

Editorial Foreword

OUR COVER

Korea in Autumn—Baegyangsa Temple in Jeolla-do, photo courtesy of the Korea Tourism Organization.

ASIA BEYOND THE HEADLINES

This issue opens with a timely discussion of a South Asian country that has just ended an extended period of violence: “After the War: A New Patriotism in Sri Lanka?” This essay is the fifth contribution to the newest of *Journal of Asian Studies* genres, and the first to be written by a scholar based in Asia. Its author, NIRA WICKRAMASINGHE, is a scholar educated in France (at the Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne) and the United Kingdom (receiving a doctorate from Oxford), who is currently a professor of history and international relations at the University of Colombo. She is the author of books such as *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities* (a 2006 work published jointly by Hurst and the University of Hawai‘i Press), and she has written before about civil society and multiculturalism (the subject of one of her contributions to *openDemocracy*, an important online journal of opinion). She revisits each of these subjects here to add complexity to the news coverage of the announcement in May that peace had been restored in Sri Lanka.

Her essay begins with a recap of the May events, which signaled a close to the seemingly “endless war that had pitted the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) against the security forces of the government of Sri Lanka since 1983,” as she puts it. She evokes a time when “celebrations, some spontaneous and others orchestrated by sycophantic politicians, peppered the capital” and grand speeches were made about the country’s glorious future as a land moving beyond divisiveness toward unity. Wickramasinghe moves, though, to explore the reasons that there was a feeling of “trepidation” as well as excitement in some quarters in May, and to limn the obstacles that stand in the way of the kind of easy integration of all citizens of Sri Lanka into equal members of a political community. In the process, she offers those unfamiliar with Sri Lanka a valuable introduction to the past and present fault-lines in the country’s cultural landscape, and the role that political rituals can play in obscuring or revealing them, while also providing readers and specialists a thoughtful look at the challenges that lie ahead for national leaders, such as President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

ROBERT E. BUSWELL, JR., Distinguished Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, was the first specialist in Korean

studies to serve as president of the Association for Asian Studies, and his address given in Chicago last March (just as he ended his term in office) and now published here makes a compelling case for the centrality of that country in the development and spread of one of the continent's most important religious traditions. Titled "Korean Buddhist Journeys to Lands Worldly and Otherworldly," it provides a cogent, wide-ranging look at how religious figures, ideas, cults, objects, and texts move across land borders and waterways, such as those that separate Korea from the Chinese mainland, Japan, and even India. A key development that interests Buswell is how, over time, elements of sacred sites were brought back to or recreated in Korea, such that it was transformed into a kind of "Buddha-land itself," making physical journeys abroad less central to the monk's or other seekers of enlightenment's mission.

It is an erudite essay that draws on memoirs of pilgrimages and travelogues, along with many other kinds of materials (including academic works in French, German, Japanese, along with Korean, as well as biographies written by Chinese scholars) to bring to life the journeys of Korean monks of the fifth through the twentieth centuries. Buswell shows us how they were seen and how they viewed the world around them, as they moved between empires, kingdoms, and, most recently, nation-states, having not just to cross mountains, deserts, and oceans but also to navigate the political currents of various eras. The picture he paints is wonderfully complex, as he introduces us to what, for nonspecialists at least, are such surprising things as monks who are used to gather information that can be valuable for those engaged in statecraft and diplomacy, and Korean Buddhist pilgrims who report their time visiting the "undersea palace of the Dragon King protector of Buddhism" and other mythic settings.

TRADITIONS AND ACTIVISM

The two articles in this section focus on the political resonances of tradition. In the first offering, "Reconciliation and Revitalization: The Resurgence of Tradition in Postconflict Tobelo, North Maluku, Eastern Indonesia," CHRISTOPHER R. DUNCAN, an assistant professor of religious studies at Arizona State University, looks at the very notion of tradition (*adat* in Indonesian) in a province that has recently gone through a period of violence that pit local Muslims and Christians against one another. Appeals to revitalizing *adat* were made in North Maluku, he argues, to encourage all members of the Tobelo people there to focus on the things they shared as an ethnicity, rather than the things that divided them in terms of creed.

The section's second article, "Hot Potatoes: Chinese Complaint Systems from Early Times to the Late Qing (1898)," focuses not on tradition per se, but rather on one very specific tradition of dissent: *shangfang zhidu*, literally, "the system of going up to visit," a phrase applied to petitions of grievance that are taken to centers of power. The author, QIANG FANG, an assistant professor of history at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, takes a *longue durée* approach to this form of dissent, detailing the ways in which the tradition has evolved over

the course of roughly two millennia, bringing the tale of the *shangfang zhidu* as far as the end of the nineteenth century. The essay provides a detailed genealogy of a central strand within the rich tapestry of Chinese contention—a strand that is, moreover, still important, for it did not die out with the fall of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Though he does not move in any detail into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the author stresses that his tale has contemporary significance, as the contemporary People’s Republic of China is a land in which some forms of protest are dealt with harshly, but is also one where “[e]veryday, tens of thousands of people throughout the country, individually or in groups, legally or illegally, flock to all levels of a special bureaucracy established by the government to entertain grievances.”

POLITICS, ECONOMICS, AND REFORM

This section contains two articles that look at factors that facilitate or inhibit the reform of entrenched systems. They deal with very different political settings (India in one case, the China in the other) and institutions (the banking and insurance sectors in the Indian case and forestry in the Chinese case), but both highlight the difficulties of altering long-established bureaucratic practices.

The first article, by LAWRENCE SÁEZ, a senior lecturer in the Department of Politics of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies, is titled “The Political Economy of Financial Services Reform in India: Explaining Variations in Political Opposition and Barriers to Entry.” One of his goals is to show how the case of financial reform in India can add a new dimension to what he refers to as the “new institutional economics literature” dealing with comparable settings. The second article is by JULIA C. STRAUSS, who, in addition to teaching in the same department at the University of London as Sáez, is the editor of *The China Quarterly*, one of the most prominent journals in Asian studies. Her essay, “Forestry Reform and the Transformation of State Capacity in Fin-de-Siècle China,” places the Chinese dilemmas associated with woodlands (an increasingly important issue given the mixture of environmental and economic issues associated with timber) in broad comparative perspective, stressing that figuring out “how best to maintain public goods under conditions of chronic resource shortage and insufficient state administrative capacity,” as China’s government currently strives to do, “is a challenge for nearly all developing states.”

SYMBOLIC SYSTEMS IN ASIAN STUDIES

The issue ends with two considerations of major developments within the field of Asian studies. The first approaches the issue through the lens of ongoing debates about how best to characterize Chinese written script (e.g., whether terms such as “ideograph” and “ideogram” should be embraced or eschewed). The second does so by revisiting and assessing the contributions of

the late Clifford Geertz, a major figure in both the discipline of anthropology and the field of Southeast Asian studies.

The section opens with “Getting Over the Walls of Discourse: ‘Character Fetishization’ in Chinese Studies,” by EDWARD McDONALD, a lecturer in Chinese in the School of Asian Studies at the University of Auckland. The article ranges widely through the history of Chinese studies, going back to the era of John K. Fairbank and indeed much further than that to a 1605 commentary on China and language by the English philosopher Francis Bacon, and moves between linguistics and other disciplines, in an effort to explicate the passions that debates over the nature of characters have generated. His main intent is to shed light on rather than settle the enduring “ideograph” debate, but he suggests at the end that there would be great value in seeing “cultural China as ‘distinctive’ rather than ‘unique,’ as ‘interpretable’ rather than ‘inscrutable,’” and that getting beyond a tendency to make a fetish of the special rather than simply investigating the unusual qualities of characters is a necessary part of such a shift of vantage point.

The section and issue close with “Clifford Geertz, Cultural Portraits, and Southeast Asia,” an essay that was commissioned by my predecessor, Kenneth M. George, in consultation with the Southeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies, as part of the “Legacies” genre that he initiated. In this article, ARAM A. YENGOYAN, a professor of anthropology at the University of California, Davis, and a longtime friend of Geertz, looks at several key aspects of the work of this enormously influential ethnographer, cultural critic, and theorist. In the process, he offers insights into Geertz’s writings on Bali, approach to Javanese culture, and handling of issues associated with Islam’s spread, focusing throughout, as McDonald does, on the importance of the analysis of symbols in studies of Asia.

POSTSCRIPT

The Association for Asian Studies has recently placed special emphasis on initiatives intended to expand the organization’s geographic reach and to ensure that it remains as robustly interdisciplinary as possible. These initiatives have involved moves toward internationalizing the AAS (it is based in North America, but strives to be global in nature) and reaching out to scholars in areas that have not been as well represented as they once were on panels at the Annual Meetings and in publications of the organization. It is a pleasure, therefore, to note in closing that the contributors to this issue are based on four different continents, with disciplinary specialties that include history, religion, language, ethnography, and political economy.

—JNW

Forthcoming Articles in *JAS* 69:1 (February 2010)

From Undemocratic to Democratic Civil Society: Japan's Volunteer
Fire Departments
MARY ALICE HADDAD

Third Sister Liu and the Making of Intellectuals in Socialist China
EDDY U

Others No More: The Changing Representation of Non-Han Peoples
in Chinese History Textbooks, 1951–2003
NIMROD BARANOVITCH

The Begums of the Mystic Feast: Turco-Mongol Tradition
in the Mughal Harem
LISA BALABANLILAR

The Market Approach to the Rise of the Geluk School, 1419–1642
RACHEL M. MCCLEARY AND LEONARD VAN DER KUIJP

“Rule by Man” and “Rule by Law” in Early Republican China:
Contributions to a Theoretical Debate
LEIGH KATHRYN JENCO

Borders, Diaspora and Regional Connections: Trends in Asian and Queer Studies
MEGAN SINOTT
