

In This Issue

KATHERINE CARLITZ argues that the long-standing ideal of widow-fidelity gained in ideological power between the late twelfth to the late fifteenth century, emerging as a prominent social practice in mid-Ming China. By drawing on evidence from the Yangtze delta region of Jiangnan, she locates the rise of the cult of faithful widows in the late fifteenth century and correlates its institutionalization with the consolidation of the Ming bureaucracy and the growth of localism in the same period. Her account of the cult also aims to elucidate generally the cultural and social history of Ming China.

NORMAN KUTCHER looks at a “scandal” that erupted in the aftermath of the death in 1748 of the Qianglong emperor’s concubine, Xiaoxian, to identify the workings and tensions of Chinese rulership during the Manchu dynasty. Specifically, he examines cases involving Qing officials who cut their hair before the official period of state mourning had elapsed. His investigation of these cases leads him to underscore a number of crises—bureaucratic, legal, ritual, racial, and personal—that surfaced with this scandal and were indicative of the growing limits of imperial control in the eighteenth century.

JOHN NELSON focuses on the daily life of Shinto priests and the workings and organization of one particular Shinto shrine in Japan to illustrate the changing roles of priests in contemporary Asian society. He shows that the training and socialization of Shinto priests have changed in the recent past, so much so that priests must now be considered as employees of a modernizing organization. Based on first-hand observation as well as on an examination of textual materials, his detailed account of one shrine and its priests shows how a religious institution and its personnel have to adapt to changing social and economic conditions in order to survive in the contemporary world.

AJAY SKARIA examines the colonial construction of the category of “tribe” and links it to notions of “wildness,” “caste,” and “gender.” By focusing particularly on the Bhils of the Khandesh region of western India, he shows how British colonial administration in the nineteenth century ordered and separated groups into tribes and castes according to a discursive framework built around ideas about savages and primitives, and about hunting, pastoralism, agriculture, and commerce. A concluding section tracks the extent to which this discourse persists today and affects current policies and attitudes.

JUDITH WALSH highlights the voices of middle-class Bengali women in nineteenth-century India by providing a new reading of contemporary domestic/advice manuals. Although these male-authored manuals emphasized wifely devotion and subordination to husbands, she rereads them to argue that “what women learned when men gave them advice” was that they “learned to read” and were therefore able to rewrite patriarchy in order to make new choices about their domestic roles and relationships. Thus, these women fashioned “an agency for themselves.”