

Editorial Foreword

Issue 65:2 of *JAS* brings together four papers that touch on the history of modernity in East Asia. A fifth paper testifies to the loss of press freedoms in Nepal since 2001.

Conjurations of the Meiji Era

How was modernity summoned in the Meiji Era? MICHAEL DYLAN FOSTER tells us about the divination game Kokkuri and its immense popularity throughout Japan in the late 1880s. A means for contacting spirits in the otherworld and recruiting their help in foreseeing the future, Kokkuri sparked a lively commentary on why it should or did work. Foster acknowledges that the clout of the game—which resembled European precedents—drew from longstanding ideas about spirit possession. Those with a scientific perspective tried to debunk such understandings as superstition. Yet the supernatural could not be banished so easily. Invocations of “electricity” offered hybrid ways of understanding what was at work in the game and so mingled mysticism and science in an emblematic and thrilling anticipation of the future. TOMIKO YODA tells us of another apparition of the Meiji Era: the modern subject summoned through literary discourses and hailed by the state. Yoda’s look at Mori Ōgai’s early fiction, and Ōgai’s novella *The Dancing Girl* in particular, offers us a glimpse of the predicaments attending the political-literary articulations of power and ethics, and the formation of a modern Japanese subject, divided between sovereignty and subjection.

Ruin and Revival: Religion in China after 1898

The Wuxu reforms of 1898 marked the beginning of an unprecedented assault on China’s temple cults and religious superstitions. VINCENT GOOSSAERT sees behind the reforms a tension between the overlapping ideologies of Confucian fundamentalism and anticlericalism and the rejection of superstitions and irrationalities thought to taint sound religious practice. The confiscation and destruction of temples under the policy of reform forged a new relationship between the state and religious institutions and underscored the salience of religion as a contested field in modern Chinese politics and society. The reform campaign had the goal of eradicating Chinese religion, argues Goossaert, but of course, Chinese religion proved more resilient than any of the campaigners could imagine. To get a glimpse of that resilience, readers should turn to the study by YOSHIKO ASHIWA and DAVID L. WANK. Ashiwa and Wank look at the recent history of Nanputuo Temple, a Buddhist temple that had been shut down during the Cultural Revolution but that recuperated its legitimacy under new religious policies put into effect after 1979. The authors call our attention to the way religious actors and associations negotiated a Buddhist revival by engaging state and Communist Party authorities. The politics of this engagement throw light on how the state has committed itself to the separation of religious and political authority. There is not an inherent conflict between the state and religion in China but, rather, a collaborative—if sometimes tense—construction of religion and state secularism in ways that accord well with the tenets of modernity.

Damage Report on the Nepali Press

Despite protections offered by Nepal's constitution and the country's Printing Press and Publications Act 2048, the Nepali press has had to endure and resist stringent forms of state censorship over the past six years. Combing through Nepali-language newspapers for accounts of the massacre of King Birendra and his family in 2001, the declaration of national emergency, and the crackdown on the country's Maoist insurgency, MICHAEL HUTT reveals the ways in which censorship has been forced upon the press, internalized, and opposed. In doing so, he sheds light on how the palace and the army severely muted negative coverage and dissent in the vernacular-language press—coverage that would reach the country's rural masses quite easily—even as they tolerated a degree of critical reportage in the English-language media associated with Kathmandu's powerful elites.