

# Editorial Foreword

*Kings and Their People.* From the eloquence of Aristotle to the written constitutions of the modern era, European political theory has wrestled with the problems of monarchy. Some of those problems, both classic and current, concern the essays here, which apply Machiavelli's *Discourses* and absolutism in Old Regime France to the analysis of Tswana kingship and contemporary Thailand. Ørnulf Gulbrandsen, who starts from the question of why the hereditary principle has historically been so common and then moves on to issues of how that principle can allow the selection of able leaders, finds in Tswana practice a subtle extension of Machiavelli's understanding, one in which religious belief and public opinion help to assure both smooth succession and subsequent restraint. In the politics of precolonial Africa (on which there is now a considerable literature, in *CSSH* see Hyden and Williams, in 36:1; Dixon, 33:1; Kenny, 30:4; and Strickland, 18:3, among others), Gulbrandsen notes principles applicable to monarchy everywhere. David Streckfuss looks at the laws of *lèse-majesté* in Thailand (compare Vandergeest, 35:1), a conception associated with another era here extended to a modern, authoritarian state. Cultural traditions and legal codes intertwine (for other examples in the region, see Peletz, 34:1, on Malaysia and Peabody, 33:4, on India), but they include a modern concern for mass communication and national opinion that produces almost crippling paradoxes that create new opportunities for opposition. Thai sensitivity to symbols is as much a part of contemporary politics as constitutional amendments against burning flags.

*Communist Business.* In today's world, political ideologies can infiltrate the most anodyne activities. If in the United States the hobby of collecting stamps taught the lessons of a market economy (see Gelber, 34:4), in the Soviet Union it had to be cleansed of bourgeois associations to be constructed instead as an expression of socialism. Jonathan Grant's study of the humorless urge for such purification reveals something about the nature of the Soviet regime and the process that pointed to totalitarianism. Stamp collecting, a source of hard currency, had also to be a reflection of official propaganda; but the need to organize stamp collecting and give it an official interpretation resulted less from pressure at the top than from the insistent enthusiasm of middle-level party members. Multiple ironies followed. The proletariat did not much take to collecting stamps; and Soviet arguments for the hobby's merits, with their belief in the benefits of history and geography made tangible, ultimately mirrored claims heard in America (compare Soviet fascination with American technology, Bailes, 23:3, and Rogger, 23:3). However limply, philately recapitulated the ontogeny of convergence theory (see the anonymous article in 20:2). In China, the doctrines of Mao did not eliminate an older emphasis on local ties of kinship and patronage (on their importance before Communism, see Shepard, 30:3; Duara, 29:1; and Mann, 26:4). Frank Pieke delineates a parallel pattern in the system of economic exchange in contemporary China. Markets of a sort are burgeoning; yet their combination of traditional and Communist values create new, mixed forms that, while not like the classic market systems of the West, challenge state control on the different and stronger grounds of its cultural legitimacy (compare Kipnis, 37:1; Mitchell, 34:4; Lavelly and Wong, 34:3; Siu, 32:4; and Yang, 31:1).

*Constructing Spaces.* A product of industrialization, the nineteenth-century city in its monumental aspects was the power-filled creation of an international bourgeois culture. The grand boulevards, parks, and opera houses of Paris (or London, Vienna, and Leningrad) stood as universal symbols. Thus Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires were reconstructed, Jeffrey Needell shows, as the affirmation of a self-conscious elite, determined to align its nation with the civilization and progress that North America and Europe, but above all Paris, represented (compare Morse on cities in Latin America, 16:4; and on earlier connections with European modernization, see Pallares-Burke, 36:4). Recently, cultural historians, historians of art, and anthropologists have joined in probing the meanings of this urban imperialism, finding bald declarations about class and power as well as economics and taste in all the beaux-arts grandeur. As Anthony King notes, the import of such declarations are especially clear in colonial cities (see Abu-Lughod, 7:4; and Murphey, 14:3), where the politics of cultural dominance was explicitly contrived. If, as he suggests, these colonial constructions predate and perhaps predict the postmodern, it is worth noting that the urban stage-sets of Europe's provincial cities were designed from a similarly self-conscious construction of styles and spaces labelled modern and international, traditional and local (see Cohen and Heckart, both in 31:3). Expensively assembled in a single place, they proclaimed the rootedness of progress.

*Ethnographic Drama.* A generation of scholarship has usefully and joyously explored the implicit narratives that underlie ostensibly neutral language about society, but that methodological solvent leaves us with multiple plot lines to set forth in any single account, a difficulty especially apparent in discussions of colonial encounters and movements of resistance (see Ortner, 37:1). Edward Schieffelin's careful ethnographic investigation of responses to Australian authority in Papua New Guinea employs an alternative framework by presenting a drama in which distinctive narratives continue to function and only sporadically intersect. Challenging simpler stories of imperial intrusion (which long ago replaced earlier ones of civilizing progress), he attends to an indigenous interpretation of new opportunities and dangers, in which the arrival of powerful foreigners is experienced not as subjugation but as an occasion that is amenable to time-tested responses. The poetry and power of such alternative understandings have long fascinated anthropologists. Professional appreciators of cultural creativity, they have found local explanations of European strength as revealing of Western assumptions as of indigenous social systems (note Masco, 37:1; White, 35:4; Golden and Rosenbaum, 35:1; Edwards, 31:2; Berg, 27:2), but here the outcome is not assumed and the several narratives, the competing histories, remain intact (see Farris, 29:3; Bowen, 31:4). With similar sensibility, and using theories of narrative, J.D.Y. Peel reopens another familiar theme, the ways of understanding of Christian missionaries (note Schieffelin's earlier study of Evangelical rhetoric and the articles of Beidelman and Schapiro, all in 23:1; Rigby, 25:3; Rafael, 29:2; Scott, 34:2; Thomas, 34:2; Kratz, 35:1). He does so by listening closely to Yoruba converts, who were themselves missionaries and who combined knowledge from the culture in which they were formed with the narratives of Old and New Testament to sustain themselves, confident that their triumphs and setbacks were the little things from which God would greatly build.