

Abstracts

Some Observations on the "Seventeenth-Century Crisis" in China and Japan

WILLIAM S. ATWELL Pages 223–244

For more than three decades now, scholars have been debating whether or not a "general crisis" occurred in European social, economic, and political history during the seventeenth century. The debate is far from over, but one of its happy side effects has been that students of seventeenth-century Spain, France, or England now are rarely satisfied to study their chosen countries in total isolation. Indeed, it is generally agreed that many aspects of European history during the early-modern period need to be studied from an international perspective in order to be understood fully.

The author maintains that the same is true for early-modern China and Japan. Although they had radically different economic, social, and political systems, the Ming dynasty and Tokugawa shogunate experienced a number of problems during the mid-seventeenth century that were at once interrelated and strikingly similar to those occurring in other parts of the world at the same time.

The Political Uses of Crisis: The Bihar Famine of 1966–1967

PAUL R. BRASS Pages 245–267

In the summer of 1966, Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh provinces in India experienced one of the worst and most widespread droughts and crop failures in the history of the region during the twentieth century. Massive local, national, and international relief efforts were provided to prevent death by starvation on an immense scale. Nevertheless, the seriousness of the situation was only gradually and reluctantly accepted by the agencies, institutions, and governments that were ultimately involved in the relief effort. In order to convey the seriousness of the situation to those in a position to help the people of Bihar, local, state, and national politicians adopted a rhetoric that involved defining the situation as a "crisis" of unprecedented proportions. The Bihar Famine of 1966–1967 illustrates the importance of rhetoric and political definitions in distinguishing crises from "normal" situations and in defining the quantity, timing, and recipients of relief.

The Sociopolitical Effects of Ideological Change: The Buddhist Conversion of Maharashtrian Untouchables

JAYASHREE B. GOKHALE Pages 269–292

The conversion of the Mahars to Buddhism in October 1956 was an ambitious attempt to construct a new ideology fundamentally opposed to the traditional Hindu

system of beliefs, which had been destructive for the individual psyches as well as for the collective existence of Untouchables. The conversion was intended to transform the consciousness, both individual and collective, of the Mahar-Buddhists through the creation of new institutions and new modes of social interaction. The conversion was effective in inculcating a new ideology and relationships among the Mahar-Buddhists, and it did serve to make the community more cohesive and self-confident than it had been. Yet, because of the intrusion of the reservation issue and the ambiguous constitutional status of the Buddhists, they became more isolated from Untouchable communities than they had been. The conversion also had unexpected effects that ultimately reinforced divisions and class tensions both among Untouchable communities and within wider Maharashtrian society.

The Other Side of the 1945 Vietnamese Revolution: The Empire of Viet-Nam (March–August 1945)

VU NGU CHIEU Pages 293–328

On March 9, 1945, the Japanese terminated French rule in Indochina and gave Viet-Nam its first “independent” government. As an accident of history, and although composed chiefly of technicians and professionals, the government of Tran Trong Kim unexpectedly carried out a partial revolution from above—characterized by the Vietnamization (Viet Nam hoa) of nearly all French-imposed institutions—and regained territorial unification for Viet-Nam, only to see the fruits reaped by Ho Chi Minh in August 1945. Kim’s Empire of Viet-Nam was one side of the Vietnamese nationalist revolutionary coin; the reverse was Ho’s Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam.

Continuity and Change in Indonesian Language Development

J. JOSEPH ERRINGTON Pages 329–353

The development of Indonesian as a new national language is closely linked to the development of Indonesia as a new nation, but the Indonesian language has only rarely been studied as a part of larger patterns of social and cultural change. An overview of the language situation in Jakarta, Indonesia’s center and capital, highlights linguistic continuities and discontinuities between that modern speech community and the traditional culture of the dominant Indonesian ethnic group, the Javanese. The speech repertoires of Jakartans do not resemble the well-known Javanese speech levels, as Benedict Anderson has suggested, but they are better described with the widely known sociolinguistic concept of diglossia. This relatively abstract characterization can be complemented by a study of patterns of borrowing into Indonesian from foreign languages, which may reflect long-standing indigenous attitudes toward power and the use of foreign linguistic codes. Different aspects of the rapidly changing linguistic situation in Jakarta may reflect on the emerging national language and culture.

**A Review Symposium:
Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar, by Frits Staal**
Stalking the Sacrifice

DAVID M. KNIPE Pages 355–358

This two-volume study of a great Vedic sacrifice, the Agnicayana, or “piling of the fire altar,” accomplishes two ends. First, the work is detailed ethnographic coverage of the twelve-day Agnicayana performed by the Nambudiri Brahmin community in Panjal, Kerala, South India, in April 1975. Parts 2, 4, and 5 include episodic mantra-by-mantra outlines of the ritual with translations of key texts, color photographs, line drawings, and maps; a glossary and bibliography are appended. Second, parts 1 and 3 together provide a mini-encyclopedia of current information about the context of Vedic ritual in general. Twenty-two articles take up essential aspects of South Asian prehistory, ancient history, architecture, art, symbolism, and music, as well as hermeneutical studies of Vedic tradition and the Agnicayana in particular. The volumes are aesthetically stunning, and they provide a benchmark for the interdisciplinary, multifaceted study of an historic religious phenomenon.

Wrestling Against Time: The Performance Aspects of Agni

RICHARD SCHECHNER Pages 359–363

Frits Staal’s massive two-volume book details the backgrounds to, and the performance of, a “Vedic ritual,” the Agnicayana, in Panjal, Kerala, in 1975. In its own terms the book is a success. Staal has set down, or told the reader where to find, every word of the twelve-day Agnicayana; he has described every ritual event; he has included many superb photographs (by Adelaide de Menil); he has collected essays on the various aspects of the Agnicayana, including comparisons with rituals of Tibet, Bali, and Java and discussions of pre-Vedic ritual. The book falls short in considering the multiple and ambivalent aspects of Agnicayana 1975: How much was Agnicayana the creation of the scholars who wanted to discover an intact Vedic ritual? To what degree did the very filming of Agnicayana transform it into a media event? What can be said about scholarship based on hybrid events such as Agnicayana 1975?