

Editorial Foreword 69.1 (February 2010)

OUR COVER

Firefighters marching in traditional garb in the 1985 Atsuta Shrine Festival parade in Nagoya, Japan. Photograph by Jonathan Dresner <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jondresner/>. Used with permission.

In keeping with the longstanding JAS tradition of disciplinary eclecticism, the essays in this issue showcase the work of scholars trained in an unusually wide range of fields. The list of contributors is made up of four political scientists (ELLIS S. KRAUSS, ROBERT J. PEKKANEN, MARY ALICE HADDAD, AND LEIGH K. JENCO), one historian (LISA BALABANLILAR), a sociologist (EDDY U), an anthropologist (MEGAN SINNOT), a philosopher (RACHEL M. MCCLEARY), and the holder of a doctorate in Sinology, Indology, and Tibetology (LEONARD W.J. VAN DER KUIJP), as well as a scholar whose PhD is in musicology (NIMROD BARANOVITCH), though he is focusing, in this case, on literary rather than musical texts. The current locations of the contributors (Baronovitch teaches in Israel, Jenco in Singapore, for example) and the periods discussed (from the era of the Mughal Empire to 2009) and places mentioned (from Japan to Jakarta, Tokyo to Turkic parts of Central Asia) are also a study in diversity.

This issue begins with a commentary by political scientists Krauss and Pekkanen that explores the implications of last year's Japanese elections. Called "The Rise and Fall of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party," it is a contribution to the "Asia Beyond the Headlines" series, and it appears exactly one year after Duncan McCargo's "Thai Politics as Reality T.V." inaugurated this genre. Whereas McCargo explored a very public upheaval on the streets, Krauss and Pekkanen remind us that what happens in the privacy of the voting booth can also lead to dramatic shifts, such as, in this case, the fall from power of an organization that had an extraordinarily long string of electoral victories.

The main question addressed in the essay is a straightforward present-minded one: What will Japanese politics be like, now that the amazing streak of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) wins has been broken? To answer this query, though, according to Pekkanen and Krauss, we need to bring the past and the future as well as the present into the picture. We cannot make sense of why and how the LDP lost the 2009 election without having an appreciation for why and how they won so many before that. And, they suggest, the greatest shift in Japanese electoral politics may lay ahead, when it starts seeming a normal rather than headline-grabbing event when the party in power is voted out and a new group takes control.

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Following this commentary comes a book-based think piece on “Borders, Diaspora and Regional Connections: Trends in Asian ‘Queer’ Studies” by anthropologist Megan Sinnott. This discussion of recent developments in work on homosexuality in Southeast Asian studies in particular and Asian studies more generally is the first contribution under my editorship to a feature called “Trends in Research” launched by my predecessor Kenneth M. George.

The “Trends in Research” essays carry forward a longstanding tradition at the Journal, namely, extended analyses of disciplinary and interdisciplinary treatments of a common theme or subject. In the past, the Journal has often run these as “state of the field essays” (typically provided comprehensive surveys of debates on very broad issues) and much shorter “review essays” (that have analyzed a pair of books or a set of several books that look at a given topic in a more tightly focused book-by-book manner). I hope that we can continue to publish works in both of these genres, but the “Trends in Research” feature, as the previous Editor first imagined it and I am now extending it, has the potential to open up another set of possibilities.

In length, these essays will typically be somewhat shorter than standard research articles and fall between the shorter review essays and extended state of the field essays run in the past. In terms of topics, some will focus in on subject that has recently attracted a great deal of interest among scholars working on one Asian country. This was the case, for example, with Tobie Meyer-Fong’s “The Printed World: Books, Publishing Culture, and Society in Late Imperial China,” which appeared in 66.3 (August 2007) and was the first “Trends in Research” piece to run in the Journal. Others, however, will eschew national borders and look at how a subject has been treated in works on different Asian countries, as is the case with Sinnott’s contribution to this issue.

The remainder of this issue’s works follow a more standard article format, beginning with political scientist Haddad’s “From Undemocratic to Democratic Civil Society: Japan’s Volunteer Fire Departments.” This article provides a nuanced assessment of a protean civic organization, which began its existence as a militarized instrument of an authoritarian regime and, after a slow process of transformation, ended up a local community safety organization within a full-fledged democracy.

This is followed by sociologist U’s “*Third Sister Liu* and the Making of the Intellectual in Socialist China,” a study of a popular musical of the early 1960s. The goal of this essay is both to present a case study of political mobilization via a work of art, and even more so to provide a fresh perspective on how, through this play and other related activities, the Chinese state constructed a particular vision of the intellectual as a political subject.

Another look at the Chinese state of the post-1949 period comes after this, Baranovitch’s “Others No More: The Changing Representation of Non-Han Peoples in Chinese History Textbooks, 1951-2003.” This essay, which is based on close readings of materials used in high school classrooms, argues convincingly that a significant shift in the portrayal of non-Han peoples took place over time in the PRC, as they went from being represented as “foreigners” to being treated as integral contributors to “Chinese” history.

Moving both time and location, this issue continues with Balabanlilar's "The Begins of the Mystic Feast: Turco-Mongol Tradition in the Mughal Harem," which offers a multidimensional view of symbols of cultural prowess and legitimacy. Topics addressed include shifting understandings of the rights and roles of elite women and changing practices at South Asian royal courts.

We continue with another piece focusing on the distant past, McCleary and van der Kuijp's "The Market Approach to the Rise of the Geluk School, 1419–1642." This article traces the early development of some aspects of Tibetan religion, such as the central role of the Dalai Lama, that are now so taken for granted by non-specialists that they are sometimes imagined to have always been basic features of life in Tibet. The authors also look carefully at the ways that actions by different neighboring rulers affected dynamics within Tibet half-a-millennium or so ago.

The issue concludes with an essay that takes us back toward the present, Jenco's "'Rule by Man' and 'Rule by Law' in Early Republican China: Contributions to a Theoretical Debate," which picks up some of the issues raised in the forum on Chinese and Indian legal history that appeared in these pages one year ago and takes them in an exciting new direction. The author is particularly concerned with how Liang Qichao and other major Chinese intellectuals writing about a century ago dealt with the question of whether, in order for a state to be well run, the crucial ingredient was the right set of laws or the right sort of virtuous political leaders.

—JNW

Forthcoming Articles in *JAS* 69:2 (May 2010)

Asia Beyond the Headlines

Asia's Declining Death Penalty

DAVID T. JOHNSON

Refugees and the Environment in Wartime China: Huanglongshan, Shaanxi

MICAH MUSCOLINO

The interplay between the State, the Market, and Culture in shaping Civil Society: a Case Study of the PSPD in Post-Military Rule Korea

SEUNGSOOK MOON

Explaining Divergent Responses to the North Korean Abductions Issue in Japan and South Korea: Political Maneuverings for Nationalist Ends

BRAD WILLIAMS AND ERIK MOBRAND

Global Environmental Encounters in Southwest China: Fleeting Intersections and 'Transnational Work'

MICHAEL HATHAWAY

The Political Poetic of the Sena Court

JESSE R. KNUTSON

From Power to Value: Ranked Titles in an Egalitarian Society, Laos

GUIDO SPRENGER

Remembering Asian Anticolonialism, Again

ROSALIND C. MORRIS
