In This Issue

This issue opens with the second half of "Chinese Religions: The State of the Field," a project edited by DANIEL L. OVERMYER and supported by the China and Inner Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies. This part focuses on recent studies of religious traditions that are still active today; the previous section, published in the February 1995 issue, surveys "Early Religious Traditions from the Neolithic through the Han." Following an introduction by OVERMYER, FRANCISCUS VERELLEN evaluates the role of Taoism in the larger context of Chinese society and civilization. His assessment of the state of Taoist studies in Western language writings highlights selected aspects of Taoist thought and practice, Taoist history, and primary sources available for the study of Taoism. RODNEY TAYLOR and GARY ARBUCKLE concentrate on recent studies of Confucianism that explore its religious dimensions. In their consideration, the issue of the "religiousness" of Confucianism lies at the heart of debates in Confucian studies. JOHN R. MCRAE assesses the "impressive accomplishments and profound limitations" of the English language scholarship on Chinese Buddhism. He notes the considerable work done on Ch'an and other schools of Buddhism as well as the gaps in coverage of the post-Sung era. DRU C. GLADNEY shifts the focus to Islam in China. His brief overview of the scholarship on Islam pays special attention to the so-called "Hui" Muslims. The final essay of this collection by STEPHEN F. TEISER examines the anthropological and historical writings relating to popular religion. Its assessment of this literature concentrates on underscoring changing beliefs and practices and the religious aspects of the kinship system and of rites of passage.

Why, since 1988, has the Vietnamese government reversed its commitment to collective farming and permitted the revival of family farming? BENEDICT KERKVLIET rejects the obvious explanation—that reversal followed naturally from the post-1986 policy of reform (*đ'ôi-mói*) or that it merely mimicked Chinese policies. He proposes, as an alternative, that the Vietnamese government has responded with various kinds of accommodations since the mid-1970s to growing popular discontent with its agricultural policies. Borrowing a concept from Brantly Womack, Kerkvliet suggests that Communist parties must be "mass-regarding" both to establish their rule and to maintain it. He links this idea with James Scott's emphasis on the power of everyday peasant resistance to conclude that the Vietnamese Communist Party was responding to popular pressure from below. Thus, Kerkvliet finds that standard characterizations that represent the current regime in Vietnam as a "dominating state" or one that rules through "mobilization authoritarianism" overlook the existence of strong local social pressures that have the capacity for low-level resistance to government policy. Moreover, such characterizations also do not take into account that the Vietnamese state has displayed a long-term concern with ensuring that its policies are acceptable among the peasantry.

In an article commissioned by the Southeast Asia Council, CRAIG REYNOLDS takes up F. R. Ankersmith's exhortation that the "time has come that we should think about the past, rather than investigate it." His interest therefore is to assess approaches, paradigms, and models rather than merely to offer a conventional historiographical survey of the literature on early Southeast Asia. His line of inquiry

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enables him to locate a gap between European-language historiography produced particularly by Western scholars and the indigenous historiographies generated particularly in older versions. Much of his discussion is concerned with establishing the extent to which the Western discourse is constructed around a search for "origins," "agency," and "difference." These emphases he relates to a preoccupation with validating Southeast Asia as a region and field of study, an enterprise that he identifies as a Western postcolonial project. The "motivation to authenticate Southeast Asia as a region and field of study," he avers, "is connected to modern contemporary anxieties about authenticity." In other words, he argues that historians of early Southeast Asia operate within research parameters defined by the same themes and polemics that preoccupy historians of more modern periods. Thus, his essay aims at questioning the project of authenticating Southeast Asia.

ALF HILTEBEITEL examines the cult of Kūttāṇṭavar/Aravāṉ in present-day south India that derives from the "epic" tradition of the Mahābhārata by exploring classical epic stories about this hero and by reconstructing the folk-ritual world of the South Arcot and North Arcot districts of Tamilnadu (Madras). Along with a rich account of oral versions of myths associated with this cult (Kūttāṇṭavar is the son of Arjuna, the principal hero of the Mahābhārata), he offers a 'thick description' of the spectacular and complex Kūttāṇṭavar festival celebrating Kūttāṇṭavar's various deaths and births. Especially striking and vivid is the author's detailed ethnographic account of the roles assumed in the cult by the self-emasculated Alis—men from the Vaṉṉiyar and other Śūdra communities who dress like women, identify themselves with the god Visnu in his feminine form, and who marry the sacrificial male Aravāṉ in this context.

BARBARA METCALF's review of the biographies of three seemingly disparate people—the Mughal Empress Nur Jahan, the eighteenth-century French adventurer, Claude Martin, and a prominent twentieth-century Muslim leader and intellectual, Abdul Kalam Azad—reveal the similarities in the way many life stories are constructed. In drawing out the metanarratives of these accounts, she clarifies the "common-sense" stories employed by authors to conform to the canons of the genre of biography and autobiography.

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