

## Editorial Foreword

Most of the papers that the *Journal of Asian Studies* will publish this year were reviewed and groomed under the careful editorial eye of my predecessor, Ann Waltner. Ann set a magnificent standard, not only for the quality and scholarly interest of the articles that appeared in *JAS* over the past five years but also for the care with which they were copyedited and presented. Readers will especially recall the introductory essays that she thoughtfully prepared for each issue and her signature touch of inviting authors to comment on each other's papers so as to provoke reflection and discussion. I am taking a different path in pursuit of the same goal. For this issue, I picked through the pool of accepted manuscripts that Ann passed on to me and gathered five that seemed to fit together in a congenial way. I hope the contributors to this issue—and you, the readers of *JAS*—will enjoy seeing their articles grouped as “companion” pieces beneath appealing rubrics.

## Identity Papers

Minority identity politics has flourished under nationalism despite its potential to refigure or threaten the ways in which a nation—and its history—may be imagined and summoned forth. URADYN E. BULAG looks at the efflorescence of revolutionary histories on the northern frontier of China, relating such histories to minority nationality, the legitimacy of Inner Mongolia as an “autonomous region,” and the currents of China's structural transformation and hypernationalism. A new nation-centered reappraisal of the “friendship” between the Mongol Communist revolutionary Ulanhu and the Chinese warlord Fu Zuoyi in the anti-Japanese resistance suggests an attempt by China to domesticate Inner Mongolia for the purposes of a national, post-revolutionary self-enjoyment. YASMIN SAIKIA follows the movement to establish Tai-Ahom self-consciousness and political identity in Assam, an identity that challenges the religious, geographical, historical, and epistemological limits of contemporary India. The construction of a new religion, *Phra Lung*, incorporating features of Buddhism and ancestor worship, and the efforts of pan-nationalist Thai scholars, conjured a history and collective memory that intended to distinguish and legitimate the Tai-Ahom minority as a community that was not quite, and perhaps not rightly, “Indian.”

## Contingency, Knowledge, and Colonial Rule

The seeming rationality, logic, and coherence of British colonial discourse did not inhere in the colonial regime in South Asia, or go unchanged, but was produced and reworked through the messy and contingent circumstances of rule, governance, and “expert” knowledge. Taking his cue from the work of Timothy Mitchell, DAVID MOSSE looks at irrigation and environmental discourses to explore the “messiness of practice that accompanies or precedes the ideas and technology of rule.” Such an approach allows us to see how an idealized set of bureaucratic and engineering principles were abstracted from, and so hid, the local political practices needed to sustain the social basis of irrigation. The crises this misrecognition engendered would have lingering effects on development policies and debates throughout the twentieth century and beyond. In what Carlo Ginzburg might call a “physiognomic reading” of

monumental art, REBECCA BROWN takes interpretive measure of the 1763 Patna Massacre Memorial in order to show us the instability of colonial power and the precariousness of the colonial presence. The monument itself is a place where colonial inscription and reinscription reveal the shifting relationship between the British and the Indian subcontinent. In the closing article, DAVID LORENZEN asks why Roman Catholic and Protestant evangelical missionaries appeared to do so little over a period of three hundred years in transforming European knowledge of Indian culture and history compared to the swift and lasting impact of the “secular” British orientalist. An answer may lie in the way the latter marshaled resources for working collaborations with Brahmin pandits and Muslim Maulavis, collaborations that may have gone unrecognized but ought to be explored for the ways Asians played a part in constructing Europe’s view of “the East.”

—KMG