

Special Issue: Geographies at Work in Asian History

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The articles presented here grew out of a year-long discussion of the spatial dimensions of historical and cultural change in various parts of Asia during the early modern and modern periods. Each essay engages the ways in which geographies—here defined as visual and verbal discourses about space—perform political and cultural work. That is, we examine how geographies in Asia were deployed strategically, whether to map, narrate, frame, relocate, or dislocate particular places, regions, “homelands,” or nation-spaces. In recent centuries, these Asian geographies have necessarily coexisted with Western (principally European) geographies, whether in the colonial or postcolonial context. As these essays show, such coexistence has taken many forms, from conflict to emulation to apparent disinterest.

Although these essays do not adopt a single, unified methodological approach, they share common theoretical and practical concerns. Chief among these are a desire to subject geographical categories to critical scrutiny, a conviction that geography and spatiality are active and effective, rather than simply metaphorical terms, and a commitment to interdisciplinary and interarea study of the inhabitation, conceptualization, and representation of space in various Asian contexts.

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