

## Editorial Foreword

### OUR COVER

Our cover features a 1951 “realist” photograph by Domon Ken titled *Shoi gunjin, Ueno* (Wounded Veteran, Ueno). Courtesy of Julia Adeney Thomas and reproduced with the permission of the Domon Ken Memorial Foundation, Sakata, Japan.

### PHOTOGRAPHY, IDEOLOGY, THE “AUTHENTIC” AND THE “REAL”

We begin with two articles on the history of photography in Asia. JULIA ADENEY THOMAS opens this issue with a fascinating account of the animated debates over realism (*riarizumu*) that appeared in 1953 in the pages of one of Japan’s photographic monthlies, *Camera*. The core of the debate over realism and the real, says Thomas, was political: Constituting reality through the work of the camera was an effort to make power visible in post-occupation Japan. And yet this bid for the real lacked ideological coherence. Socialism, democratic liberalism, and sentimental nationalism each gave realism and the real a different source and meaning in the relationship between subject, lens, and photographic consciousness.

Episodes in the history of photography are no less political in late colonial and early postcolonial Java. KAREN STRASSLER looks at the ways in which Chinese Indonesian photographers played an active role in making the cosmopolitan origins of the Indonesian nation visible. Amateur photographers were usually assimilated *peranakan* merchants and typically embraced a romantic and indigenist vision of authentic national belonging; studio photographers, by way of contrast, were of a different social milieu—they tended to be newly arrived and upwardly mobile immigrants—and they sought ways to portray their subjects as participants in a nationalized precinct of global modernity. Although both groups of Chinese Indonesian photographers belonged to a marginalized and stigmatized transnational ethnic minority, their distinct visual ideologies and iconographies reflect two important and opposed strands of Indonesian nationalism—civic and ethnic.

### POLITICS IN RURAL THAILAND

Rural Thailand has been the scene of corruption and pork-barrel politics for decades. The “traditional” and still influential explanation for the countryside’s failure to democratize is that undereducated and economically vulnerable villagers cling to patronage politics in ways that urban elites do not. Our next two

essays attempt to subvert or complicate that view. YOSHINORI NISHIZAKI concedes that pork-barrel politics in rural regions is alive and well, but it cannot alone account for the strong local support accorded to leading politicians. Road-building projects promoted by native-son and Parliament member Banham Silpa-archa, says Nishizaki, have brought new prestige to the province of Suphanburi. Once regarded as a dusty backwater, Suphanburi now has a road network that distinguishes the province as one of Thailand's most modern. The roads, argues Nishizaki, are a symbolic means for the production and reproduction of the province's pride and self-enchancement, factors that lead villagers to tolerate Banham's corrupt leadership.

In contrast to Nishizaki, who emphasizes the psychosocial appeal of the modern as an element in provincial politics, KATHERINE A. BOWIE considers historical factors that have shaped village leadership and what she calls "kin-based democracy." In her study of vote buying in a rural subdistrict election for *kamman* (headman) in the mid-1990s, Bowie finds that recent legal reforms introduced ambiguities that constrained villagers' capacity to protest corrupt electoral practices. Flush with funds from his road construction business, one village headman bought enough votes to win election as his subdistrict's *kamnan*. Bowie views his machinations—as well as the subsequent (and thwarted) complaints by outraged villagers—in light of conflict between new democratic laws aimed at political decentralization and older feudal laws that centralized power. From this perspective, vote buying in village electoral politics is in no way a continuation of traditional village culture but an emergent modality of political action shaped by the influx of capital in Thailand's rural precincts. Bowie goes on to describe vote buying as an "aberration" stemming from the clash of democratic and feudal trends rather than a feature that many of us commonly see in democracies around Asia and beyond.

#### HISTORY AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURE

Our next three articles lead us to reflect on politics, culture, and the writing of history. KUMKUM CHATTERJEE assesses the influence of Persian political culture on the historical imagination and the Puranic literary traditions of eighteenth-century Bengal. She examines works in the Bengali genre known as *Mangalkabya*—a broad corpus of sung, narrative poetry honoring deities, depicting momentous political events, and also praising the elite patrons who supported the production of these lyric performances of mythohistory. Evidence from two *Mangalkabya* texts shows the influence of Persian-language historical chronicles (*tarikh*), suggesting that the political culture of Mughal rule succeeded in leavening classical Bengali tradition and the Bengali gentry yet never erased the genre's deeply embedded Brahmanic-Sanskritic values and historiographic traits.

The intermingling of propaganda and visual culture preoccupies JUSTIN JACOBS as he examines how Chinese nationalists and the Chinese state represented non-Han ethnic minorities in the short-lived magazine, *Tianshan Pictorial* (June–December 1947) and in the Xinjiang Youth Song and Dance Troupe. Launched by nationalist leader Zhang Zhizhong and aimed at Uighur and urban Chinese

audiences, the magazine and dance troupe melded Soviet conceptions of minority representation with long-standing Chinese traditions of portraying ethnic “others.” Ostensibly portraying the Xinjiang region as Turkic, the magazine and dance team nonetheless depicted the Central Asian frontier as a subaltern part of a unified Chinese republic. This popular “visualization” of one of China’s internal “others” may have helped rejuvenate regional pride and cultural self-consciousness among the Uighur, yet it surely served as a propaganda initiative intended to strengthen the imperial reach of Chinese nationalism.

Finally, KUEI-FEN CHIU invites us to consider the extent to which the diasporic imagination is predicated on nationalist and place-based logic. Taking a cue from pragmatist and constructivist approaches, Chiu insists that the so-called Chinese diasporic literary imagination does not have meaning outside the localities and circumstances in which it is deployed. This comparative historical look at Chinese Malaysian and Taiwanese literature reveals that the Chinese diasporic imagination has considerably less force than that commonly attributed to it as a counter to the power of the nation-state. Indeed, Chiu suggests that the discourses that celebrate the transnational Chinese diaspora may end up “[expanding] the power of the nation-state by enabling it to transcend its geopolitical boundaries.”

#### VERBAL HYGIENE

With the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing just months away, an article by MARY S. ERBAUGH on China’s effort to promote egalitarian verbal courtesies is of special and timely interest. Urbanization, along with international commerce, tourism, and exchange, has made strangers of millions and millions of people in China’s cities. Courtesy is no longer restricted to the workings of traditional hierarchy but is a reciprocal right of good conduct among strangers. Erbaugh details for us popular and official forms of language ideology regarding “verbal hygiene,” its relationship to Confucian ideals and everyday comportment, and its pragmatic effects in social relationships with strangers and foreigners.

#### SPECIAL REVIEW ESSAYS

We take an opportunity once again to publish special review essays that engage with a number of thematically or topically related books rather than just a single volume. We are pleased to include in this issue a discussion by MARK METZLER of five recent works on the financial history of contemporary Japan (“Toward a Financial History of Japan’s Long Stagnation, 1990–2003”) and a review by ROBERT W. HEFNER of three analytic studies of ethnoreligious violence in Indonesia (“Religion and Violence in Post-Soeharto Indonesia”). I thank our book review editors, Stephen Vlastos and Susan Rodgers, for commissioning these fine essays.

—KMG

## Forthcoming Articles in *JAS* 67:3 (August 2008)

### *Terror and the Pamphlet*

Legitimizing Violence: Seditious Propaganda and Revolutionary Pamphlets in Bengal, 1908–1918

SUKLA SANYAL

Rumors, Pamphlets, and the Politics of Paranoia in Indonesia

NILS BUBANDT

### *Nationalism in South Asia*

Martyrdom in the Age of the National Picture in Modern India

SUMATHI RAMASWAMY

The Making of an Indian Nationalist Archive: Lakshmibai, Jhansi, and 1857

PRACHI DESHPANDE

Princely States and the Hindu Imaginary: Exploring the Cartography of Hindu Nationalism in Colonial India

MANU BHAGAVAN

Language, Nation, and Symbolic Capital: The Case of Punjab

ALYSSA AYRES

### *Desire and Sacrifice in Medieval Japan*

Chigo in the Medieval Japanese Imagination

PAUL S. ATKINS

### *Violence, the State, and Memory in Muslim Asia*

A Historiography of Violence and the Secular State in Indonesia

JEFFREY HADLER

Violence, the State, and a Chinese Muslim Ritual Remembrance

MARIS GILLETTE

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