

Editorial Foreword

OUR COVER

Evening Qur'anic Study, Madiun, East Java. Photo by Robert W. Hefner
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This issue opens with a wide-ranging exchange that explores competing visions of the interconnections among Asian countries and the meaning of “Asia” as a region. The forum, titled “Asia Redux,” begins with a think piece by historian and cultural theorist PRASENJIT DUARA focusing on the ways in which Asian intellectuals of the twentieth century thought about the things that unite and divide the continent. This is followed by spirited rejoinders to and elaborations of his argument by five scholars in different areas of Asian studies: WANG HUI, a public intellectual and analyst of modern Chinese thought; TANSEN SEN, a specialist in Chinese ties to South Asia during what he refers to as “premodern” times; AMITAV ACHARYA, who, among other things, heads a center devoted to the study of ASEAN countries; BARBARA ANDAYA, former president of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) and a scholar who has worked on many facets of Southeast Asian culture; and RUDOLF MRÁZEK, whose works cross the borders between ethnography, geography, and history. The series ends with Duara’s response to their comments.

The forum is, in some regards, a classic *Journal of Asian Studies* kind of symposium. It brings into conversation scholars who have distinguished themselves through work on varied parts of Asia (from Indonesia to India), varied periods (from the 1200s to the present), and varied topics (from international relations to religion). The contributors, moreover, are based not only in different departments but also different parts of the world, from Singapore (where Duara now works) to New York City (in the case of Sen), to Beijing (Wang’s home) and Hawaii (where Andaya is usually based, though she is currently on a visiting post in Malaysia). And many of the concerns that are addressed by the contributors, such as the way in which individual nations become part of and sometimes resist incorporation into larger geopolitical systems, have been grappled with before in *JAS* articles.

Still, there is something that sets the “Asia Redux” forum apart from anything that has appeared in these pages before. Namely, it is the first to emerge from what we hope will become a yearly occurrence: an experimental session convened during the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies that is explicitly designed to preview in a “live” version of something that will evolve into a publication. In this case, a session was held at the Philadelphia AAS meeting this past March, moderated by *JAS* managing editor Jennifer Munger. The session began, after opening comments by Duara, with oral responses to a

draft version of his essay that had been distributed in advance to a set of five discussants and made available online in a condensed form to participants. Four of the five commentators later revised their remarks for inclusion in this issue. In a nice bit of serendipity, when one of the original discussants, geographer and cultural historian Kären Wigen, was unable to rework her presentation for publication, her place was taken by a member of the audience, Acharya. This was a natural segue, as Acharya had asked an intriguing question at the session, and his work on related themes had been praised by political scientist Donald Emerson during a lively give-and-take among the forty or so people who attended the session.

This forum is followed by a piece that, following a long-standing tradition, has an intimate tie to the AAS annual meeting: the presidential address. This year's, titled "Religious Resurgence in Contemporary Asia: Southeast Asian Perspectives on Capitalism, the State, and the New Piety," is by anthropologist ROBERT W. HEFNER. Drawing on his ongoing engagement with broad issues of secularism and religiosity in Southeast Asia, as well as his deep knowledge of the complex roles of Islam in that region and the continent as a whole, Hefner provides a stimulating survey of the "unprecedented upsurge in religious ritual, association, and observance" across a "broad swath of contemporary Asia." He puts this swing toward increased religiosity in perspective by looking at a range of factors, including a dawning sense in many quarters that something was lacking in the "comprehensive guides" that elites had been offering when appealing "to the masses to join them on the golden road to modernity." What was missing, in settings where rapid economic growth was the norm or simply one thing that was promised, was an "enduringly resonant ethical plan"—exactly what so many old and new religions claim to give their followers. This leads Hefner to insist that the "religious resurgence" be understood "not as a mystification of the late modern condition, but as a creative and nonsecular response" to the "existential insecurities" of our times.

Next is a pair of research articles that, though very different from one another in topical focus, share a concern with the distant Chinese past. The first is philosopher YONG HUANG's "Respecting Different Ways of Life: A Daoist Ethics of Virtue in the *Zhuangzi*," which focuses on an early Chinese text, filled with parables and paradoxes, that has intrigued readers and spurred divergent interpretations for millennia. What will be striking about this essay to many readers—at least those who are not specialists in the author's discipline—is that it is as concerned with how the ideas of Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu), a key Daoist (Taoist) thinker, overlap with and diverge from those of famous Western philosophers as it is with how they complement or contradict those of competing Chinese sages. The article traces the implications of the fact that "Zhuang Zi, just like Aristotle and unlike Mencius, does not hold the view that human nature is originally virtuous," which means that, to the influential early Daoist, "human virtues have to be cultivated."

The second essay in this pair, JACK W. CHEN's "Blank Spaces and Secret Histories: Questions of Historical Epistemology in Medieval China," also builds on early philosophical texts, in this case ones attributed to Confucius. Chen is

concerned with figuring out the status accorded different kinds of sources and types of information in official history writing. His multifaceted exploration of this theme takes him back to classical works, such as Confucius's *Analecets*, but his focus is on the later periods, the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties. In all of these eras, “official” historians, he writes, while they might prize other sources, could “not forego the use of anecdote and gossip,” which put “flesh on the bones of annalistic factuality, creating narrative where there might have only been chronological archive.”

The first of this issue's articles on colonial India finds historian ELIZABETH KOLSKY zeroing in on and providing fascinating details about rape trials, using these cases to advance arguments that have clear relevance for scholars working on issues of gender and the law in many settings. Kolsky demonstrates, as other legal historians working on different contexts have, that court records can go a long way toward illuminating hidden cultural codes and helping us make sense of patterns of rule. In “The Rule of Colonial Difference: Rape on Trial in Early Colonial India, 1805–1857,” she adds an intriguing new dimension to the debate on the policing of sexuality by colonial authorities. A key conclusion of the author is that “for all of the racial and cultural stereotypes that shaped the colonial encounter . . . rape was treated by colonial authorities as a culturally common rather than a culturally specific crime.” This meant that it was often the case that in “rape trials, cross-cultural assumptions about male and female behavior prevailed and Indian women, cast by liberal reformers as victims of Indian men and Indian culture, were meted out rather illiberal forms of justice.”

This is followed by another foray into legal history, ELISA GIUNCHI's “The Reinvention of *Shari'a* under the British Raj: In Search of Authenticity and Certainty.” Here the concern is less with trials than with “codification,” as the author makes a careful case for the emergence under British rule of a hybrid yet rigid “Anglo-Muhammadan” approach to the law, which made selective use of Islamic principles. One irony of this, according to the author, is the way the approach, once codified, served to limit the space for “alternative discourses”—ironic because “a defining characteristic of Islamic law, at least on the Subcontinent, has been its flexibility, its ability over the centuries . . . to provide solutions which reconciled contextual considerations with ultimate religious ideals.” This development has contemporary effects, Giunchi claims, as the “shift in the interpretation of *shari'a* that occurred in colonial times under internal and external pressures has influenced the way Muslims on the Subcontinent articulate their values and religious ideals, and can be found in Pakistani attempts to Islamicize their legal system.”

After several articles that take us into the past, sometimes the very distant past, we return to the present with a closing essay by political scientist DARREN C. ZOOK. Titled “Making Space for Islam: Religion, Science, and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia,” its jumping-off point is a curious text that the author describes this way: “a small book really, something more like a pamphlet.” What makes this document, which was created at the time the country's first astronaut was about to head into the stratosphere, so interesting, according to

Zook, is that it does much more than simply lay out “definitive guidelines for the observation of Islamic principle and practice in outer space” (its purported goal). It strives to “make a not so subtle, if not stentorian, statement about Malaysia’s newly claimed influence in the Islamic world,” he writes; it is also, he notes, a work that can be seen as “an earnest attempt to reconfigure the relationship of Islam with science.”

—JNW

Forthcoming Articles in *JAS* 70:1 (February 2011)

The Question of Translation in Taiwanese Colonial Cinema
KUEI-FEN CHIU

The Commercialization of Emotions in Zhang Ailing’s Fiction
LIN ZOU

Taqiyya and Identity in a South Asian Community
SHAFIQUE N. VIRANI

Mapping an Imperial Borderland: Objectifying the “Geo-Body” of India’s
Northeast
DAVID VUMLALLIAN ZOU AND M. SATISH KUMAR

Translating the Past: Rethinking *Rajatarangini* in Colonial India
CHITRALEKHA ZUTSHI

The Location of “Korean” Culture: Ch’oe Chaesŏ and Korean Literature in a
Time of Transition
SERK-BAE SUH
