

## Editorial Foreword

### OUR COVER

Hongsa, Sayabouli Province, Laos (2008). Photograph by Caroline Finlay, <http://www.carolinefinlay.com>. Used by permission.

Carrying on with the *Journal of Asian Studies*' tradition of disciplinary eclecticism, the current issue includes essays by three anthropologists (ROSALIND C. MORRIS, MICHAEL J. HATHAWAY, and GUIDO SPRENGER), two sociologists (DAVID T. JOHNSON and SEUNGSOOK MOON), one historian (MICAH S. MUSCOLINO), a specialist in literature (JESSE ROSS KNUTSON), and two political scientists writing together as a team (BRAD WILLIAMS and ERIK MOBRAND). The mix of regions to which these authors turn their attention reflects the broad spectrum of locales that engage members of the Association for Asian Studies. Central Asia, an area that featured prominently in the February issue, does not get renewed attention here. On the other hand, this number includes focused articles that deal largely (sometimes exclusively) with South Korea, North Korea, Japan, southwest China, Bengal, and Laos. It also contains a pair of wide-ranging opening essays, belonging to the "Asia Beyond the Headlines" and "Trends in Research" series, that bring many other settings into the picture, at least in passing, through discussion of events that have taken place in or recent books that have been published about Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and Pakistan.

This issue begins with Johnson's essay "Asia's Declining Death Penalty," which explores the move away from capital punishment in various countries, calling attention to patterns that link Asia to and set it apart from other parts of the world. Previous contributions to "Asia Beyond the Headlines" have zeroed in on one or two countries, but this one breaks new ground by moving across the region as a whole.

This is followed by Morris's "Remembering Asian Anticolonialism, Again," which uses four recent books as a jumping off point for a discussion of shifts over time in the treatment of a topic that, once again, has relevance for many parts of Asia. Southeast Asia looms largest in Morris's insightful and elegantly crafted "Trends in Research" article, but this, too, is a piece with very wide geographic appeal, as so many countries in the region were affected by colonialism at one point in their history, and as some of the authors she discusses, such as Benedict Anderson and James C. Scott, are read by scholars working on disparate locales.

Next up is Knutson's "The Political Poetic of the Sena Court," which takes us back to texts written roughly 800 years ago that offer us a window onto contemporary views of Lakmanasena, an early king of Bengal. The author's goal, in

analyzing poetic works from this specific time and place is, in part, to “strive to erode established scholarly visions of the endless uniformity of premodern literary-political life.”

This is followed by Sprenger’s “From Power to Value: Ranked Titles in an Egalitarian Society, Laos,” which moves to a different period—the present—and a different region—the Southeast Asian highlands, the part of the continent featured in the cover photograph. The author uses the rituals of “wife-giving” and “wife-taking” to explore changes over time in local hierarchies and symbols of status.

Another article by an anthropologist, Hathaway’s “Global Environmental Encounters in Southwest China: Fleeting Intersections and ‘Transnational Work,’” comes next. The author opens with a tale of his interview with a Chinese professor who “helped introduce Yunnan’s tropical forests to the world of global conservation, in part through his engagement with two European princes,” Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom’s Prince Philip, who for a time was president of the Worldwide Fund for Nature International.

The issue continues with another essay on China focusing on ecological concerns, Muscolino’s investigation of the “relationships between refugee flight and environmental change” during the period of Japanese invasions. In “Refugees, Land Reclamation, and Militarized Landscapes in Wartime China: Huanglongshan, Shaanxi, 1937–45,” the author connects the often separate fields of environmental studies and the history of war through a concern with the drive to “control and exploit the environment for nationalistic and military purposes.”

Closing the articles section, which is followed, as always, by a host of book reviews—the “back of the book” part of the journal that many *JAS* readers turn to first—are two examinations of Northeast Asia. The first is Moon’s essay, “The Interplay between the State, the Market, and Culture in Shaping Civil Society: A Case Study of the People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy in South Korea,” which elucidates the workings and places into context “a new type of voluntary association” that proliferated after the end of military rule in the late 1980s. The author’s particular focus is the People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, and she presents a case study of the rise and decline of this “citizens’ organization” to shed light on broad trends in civil society, from the workings of gender within it to its political dynamics, in South Korea.

The second essay in this pair and the last in the issue is Williams and Mobrand’s “Explaining Divergent Responses to the North Korean Abductions Issue in Japan and South Korea,” which highlights the difficulty, in each setting, of moving toward a “neutral” way of addressing this matter. The dynamics in the two settings vary greatly, but in each case, the authors argue, “nationalist themes” and efforts by “politicians to mobilize support” through references to the actions of North Korea add a politicized and emotional dimension to the “ostensibly apolitical demands for the state to fulfill its duty to protect citizens” that undergird formal discussions of the topic.

—JNW

## Forthcoming Articles in *JAS* 69:3 (August 2010)

*Asia Beyond the Headlines*

Forum on Transnational Spectacle

The Apocryphal Suicide of Saigō Takamori: Samurai, Seppuku, and the Politics of Legend

MARK RAVINA

Egalitarian-Developmentalism, Communist Mobilization, and the Question of Caste in Kerala State, India

J. DEVIKA

Drumming from Screen to Stage: Ondekoza's "Odaiko" and the (Re)Imaging of Japanese Taiko

SHAWN BENDER

Making Family and Nation: Hindu Marriage Law in Early Postcolonial India

NARENDRA SUBRAMANIAN

The Great Rumor Mill: Gossip, Mass Media, and the Ninja Fear

NICHOLAS HERRIMAN

Modern Art Patronage and Democratic Citizenship in Japan

LAURA HEIN

Inauthentic Sovereignty: Law and Legal Institutions in Manchuko

THOMAS DUBOIS

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