

In This Issue

HONG LYSA examines the politics of gender representation in Thailand by looking at the ways in which the portrayals of Siamese women in Thai popular histories shape and reflect present-day gender relations. Specifically, she focuses on the polar images of nineteenth-century women as consorts and harlots and their currency in “traditionalist,” “middle-class,” and “critical popular historical narratives” as well as in contemporary police and judicial records. By exploring how popular and academic histories today confront or perpetuate stereotypes of women, she is able to discern shifts in the current discourse about gender relations.

MATTHEW C. STRECHER identifies Murakami Haruki with a new generation of Japanese writers whose work stands in opposition to “pure” literature. He characterizes the essentially formulaic structure of Murakami’s “imaginative, often unrealistic texts” as enabling the author to play “a structuralist game with his readers, creating texts which are obviously and meticulously formulaic, but with results and purposes distinctly postmodern in character.” Strecher’s recuperative reading of Murakami’s “fiction” is aimed at locating this fiction in the debate between “pure” and “mass,” “serious” and “popular,” and “mimetic” and “formulaic” literature and at exploring its deeper significance.

CHIEN-YU JULIA HUANG and ROBERT P. WELLER trace and explain the rise of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Foundation (Ciji Gongdehui) from a small group in 1966 to its emergence as the largest civic organization in Taiwan with a worldwide membership of four million people who are predominantly female. They provide a historical context for the organization by comparing it to earlier popularizing Buddhist movements in China and to various Christian charitable organizations that emerged in nineteenth-century Europe and North America to do “good works.” In their estimation, the significance of the Ciji lies in its capacity to reinvigorate Taiwanese Buddhism and to establish “a new public sphere in Taiwan’s transition from authoritarian rule.”

DANIEL K. GARDNER dwells on the neglected subject of the vast commentarial corpus associated with texts in the Confucian canon in order to insist on a more nuanced historical understanding of Confucian intellectual tradition. He makes his case in part by alerting the reader to the riches and elasticity of this commentarial tradition and in part by establishing the significance of commentaries as sources for the intellectual history of their times. By highlighting a dialogical relationship between commentaries and the Confucian classics, he underscores the problematics of normative readings of Confucian classics and of accepting “the myth of an unchanging monolithic Confucianism.”

SUMIT GUHA draws out the present-day ramifications of the conventional notion of the “timeless, conservative caste” and its antecedent, “the unchanging primitive tribe,” by exposing its historic roots. He begins by excavating the metamorphosis in thinking that occurred in ideas about race as geology and biology emerged to undermine earlier Biblical ideas about the “common descent of all humans.” Well suited to match indigenous elite views, the new ideas about racial ethnography were

appropriated by them to justify hierarchy in indigenous society and to advocate their “parity with the European upper classes.” However, as the author shows, the archaeological record does not substantiate the contemporary notion that forest dwellers and tribes belonged to “the oldest and lowest stratum” of a racial hierarchy.

Why are there no privately owned, publicly traded corporations in China? J. RAY BOWEN II and DAVID C. ROSE respond to this question, which was previously broached by William C. Kirby in the *JAS* (54, 1, 1995), by explaining how *kejuan zashui*—the use of discretionary fees to raise government revenues—makes the government, rather than firms owners, the de facto residual claimant of firm income when the government knows the firm’s true profitability. This makes the share of publicly traded firms an exceptionally poor investment in China, thereby depriving the modern legal corporation of its ability to raise large amounts of capital at low cost.

With this issue, we are pleased to announce a new duo of South Asia Book Review Editors: William R. Pinch of Wesleyan University and Indira V. Peterson of Mount Holyoke College.