In this Issue

The articles in this issue are quite diverse in their subject matter and in their approaches to that subject matter, something that was noted by the authors of the articles as they read one another's work. In his comment on the five articles, Bill Atwell suggests that we celebrate "the wide range of subjects and scholarly approaches they encompass." He continues:

> Chronologically the articles cover 600 years, beginning in the early fifteenth century and ending in 2001. Although they deal primarily with India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, China, and Japan, they also draw on materials from and scholarship about many other parts of the world. In terms of source materials, the authors attempt to support their arguments by making use of everything from oral interviews, diaries, literary texts, and government statistics to scientific analyses of ice cores and tree rings. Among the "disciplines" they employ in their research are anthropology, biology, cartography, demography, economics, geophysics, history, literary criticism, meteorology, philology, philosophy, political science, sociology, and religious studies.
>
> (Atwell, e-mail, 15 November 2001)

WILLIAM S. ATWELL'S article is fundamentally concerned with the interconnectedness of the global economy, and the ways in which changes in weather patterns can have a significant impact on agricultural productivity (thus his interest in ice cores and tree rings). He begins his article suggesting that in the mid-fifteenth century, the world was in a depression, but that by the latter decades of that century, new prosperity ushered in a new era. The scope of the article is global, though its fundamental locus of interest is Ming China. It serves as a reminder that global economic interconnectedness has a very long history indeed.

PENELOPE FRANCKS applies an economic model originally applied to contemporary Asian economies to Tokugawa Japan. The model, called a "virtuous circle," suggests that linkages between agricultural and industrial productivity can produce economic growth which is relatively egalitarian. Francks argues that the conditions for the "virtuous circle" existed in the Tokugawa period.

WILLEM VAN SCHENDEL'S article is concerned with enclaves on the India-Bangladesh border—areas of Indian territory that are surrounded by Bangladesh and vice versa. The presence of these enclaves raises interesting questions about the conceptualization of nationalism and the relation of nationalism to territory.

SHAWN MCHALE writes about Tran Duc Thao, a Vietnamese intellectual who was caught up in the Nhan Van–Giai Pham affair of the 1950s, a phase of Vietnamese history that has strong resonances with the Hundred Flowers movement in China. The article is fundamentally concerned with questions of history and memory, and is interested in both how nation-states reconstruct their pasts, and how a historian can reconstruct the past of a nation-state.

LIANGYAN GE begins from what may seem to be a small point: the use of the metaphor of stone in the novel *Honglou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber* or *Story of the Stone*). In showing ways in which the metaphor is used and transformed, he is able to

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come to substantial conclusions about the nature of fiction-making in the novel, as well as to pinpoint some ways in which the novel is fundamentally new.

As even these cursory descriptions make obvious, this is a very rich and diverse group of articles. Willem van Schendel began his comment on the five papers by suggesting that what the papers share is a concern with Asian societies. But he goes on to modify and complicate that initial statement:

> These are not papers about "Asia": they do not employ Asia as an important analytical concept. Atwell's canvas is global, and the rest of us set our sights on the regional (Francks on East Asia and van Schendel on South Asia) or the national (McHale on Vietnam and Ge on China). The articles are rich in comparative content but comparisons with other Asian societies or theoretical debates among colleagues working on other parts of the continent are actually quite limited. McHale's use of Shahid Amin's work is an interesting exception.
>
> (van Schendel, e-mail, 11 November 2001)

In a later message, van Schendel elaborated:

> Asia is the only world region which is firmly divided into four academic "areas" (East, Southeast, South and Central/West) that have developed quite different concerns, styles, and "schools." Despite an often expressed need to reach across "area" borders, scholars of Asia often seem to be less well equipped to situate their work in a field of "Asian studies" than their Africanist or Europeanist colleagues, who are more used to taking a continental perspective.

He amplifies the concrete consequences of these different historiographies:

> Another thing that struck me in reading through these five articles is that comparisons are hampered by the enormously differentiated development of the historiography of different Asian societies. What Francks does for Japan would be very hard to replicate, for example, for rural Bengal, because her work rests on detailed and sophisticated earlier work that, for this theme, is largely lacking for Bengal.
>
> (van Schendel, e-mail, 28 November 2001)

Both Francks and Atwell write about economic history, and both articles are concened with big questions. Francks is looking for a new model to help understand Tokugawa economic history and Atwell demonstrates global connections and the emergence of the early modern world. Both articles make their arguments through a plethora of detail. Francks noted some resonances between her article and Atwell's:

> Firstly, both are in part concerned with what can be learned from the history of consumption, which has perhaps been neglected by economic historians in the past. In my case, I am interested in consumption by ordinary rural households; Atwell is interested in consumption on the part of the elite. I was overwhelmed by his immensely wide-ranging and creative use of sources on what people bought and sold. Secondly, I suppose that you could say both articles are concerned with the analysis of economic interconnectedness, mine at the domestic level, his at the world-economy level.

Francks goes on to suggest a way in which the subject matter of the two articles may speak to one another when she writes:

> The growth of Chinese exports to Japan, and corresponding outflow of Japanese silver, which was occasioned by the recovery from the fifteenth-century depression, was a

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> significant factor in the adoption of the *sakoku* (closed country) policy of protection and import substitution by the Tokugawa government. This in turn stimulated manufacturing growth in Japan, which by the late eighteenth century was occuring in rural areas as part of the "virtuous circle."
>
> (Francks, e-mail, 7 November 2001)

Van Schendel notes that in spite of the differences among the articles, they share a strong concern with history. He writes that "the methodological concern with sources of knowledge, how best to assess truth claims and how to combine and interpret them is explicit in each paper. All authors strive for novel combinations and there is no strict adherence to a particular set of canonical sources." He further suggests that there is an inherent tension in the use of sources produced in a variety of contexts, for a variety of audiences, for a variety of purposes, and writes that that tension is perhaps most clearly articulated by McHale, who is using memoirs and self-criticisms as well as other kinds of documents in writing both about Vietnam in the 1950s and about how the conflicts of that decade are remembered. Van Schendel continues:

> Although the articles differ in the historical fields and debates they engage with—intellectual history and literary criticism (McHale and Ge), economic and ecological history (Francks and Atwell) and political and social history (van Schendel and McHale)—their aims are rather similar in that they employ empirical evidence to question established frameworks of analysis. Thus Francks shows how the proto-industrialization model does not work well for nineteenth century Japan (and proposes the growth-linkages model, what she calls a "virtuous circle"). Atwell argues that the depression in fifteenth-century China and the sharp economic upturn following it cannot be explained by local indicators (but must be explained by relating the crisis to global weather patterns and flows of precious metals). Ge proposes a break with the tradition of analyzing the Chinese novel *Honglou meng* against the background of the author's life (and suggests that it is better analyzed as an innovative form of aesthetic fiction that is critical of previous didactic notions of fiction). Van Schendel uses the example of spatially discontiguous state territories to challenge nationalist historiographies in South Asia. And McHale uses the example of a single Vietnamese intellectual to challenge the monolithic views churned out by the state as a "memory machine."
>
> (van Schendel, e-mail, 11 November 2001)

McHale is particularly appreciative of the ways in which Ge uses prefaces. He writes, "I myself have found that prefaces and commentaries on Buddhist sutras have almost completely been overlooked in scholarship on modern Vietnamese Buddhism. But such prefaces are priceless: rather than tell us how an informed, erudite twenty-first century reader should interpret a sutra, they tell us how an actual reader did" (McHale, e-mail, 26 November 2001). For his part, Atwell comments on how much Tran Duc Thao's criticism of the Communist Party reminds him of the chapter in Xunzi entitled "The Regulations of the King" (*Hsün-tzu*, 1996) (Atwell, e-mail, 11 December 2001).

Liangyan Ge is interested in the ways concepts (or names) are central to analytical enterprises. He suggests ways in which these articles show, in various ways, how these names are themselves complex and limited. He writes:

> [Human activities] are conditioned and complicated by the mutual relations among themselves, and consequently the representation of any human activity by a concept

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is inevitably a misrepresentation. The demarcation between "literature" and "literary criticism" becomes blurred in the eighteenth-century Chinese novel *Honglou meng*, which can be read as a fiction as well as a critique of fiction, as my article demonstrates.

For Penelope Francks, what is most interesting about the economic growth in nineteenth-century rural Japan is neither agriculture nor industry, but the interactive dynamic between them. It was the linkage and interlocking between these two types of economic activities, rather than a clear-cut bifurcation or divergence, that led to the "virtuous circle" of economic development. The source of the newly generated economic vitality was a new sphere of overlap that cannot be unequivocally called either agriculture or industry.

Such names—literature, literary criticism, agriculture, industry, etc.—inevitably fall short of the contents they are supposed to cover. They are, as Shawn McHale would call them, only "metaphors." In his article, McHale offers a different example of the problematic of naming which has to be historicized and contextualized: Tran Duc Thao was neither an orthodox Marxist nor a real political dissident, but ambiguously in between. Yet more interesting about McHale's article is his alert about the peril of absolutizing the name to the extent of neglecting the complexities of the content. In Tran Duc Thao's case, the Vietnamese authorities' forceful reaffirmation of such labels as "political conspiracy" and "counter-revolutionary" has led to a distortion of people's memories of the Nhan Van–Giai Pham affair: The hegemony of the name forces a reshaping of the content.

In a sense, Willem van Schendel's article on the South Asian enclaves can almost be read as a parable on the necessity of contextualizing and relativizing naming. These enclaves were obviously the byproducts of modern statehood. Ironically, however, the fortification of statehood—a name—led to the statelessness for the enclaves, or lack of a name. Yet in this case the lack of a name simply means, paradoxically, multiple names, as the enclave people have dual identities based on their citizenship and proxy citizenship. With such crosscutting identities, each person in the enclave can equally be called Indian, Bangladeshi, both Indian and Bangladeshi, or neither Indian nor Bangladeshi, depending on the context. If McHale shows us the political power of the name that distorts the content, van Schendel presents a case of the intractability of the content that thoroughly defies a proper name.

(Ge, e-mail, 4 November 2001)

McHale writes about van Schendel's piece:

I found this paper to be fascinating. I think most people think that advances in cartography—and indeed, the extension of Western practices of mapping—resolved earlier ambiguities over the limits of sovereignty. After all, a clear boundary line is far more "accurate" than a rough frontier. Yet with such advances come unforseen problems. As Willem van Schendel shows, the precise delimitation of enclave boundaries in the context of a system of nation-states has given rise to the fascinating anomaly of enclaves—"territories beyond the orbit of any state."

The question arises: are these enclaves simply oddities: exceptions to the general rule about the delimitation of sovereign space? Are they, in other words, mostly irrelevant? I suspect not. I suspect that there are numerous cases in which the Western model of territorially defined sovereign states has come to be seen as lacking. The enclaves are, after all, a "failure" from the point of such a model. And how do we explain other "failures" or quasi-failures, such as the neutral zone between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (a zone of joint sovereignty)? The oddity of Antartica? The problem of native American reservations in the United States, areas in which the sovereign authority of states is challenged?

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> Van Schendel's article, while focusing on one particular anomaly, reminds us that the international delimitation of boundaries is fraught with problems.
> (McHale, e-mail, 26 November 2001)

There are in this issue two review essays as well as the five articles. The review essays deal with recent scholarship on the Manchus. As part of our goal to produce conversations across geographic lines, we have asked R. Kent Guy to comment on the work from his perspective as a historian of China and Sudipta Sen, a historian of South Asia and the British Empire, to write about what recent work on the Manchus can tell us about the Qing as an Asian empire.

Works Cited

Hsün-tzu. 1996. Translated by BURTON WATSON. New York: Columbia University Press.

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