modes of exchange in the colonial state; cheaper photographs, reproductions, and new forms of entertainment such as cinema threaten the importance of the scroll form and its performative uses. Second and related to this, the affirmation of identity, particularly through the politically potent medium of the *Ramayana*, expresses a larger sense of dissatisfaction with modern values. Ghosh’s method for this exploration involves situating the scroll in an examination of the sociopolitical context in which it is painted, especially the nineteenth-century appropriation of the Durga festival as a “significant marker of Bengali identity in the face of increasing Europeanization in Bengali intellectual and cultural life. . . .” In addition, she examines the evolution of scroll painting as an artistic form. What we begin to see from this examination is that patuas continuously reinvented their tradition—not just as a result of the colonial context but in response to changing aesthetics and sociopolitical circumstances over time in general. Although the British colonials characterized South Asian artistic and religious expression as “eternal and unchanging,” in fact the examination of this scroll from the colonial period provides a case study of how and why artistic expression changes in particular historical moments.

The Maclean article on the “ancient” Kumbh Mela is another case in point. Like the *Ramayana* scroll, the Kumbh Mela becomes another instance of both subversion and adaptation to the colonial political context. In this study we see the deft ways in which the Pragwals of Allahabad used colonial infrastructure (better roads, railways, and so on) as well as colonial constraints on Indian pilgrimage practices (fears of dissidence, concerns about hygiene, and capitalist impulses to tax religious participants) to their own advantage.

In many respects, these two articles connect more closely to my larger project on the production of modern Buddhist values in colonial Cambodia than is clear from the “Image of an Orphan” article included in this volume. Like both Maclean and Ghosh, I seek to situate my examination of Buddhist ethical writings in the sociopolitical context of colonialism but also to show both continuities in thought and strategies for adapting Buddhist ethics to social change that are independent of colonial influence. Our articles connect closely in terms of their methodological use of similar kinds of sites (a single religious scroll/narrative/festival) for examining the

articulation of ways of responding to modern ideas and values and in their theoretical concern with understanding how artistic and religious expressions change and are constructed in particular historical moments.

(Hansen, e-mail, 7 May 2003)

Both Hansen and Ghosh are interested in the processes of vernacularization, local variants of metanarratives, and the ways in which these local narratives are related to and transform the metanarratives. Ghosh notes similarities of concern between her article and Maclean's:

Like Maclean, I am interested in the role of resistance in the shaping of colonialism. Her reading of the Kumbh Mela as a site of resistance to British colonial intervention and a site of creativity and invention which elevates the social and professional stature of the local religious practitioners, the Pragwals, is not dissimilar to my suggestion that the patuas responded to the pressures of cheap images and entertainment forms introduced with increasing European contact, both asserting their identity and drawing attention to their precarious conditions, contrary to statements about India's eternal and unchanging art forms.

(Ghosh, e-mail, 12 May 2003)

Ghosh reiterates the ways in which both of these articles demonstrate transformations in Indian religious life and artistic production, changes which were happening under the very eyes of the British who asserted the timeless and unchanging nature of Indian religion and art.

Des Forges notes that both the Maclean and Goldstein pieces describe state authorities who are anxious about crowds. He writes:

Maclean and Goldstein both emphasize the extent to which government authorities worried about large public leisure gatherings, whether their misgivings were expressed in terms of morality, public hygiene, or social order. At the same time, we find a few hints that attempts to contain or suppress public leisure activities not only may have failed but indeed may have contributed to the attraction that these activities had for many individuals. For example, organizers of pilgrim activities in Allahabad could make use of anti-British symbols to bring in more business or, conversely, exploit the presence of British police as an emblem of prestige (Maclean). Similarly, Goldstein notes in the very wording of edicts against theaters in Beijing a step-by-step retrenchment that suggests that campaigns to keep public theaters under control were at best partially successful, even in the areas of the city closest to the Imperial Palace. Despite constant proclamations by the authorities that women of good families *by definition* were not to be found as audience members in public theaters, a variety of sources suggest that in Shanghai the wives and daughters of the local elites regularly attended public theaters as early as 1890. This dynamic matches the rhetorical construction and manipulation of the reader's desire in Shanghai installment fiction. It is in fact the limits imposed on the reader's engagement with the text—whether for moral and aesthetic reasons or because the day's installment has come to its end—that work to heighten his or her interest in the narrative and ensure that this interest will persist far longer than it might have otherwise.

(Des Forges, e-mail, 20 May 2003)

Des Forges also remarks upon the phenomenon of created antiquity and the role of the colonial state. He begins his discussion with Maclean and Ghosh but ultimately touches upon all of the articles. He writes:

Maclean's article begins by confronting us with a striking problem: although the Kumbh Mela is generally considered to be ancient and ageless, it took shape as a duodecennial festival only in the 1860s. Indeed, the creation of this festival and its subsequent popularity are tied closely to a variety of British strategies and tactics in northwest India, from colonial attempts to encourage Hindu rituals that could be understood in terms of Christian parallels to the improvement of roads and the construction of rail networks and bridges, which made travel to Allahabad much simpler and quicker. Similarly, Ghosh notes the significance of the colonial categorization of individuals into two mutually exclusive categories—"Muslim" or "Hindu"—as a source of anxiety for patua and other artisan communities and suggests that these painter-storytellers are motivated in response to construct a genealogy that linked them to "classic" works of much earlier eras.

Peking opera is also often identified as a traditional Chinese art form, even though, as Goldstein shows, it came into its own as a distinct genre only relatively recently. And although Peking opera did originate in Beijing, it owed its continued popularity in the last quarter of the nineteenth century at least in part to its rapid development in the Shanghai concession areas. Goldstein documents the long-term skepticism of Qing authorities toward public theater. This attitude found perhaps its most intense expression after the death of the Tongzhi emperor in 1874, in the form of a three-year ban on public opera presentations across China, which ensured that during this period the Shanghai concessions (due to colonial status) would be the only area in which Peking opera could be both openly performed and widely advertised. As a consequence, the concession areas became one of the two major centers for a cultural practice that has been strongly identified as an integral part of *Chinese* identity ever since. Although my own article does not emphasize the colonial project, installment fiction written in Chinese appeared only in response to the publication in installments of works translated from European languages (the widespread popularity of installment fiction a century earlier in Edo Japan provides an instructive contrast to this) and for more than two decades was published primarily in the concession areas. Yet, Shanghai novels, the first Chinese genre of fiction to be printed in installments, make extensive references to classic Ming and Qing works of fiction and fiction criticism, not only in their accompanying commentaries but also in the very structure of the installment fiction itself. By imagining the installment format as a means for the material realization of an aesthetic of delay and readerly frustration articulated more than two centuries earlier, authors were not only able to seize on installment publication as a practical innovation but were also able to use it as a spur to new developments in classical vernacular aesthetics.

The relationship between "colonial" and "native" cultural production is clearly often more complicated than one might imagine, especially given the variety of powerful ideological motivations to view this relationship in the simplest possible terms. Although we certainly will want to retain some distinctions between the European and American colonial projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the one hand and earlier unequal relations between states and cultures on the other, it is worth remembering that this kind of complexity or hybridity is not a recent invention. Hansen's article not only calls our attention to French colonial influences on Buddhist traditions in Southeast Asia but also, and perhaps more significantly, formulates a contrast between cosmopolitan Pali and Sanskrit traditions on the one hand and local literary cultures on the other. This suggests to me that we may want to read the spread of Buddhism in East Asia—in certain specific ways—as analogous to later colonial projects involving similar complexities and paradoxes. To give just one example of this earlier complexity (brought to mind by Maclean's citation of Xuanzang in a discussion of the medieval antecedents of the Kumbh Mela), Jan Nattier's (1992) work on the Heart Sutra suggests that it originated as a Chinese text and was subsequently translated into Sanskrit only in the seventh or eighth century C.E. Evidently fundamental challenges to accepted narratives of cultural

continuity, coherence, and discreteness are not limited to the colonial and postcolonial eras.

(Des Forges, e-mail, 20 May 2003)

Hansen sees her article and those of Des Forges and Goldstein as being centrally focused on the question of how modern values and identities were created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She writes:

All three articles contain some implied assumptions about what modern values/identities are: changed modes of production and consumerism, changed experience of temporality, the imagining of new kinds of identities and communities such as the nation, urban society, and national "cultures" that share certain kinds of aesthetic and moral values and tastes. These assumptions are spelled out more clearly in Des Forges's "Building Shanghai" than in the other two articles.

The articles explore the articulation of modern values and identities through the development of genres and urban values tied to the introduction and expansion of print journalism, the alteration of theater architecture to fit the rise of a new aesthetic in which performative representation and social reality are separated, and the articulation of modern identity through the medium of Buddhist ethical narratives that privilege the values of moral discernment and social relationships. All of the articles are concerned with the ways in which these modern genres or expressions draw on and reinterpret older literary genres and architectural forms or, in my article, with the ways in which local Buddhist values draw on and reshape the cosmopolitan expression of Theravadin ethics.

Des Forges's article examines installment fiction in Shanghai as a genre that develops along with the rise in popularity of print journalism. I found his examinations of the modern tropes articulated in this new genre to be particularly helpful as a way of understanding how people experience and express changed conceptions of temporality (something with which I am struggling in my book project). À la Martha Nussbaum (1990), Des Forges's discussion of "simultaneity, interruption, and excess" in the Shanghai installment fiction exemplifies the interconnectedness between literary form and the content of some of the values and ideas that the genre wants to explore. Des Forges's discussion also allows us to see the relationships between literary techniques in the new genre and new social experiences of consumerism, addiction, urban busy-ness, and so on. At the same time, I am persuaded after reading Des Forges's article that the installment fiction that he explores must have contributed significantly to the imagining of a shared modern urban identity in Shanghai.

The installment-fiction genre in Shanghai played a similar role to that of Buddhist ethical literature in Cambodia during the same period as a means of articulating and shaping modern values and identity. Print came to Cambodia extremely late, and Khmer-language newspapers did not begin to circulate until the 1930s. Prior to this time, young reformist Buddhist monks in Cambodia sought to introduce the printing of Buddhist texts during the 1910s but the Khmer clergy resisted print until around 1920. During the 1920s, there was a rapid introduction of Buddhist printed texts, and two Buddhist serial publications that emphasized Buddhist social ethical teachings emerged. These texts, as I argue in my larger study (if not explicitly in the article that appears here), became the primary means of articulating modern identity for Khmer intellectuals, most of whom were or had been trained as members of the Buddhist clergy. In their writings on social ethics, they refocused the construction of Buddhist identity from a "cosmic time frame," imagined in terms of moral development through multiple lives, to individual comportment within the present life, situated in the here and now of colonial Cambodia.

(Hansen, e-mail, 7 May 2003)

Kama Maclean notes a similarity of concern in her article and Hansen's article. She writes:

Hansen's article is important because it deconstructs long-held ideas about religion, in a similar way to my own article. Hansen argues against long-held monolithic constructions of Buddhism (whereas I call into question the widely believed idea of the ancientness of the Kumbh Mela). The political backdrop to both of these stories is the presence or influence of a colonizing state and its attendant notions of modernity; that strands within religious traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism can adapt to them so spectacularly argues against sweeping conceptions of religion. Religion becomes an important site for resistance to powers and regimes.

(Maclean, e-mail, 12 May 2003)

Hansen concludes her comments with a question provoked by Goldstein's article but which is in actuality a question about the specificity of particular case studies and their applicability to larger questions:

The point that was most intriguing was Goldstein's argument that the change from teahouse to playhouse reflected a change in the way that the "social body" of the audience was understood and constructed. Instead of the blurred "playfulness" of the relationship between the "social (audience) and representational (stage) spaces" of the older teahouse, there was a shift to a more egalitarian kind of space in which there was a new and stricter separation between social life and representation. I do not know enough about Republican-era Chinese social formations to know exactly what sort of values are invoked by this reference, but the idea of a shift in perception and understanding of how representation relates to social experience is one that I find provocative. . . . Is this shift characteristic of "Asian modernity," of all modernities, or is it simply a way of viewing the production of national identity that occurred in late Qing China?

(Hansen, e-mail, 20 May 2003)

In concluding his comments, Des Forges writes that "[i]n each of these cases, it becomes clear that aesthetic choices are best understood in close conjunction with ideological and material production. Whether literary, visual, or performative, these choices not only respond to the social characteristics of the given moment but also do their part to construct the new social characteristics yet to appear" (Des Forges, e-mail, 20 May 2003).

In addition to underscoring the materiality of aesthetic choices, these articles provide us with new ways of thinking about local cultures, narrative, and social and textual space. These new formulations also have the potential to contribute to long-standing questions about colonialism and the nature of Asian modernity.

A final note: color versions of the figures in Ghosh's article are available on the *JAS* website, <http://www.aasianst.org/catalog/jas.htm>.

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