

Editor's Note

This issue begins the final volume that will be published during my three-year term as editor. With that fact in mind, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of various scholars during the past academic year and to comment on some questions that are routinely raised by readers, authors, and interested members of the Association for Asian Studies.

Changes In The Editorial Board

A number of changes in the Editorial Board should first be noted. Barbara Metcalf has returned from South Asia and resumes full responsibility for South Asian book reviews. During the past year, she shared this responsibility with Bruce Pray, University of California, Berkeley. Professor Pray has been a resourceful and thoughtful member of the Editorial Board with the task of overseeing the most complex review section of the journal. He has been a genial colleague and helpful with the numerous technical problems that have confronted the editor. I want to thank him for his assistance.

Karl Moskowitz, Harvard University, has retired after serving two years as the editor for articles and book reviews in the Korean field. As long-time readers of the *Journal* will surely recognize, Moskowitz has been an exceedingly energetic and active editor. The results of his solicitations and commissions will be found throughout the prior eight issues together with this issue. Though the editor of the *Journal* has final responsibility for the contents of each issue, I must depend on my colleagues on the Editorial Board for balanced and informed expertise in certain areas. In the past two years, Karl Moskowitz has set high standards through his good judgment, insightful editorial advice, and unfailing courtesy in his dealings with the authors and reviewers in his field. Michael Robinson, University of Southern California, has assumed this post.

Articles and Book Reviews—The Continuing Dilemma of Space

In recent years the *Journal of Asian Studies* has grown in length. It now averages 240 pages an issue. Between the covers of a single issue there are likely to be three articles, perhaps two more review articles, with some seventy-plus book reviews. With such a publishing schedule, it is possible to remain more or less current with accepted manuscripts. The above schedule, however, almost certainly results in delays in the publication of book reviews. If an issue of the *Journal* devotes substantial space to the publication of a symposium, an article backlog is also likely to result. This situation is not new, though the book review backlog has grown. Such a situation is certainly unhealthy for the *Journal*. How important is it that matters be changed?

To answer this question, I believe that it is essential to recognize that the *Journal* is THE journal of the Association for Asian Studies. Its funding is largely derived

from AAS sources, despite assistance from the editor's university. The geographic areas covered by the AAS provide the parameters for the *JAS*. The editor of the *JAS* is appointed by the Directors of the AAS. Though the authority is not normally exercised, the Board of Directors could establish explicit regulations for the operation of the *Journal*, sharply reduce the funding for the publication, and intervene in the *Journal's* operation. The Board of Directors has rarely wished to do so, and overseeing the daily operation of the *Journal* is simply not feasible. But AAS sponsorship does mean that the *JAS* should take clear note of the interests and expectations of members. The editor has an obligation, in my view, to be abreast of new developments in the various fields, take account of the diverse interests of the AAS constituency, and, most importantly, maintain the book review section of the *JAS*.

I believe that a substantial backlog in articles and book reviews does a disservice to the AAS membership and the authors of the articles and reviews. Although, in years past, this may have amounted to nothing more than an inconvenience, in the difficult academic situation of the 1980s, the matter is likely to be more troublesome. Appraisal and publication of articles and book reviews are increasingly important for appointment to academic positions and for tenure decisions. The extraordinary increase in the price of books makes it essential that the *Journal* exercise its prerogative to comment on the usefulness of volumes for the scholar's library, university and college acquisition, and classroom use. It is also essential that the *Journal* carry out its duties with respect to articles and reviews in an efficient, responsible, and timely manner.

Yet readers must be aware of the primary commitment of the *Journal* to the highest level of scholarship, to publication of first-rate research and analysis, and to the exercise of balance in geographic content within an issue only when the first two criteria have been met.

In the difficult matter of balance with respect to articles, it is essential to keep in mind that the *Journal* is dependent on the manuscripts received. They are overwhelmingly from the South Asia and China fields, with Southeast Asia somewhat behind, and both Japan and Korea lagging far behind. Because the acceptance rate of the *JAS* is about 8:1, the submission rates of articles in the Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia fields must substantially increase if the area emphasis is to be more balanced. Editorial Board members actively search out manuscripts through local conferences, regional AAS meetings, and the like, but the basic thrust must come from scholars.

Some options that would probably ensure prompt publication of articles or reviews are not acceptable. I believe that the *JAS* should not abandon publication of research manuscripts or sharply reduce the space allocated to book reviews (a matter discussed below). As editor I have been willing to consider longer manuscripts than some of my predecessors. The next editor may change this policy. There are two areas, though, that do lend themselves to rethinking with respect to current space allocations. In these matters, I am soliciting the views of colleagues.

Symposia

It may be that the *JAS* should reconsider its policy with respect to symposia. Even when the matter of peer review is successfully completed, most symposia remain relatively narrow in their focus. It seems essential to me that the coordinator of a symposium assumes the burden of demonstrating that the articles to be included not

only meet scholarship criteria but are also organized and presented in such a manner as to be of interest to a substantial portion of the *JAS* readers. A second policy to be considered would be to require that half the costs of publication for a symposium be provided from external sources, thus freeing the *JAS* to extend the pages of that issue. Third, the Editorial Board might well decide that no more than one symposium be published in any single volume (that is, four issues) of the *JAS*. Finally, it might be wise to publish all symposia in a special issue of the *Journal*. I am setting out these alternatives to address the problem of article space and invite readers to comment.

Book Reviews

Readers of this (and other) journals not uncommonly remark in a somewhat jocular fashion that they value the *Journal* more for its reviews than its articles. The reality behind this statement is complex and relates to the limitations of article coverage mentioned above and to other matters as well. Because any narrowly defined group is not likely to find an article in their speciality in a given issue of the *JAS*, the value of the *Journal* to them is, and likely will continue to be, the book review section. Here the *JAS* can provide competent, thoughtful analyses of publications reporting on research results in the general Asian field.

The *JAS* cannot now comment on all the materials published. In the past thirty years, there has been an explosive development of specialization in the Asian field with an increased number of area faculty in academic departments (though history remains the major field for the AAS membership). Specialization is so common that little attention is given to its consequences in journal publication. There are Taisho experts in Japanese history, anthropologists studying villages in Sri Lanka, and historians of Burma. The establishment of expertise in the China field seems limited only by the availability of historical periods or dynasties. At some point these self-identified groups coalesce to the extent of publishing a newsletter or perhaps a journal. This internal proliferation of publications is matched by a growth of publications and periodicals from our colleagues in Canada, England, Australia, New Zealand, and India (to focus on English language materials). There is, of course, the extensive publication in Chinese, Japanese, and Western European languages. The AAS specialist is besieged, therefore, with journals, books, monographs, series, collections of documents, and the like. The *JAS* must perform the valuable service of keeping the reader current and knowledgeable, especially with respect to items in the Asia field outside specialist areas.

The number of reviews published in the *JAS* has increased substantially in the past three years. It exceeded three hundred for the most recently completed volume (including single reviews and review articles). Yet there is a backlog in the office of the editor, and not all books received are reviewed.

How should the *JAS* select materials for review? How should it maximize the number of items reviewed? With respect to the second question, there are relatively easy options, some of which are already in practice. The *Journal* publishes short reviews. These are frankly not popular with reviewers (and most likely not with the authors). The various editors try to establish stringent review limits and edit or return lengthy reviews. This effort, however, only nibbles at the edge of what is the reality of too many books for the space available.

There are two sets of policies that will permit the *Journal* to reduce its backlog

and, more to the point, maintain a relatively current publication policy. Both, however, constitute important changes for the *JAS* and its readers; therefore, this note solicits your comments.

With respect to the book review choices, the *JAS* might try to establish a relatively clear-cut set of priorities and guidelines for the inclusion of books in the review sections. These guidelines would replace the present highly variegated series of choices made within each successive editorial board. Some editors review bibliographic materials, others do not, many do not assign monographs for review, some commission reviews of books in foreign languages, and others emphasize volumes on relatively contemporary or modern topics. Such diversity contributes to spontaneity and innovativeness in the book review section. But there are some less pleasant consequences. Readers and authors do not know if the absence of a review reflects (1) loss of the book or its nonreceipt by the *Journal*; (2) tardiness of a reviewer (until the matter is simply set aside); (3) disdain for the book or author; or (4) a general policy of the *JAS*.

The establishment of general guidelines, probably in consultation with the area councils, might facilitate a painful but necessary redirection in the areas routinely reviewed. But, first, the *Journal* needs to know if there appear to be gaps in the items reviewed. Accordingly, we solicit the views of our readers. Are there volumes or books you expected to see reviewed that have not been reviewed? Are there areas that you believe are not adequately covered? Are books routinely reviewed that you believe could well go unreviewed?

In addition to, or perhaps instead of, the effort to sharpen and perhaps restrict the review policy of the *JAS*, there is another possibility that might be considered. Should the *JAS* designate one or more issues as solely devoted to book reviews? The *Journal* might publish only nine research articles a year, which would increase by 25 percent the number of reviews.

The decision to reduce the number of research articles published in the *JAS* would be an exceedingly important one. It should not be undertaken without considerable thought by the Editorial Board after the *Journal* readers have responded.

Journal Policy

Responsibility for the *Journal* rightfully rests with the editor, the Editorial Board, and the AAS Board of Directors. The approaching editorial change provides an opportunity for review and rethinking. If financial constraints remain as sharp as the Board of Directors indicates and the *JAS* continues to be distributed to readers by virtue of their AAS membership, then I believe there is considerable merit in being as explicit as possible in the matters of book review policy and manuscript solicitation. It is not my intention either to limit or inhibit the selectivity or good judgment of my colleagues or future editorial boards but rather to provide some reasoned advice for consideration. As a first step, I am enthusiastically soliciting the comments of our readers on the matters raised above. They will be welcome in this office or by any member of the Editorial Board.