

Editor's Note

With this first number of Volume 40 of *The Journal of Asian Studies*, a new editorial board assumes office. Professor Robert Kapp and his colleagues have been unfailingly helpful in facilitating the transition of matters. We thank them for their assistance.

The change in the *Journal* masthead does not, however, mean any dramatic change in its general editorial policy. In part, continuity is unavoidable due to the mechanics of publishing a quarterly academic journal. The contents of this issue were commissioned long before most of us had thought of joining the enterprise. When our term has ended, our successors will find, for better or worse, our decisions have foreshadowed their available options.

In addition to the practical constraints of publishing, which make drastic change difficult, we share many of the values and expectations of our readers with respect to topics appropriate to the *Journal* and how scholarship should be appraised. Because the *Journal* relies upon a community of scholars for its writers, referees, and book reviewers, the image of the *Journal* is only slowly formed and slowly changed. Although each member of this editorial board has his/her own special interests and competences, which will influence to some degree the contents of an issue, the broad dimensions of this academic enterprise have been formed throughout its forty-year history.

It was only two years ago that the prior editor wrote about the *Journal*, its strengths, weaknesses, needs, and future course. Since then, there has been discussion about the *Journal* among the leaders of the Association, occasioned in part by the rising costs of publication. Furthermore, a recently concluded membership opinion survey not only confirmed the importance of the *Journal*, it also highlighted the special emphasis that members give to the Book Review section: Respondents called for additional reviews. Much of what was written two years ago is still relevant but, in the light of the 1980 survey, I want to comment on the reviews and articles that are now coming into the *Journal* office.

Book Reviews

Financial constraints establish desirable page lengths for each issue. Normally, slightly over half the pages are devoted to book reviews and the remainder to articles. The ratio shifts during the course of a year, but this is the general balance. Increased book reviews reduce the number of pages available for manuscripts.

In the Asian field, as elsewhere, readers are physically unable (even if they wished), to keep up with the explosion of publishing in the field. Furthermore, the costs of many books make it essential for the scholar to rely on the *Journal* for thoughtful, balanced, and current reviews that will assist the reader in remaining knowledgeable in the field while only occasionally adding to a personal collection. The *Journal* is mindful of this obligation and will emphasize, wherever possible, rapid response to publication as well as an emphasis on high standards for reviews. In this

issue and the next, we will endeavor to catch up with some of the backlog. In order to remain current, we need your assistance in enlarging the number of potential reviewers.

Book review editors are selected in part because they are knowledgeable about personnel in the field, their specialties and research interests. Still, no individual can know all the scholars, plus new Ph.D.'s and the men and women entering into the professionally allied fields of publishing, banking, and government (to suggest a few examples). It is essential to expand the list of potential reviewers willing to undertake some work for the *Journal*. It is the intention of the Editor, therefore, to solicit volunteers for book reviews, through an announcement in the *AAS Newsletter*. The responses will then be forwarded to appropriate book review editors. Review decisions, however, will remain in the hands of the area book review editor.

The *JAS*, along with many other academic journals, solicits and publishes review articles. This issue has three. For certain controversial topics, teaching needs, and related matters, review articles can be extremely useful. While it is true that volumes selected for review articles are often delayed in receiving an appraisal, the benefits from their integration into an overall discussion generally outweigh the disadvantages in delaying appraisal. Responsibilities for the solicitation, guidance, and preliminary consideration of review articles are normally in the hands of the area book review editors. They will welcome proposals from the membership.

Articles

It is readily apparent that since World War II there has been increasing specialization in the study of Asia as well as an overall increase in the total number of scholars studying the area. Along with this increase in the number of scholars has come a proliferation in the various publication outlets for books, articles, translations, and other forms of manuscripts. In virtually every discipline, for virtually every country and time period, there is now a journal, newsletter, occasional note, or some means for making research information and results known. The review procedures among these publications are highly diverse. They vary from casual in-house review to the highly structured and anonymous referee procedures of the major journals, including the *JAS*. In this set of circumstances, the interest, willingness, and motivation of individuals to venture outside of their own specialization for publication has seemed to diminish. These same individuals, though, want to remain current. They read journal reviews but with respect to articles, it is not uncommon to hear the judgment "I never read the articles" or "I can't decipher the articles in ———." This sentence is almost always followed by the statement, "I only read the reviews." With respect to the *JAS*, the criticism is more commonly, "The articles are too esoteric."

The real problem of responding to the needs of our academic community for relevant reviews and still publishing manuscripts of high quality can be mitigated but not solved. The *Journal* does not intend to become primarily an enlarged and specialized "Book Review" service. We will be responsive to our readers for maintaining current efforts in the reviewing field, but we also intend to continue publication of outstanding research.

We rely upon the judgments of our colleagues for the professional worth of a manuscript. We take seriously the importance of publishing pieces whose topics will appeal to significant portions of our readers. All things being equal, we give preference to manuscripts that are broadly comparative in results or methodology; articles

that address one region or one discipline but are explicitly designed to provide theoretical assistance to scholars in another region are sought and welcome.

On the other hand, we intend to continue to publish manuscripts that are characterized by reviewers as having the "lustre of originality" even though the topic may be relatively narrow; we believe that the *JAS* has the responsibility to publish the highest scholarship and most innovative pieces of work. That responsibility is one of the reasons we have all joined in this editorial work, and we do not intend to abandon it.

One new orientation of the *Journal* should be noted. The *Journal* will welcome articles that focus on the use of new methodologies as applied to research problems in Asia. We have no intention of devoting our pages largely to the computer programs of specialists or the mathematical formulas of the economists, but we do believe that most of us will profit from an occasional article that demonstrates the possibilities and utility of such methodology as multivariate analysis, modeling, and scaling. At the same time, the burden of making the article clear to the nonspecialist rests with the author and will be an important part of the decision to publish.

Finally, some comments on symposium pieces. In the past few years, there have been a number of articles published that originated at meetings of the AAS and were revised for this journal. There have been several solicited articles and responses organized around a special theme. There are a number of advantages to the publication of such pieces. When well organized and with reasonable fit, they provide a forum for intellectual controversy with the potential for "give and take!" However, they do reduce the number of articles that can be published, and, it is much more difficult to subject this type of contribution to the same rigorous standards of review that apply to single manuscripts. The editor welcomes proposals under the symposia format, but with the understanding the author will need to work closely with the editorial staff of the *JAS* to make certain that the appropriate review procedures are carried out.

Journal Procedures

To facilitate the appraisal of materials, it is essential that the author submit the original and two copies of the manuscript. The review process is lengthened when we must write to the author for additional copies. It is important that the manuscript and footnotes be presented in such a way as to conceal the identity of the manuscript author; the anonymous review procedures should not be compromised.

This *Journal* receives manuscripts from an international constituency, and it solicits reviews and referees on an international basis. All of these men and women are volunteers asked on the basis of their knowledge of a topic. Obviously, this whole process can become, through the fault of no one, very lengthy. This is especially true in the case of highly specialized fields where possible referees are limited in number and widely dispersed in location. Furthermore, the recommendations for many manuscripts are often conflicting, inconclusive, and unclear. Decision making, therefore, has a tendency to be prolonged, particularly when revisions are involved.

At the same time, we recognize the penalty and trouble that the delay may impose on an author. Given the contemporary academic marketplace, publications are an important part of the procedures for appointment and promotion. Accordingly, we will make a special effort to facilitate prompt decisions and have set a goal of no more than three months for the decision-making process. The policy of the *Journal*

will be to notify an author when we discover that the decision on a submitted manuscript will be delayed beyond this three-month period.

Within the boundaries of our commitment to scholarship and to the broad representation of membership interests in topics and countries, the editorial board wishes to be responsive to the needs and inquiries of potential authors, reviewers, members of the Association, and the scholarly community in general. We hope that you will write to us when questions arise or controversies present themselves. We will respond and, on occasion, will solicit your permission to publish commentaries or exchanges of correspondence in the Communications to the Editor section.