

Editorial Foreword

OUR COVER

Our cover features Dinh Y. Nhi's *Daughters of Mr. Nguyen II* (2005), a painting included in the traveling show "Changing Identity: Recent Works by Women Artists from Vietnam," organized by Nora Annesley Taylor. Image reproduced courtesy of Dinh Y. Nhi, with the assistance of International Arts and Artists, Washington, D.C.

GENDER, RIGHTS, AND RESOURCES IN VIETNAM

Our first two articles explore gendered forms of sociality and culture in Vietnam. ANN MARIE LESHKOWICH examines a marketplace fee controversy in Ho Chi Min City and finds gendered memory work at play. Southern Vietnam has been haunted for years by untold numbers of malevolent "wandering ghosts"—spirits of the war dead who, lacking descendants, linger in this world homeless and uncommemorated. Yet a new "wandering ghost" has appeared: the marketplace official who demands user fees from women traders for rights to a market stall. Leshkovich shows that the fee controversy heightened tensions between cadres and traders. The metaphor of the wandering ghost, says Leshkovich, is a trader's commentary on officials who have been caught by the transition from high socialism to late socialism and who have been compelled to prey on traders. At the same time, the metaphor offers a way to talk about the consequences of war and the political and class divisions that accompanied postwar socioeconomic restructuring. Gendered memories of the war and its aftermath nonetheless enter into the picture, and Leshkovich is careful to describe how women's memories and metaphors achieve salience while others slip into the shadows of awareness.

NHUNG TUYET TRAN presents a study of women's property rights in the Lê Dynasty and uses her findings to challenge broad claims that women in Southeast Asia enjoyed social prominence because of equal inheritance rights compared to men. Legal codes, legal practice, and local custom in the Lê era emphasized not bilateral descent but principles of patrilineal succession. Lê legal codes restricted women's claims to property, with the effect of leading some women to develop succession strategies for transferring property to institutions in order to ensure the maintenance of ancestral rites in perpetuity and to maintain a hold on property that might be returned to the patriline. In short, the arena of inheritance was marked by conflict and maneuvering rather than by smooth allocation of property to and through women.

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BUDDHISM, MORALITY, AND THE NATION-STATE: VIEWS FROM SRI LANKA AND CHINA

Our next set of essays affords us a comparative look at relationships between Buddhism, nationalism, and the forces of globalization. STEPHEN C. BERKWITZ explores the way in which a Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka, Venerable Gangoda-wila Soma, conjured a certain form of “Buddhist nationalism” for his program of religious, political, and cultural reform against the pressures of “alien” threats. Following the work of Roger Friedland, Berkwitz argues that the rise of religious nationalism is associated with the cultural and economic transformations that have been forced on nation-states by global capitalism, and that religious nationalism has become a refuge for those opposed to the way a globalization has stripped nations of their capacity to control their own social, cultural, and religious spheres. In short, Buddhist nationalism depends on global forces as much as on the cultural particularities of the locale or state. Soma’s brand of Buddhist nationalism was not without ironies and contradictions, strengthening Sinhala Buddhist hegemony in Sri Lanka even as it drew on (sometimes unwitting) transnational figures and global technologies in guiding debate and fashioning Buddhist identity.

We next turn to China for a further look at the ways in which religion may become entangled in state politics and translocal religious discourses. THOMAS BORCHERT contends that we must be careful not to presume a single Buddhist response to the political and cultural condition that we call modernity. Neither should we separate Buddhism from the modern. Instead, suggests Borchert, we may fruitfully turn to ethnic relations, translocal conceptions of Buddhism, and institutional forms of state governance to understand “Buddhist modernism.” In his analysis, the modern, sub-national form of Theravāda Buddhism in Sipsongpannā, located in southwest China, owes its character both to recent forms of governance and to the tensions between national and transnational forms of Buddhism, the very conditions under which practitioners build their communities and shape their religious practices.

The third essay in this set examines merit making and morality as they contribute to translocal networks of temple building in mainland China. GARETH FISHER observes that the recent rush in temple building has been driven by urban Buddhists who are eager to participate in the moral revival of Chinese society and gain merit through their efforts. Temple projects seldom take into consideration local religious practices, and they consistently reflect the agendas of urban Buddhists who live far from the projects in question and have few, if any, cultural ties to the building locales. Translocal and transnational patrons typically view the locales for their temple projects as “empty” or morally inferior. Fisher suggests, however, that people at the temple locales use them as a way to revive or rearticulate place-specific histories. How these disparate agendas play out should be exceptionally revealing of relationships between local religion, the Chinese secular state, and the imagination of nonstate actors.

MUSLIM IDENTITY AND COSMOPOLITANISM IN SOUTHWEST ASIA

A look at pan- and transregional forms of mobility and settlement in southwest Asia since the sixteenth century alerts us to the complexity of ethnic and religious

identification in this area. NILE GREEN argues that it was in Mughal India, well prior to the establishment of Afghanistan in the eighteenth century, that Pashtun elites began to emphasize the tribal affiliations and alignments that would come to be regarded as “Afghan.” The diasporic Pashtun communities of India, says Green, were the key places in which political and cultural energies “tribalized” Pashtun historical consciousness and religious ties. Articulated in response to Pashtun encounters with India’s myriad models of affiliation and to Mughal political domination, this Afghan identity relied on the blurring of kinship and religion, especially through genealogical attachment to Sufi saints who embodied belonging and memory. Tribal and religious identity became as one: “Honoring a saint,” observes Green, “was identical with honoring the tribe.” With the decline of Mughal power, this identity was projected back on the emerging Afghan state.

MAGNUS MARSDEN calls attention to the way cosmopolitanism has infused the experience of Chitrali villagers in northern Pakistan as they imagine different ways of being Muslim. Home to recent waves of refugees from Afghanistan and Tajikistan, the Chitral region is both ethnically and doctrinally diverse and has a long history of transregional mobility. Political instability in and adjacent to the northwest frontier of Pakistan has brought Chitralis into everyday encounters with Afghan and Tajik refugees, prompting them to adopt shifting sectarian, ethnic, aesthetic, and cultural identities in the course of daily life. Here, where transregional forms of mobility are a pervasive feature of everyday life, shifting political, religious, and cultural exchanges offer us fresh insights into “folk” collaborations with and understandings of the global processes we see across Asia.

—KMG

Forthcoming Articles in *JAS* 67:2 (May 2008)

Photography, Ideology, the “Authentic” and the “Real”

“Real” Photography as Social Critique: Beggars, Bourgeois Values, and Maimed Veterans in Postwar Japan

JULIA ADENEY THOMAS

Cosmopolitan Visions: Ethnic Chinese and the Photographic Imagining of Indonesia in the Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial Periods

KAREN STRASSLER

Politics in Rural Thailand

Suphanburi in the Fast Lane: Roads, Prestige, and Domination in Provincial Thailand

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Vote Buying and Village Outrage in an Election in Northern Thailand: Recent Legal Reforms in Historical Context

KATHERINE A. BOWIE

History and the Politics of Culture

The Persianization of Itihasa: Performance Narratives and Mughal Political Culture in Eighteenth-Century Bengal

KUMKUM CHATTERJEE

How Chinese Turkestan Became Chinese: Visualizing Zhang Zhizhong's Tianshan Pictorial and Xinjiang Youth Song and Dance Troupe

JUSTIN JACOBS

Empire of the Chinese Sign: The Question of Chinese Diasporic Imagination in Transnational Literary Production

KUEI-FEN CHIU

Verbal Hygiene

China Expands Its Courtesy: Saying “Hello” to Strangers

MARY S. ERBAUGH
