

Editorial Foreword

This issue begins with a forum on COVID-19 titled “The Pandemic: Perspectives on Asia.” It is now evident that we are still in the first phase of this global pandemic, in which millions of individuals have been infected and so far more than 900,000 people have died. The full impact of the pandemic may never be known, as some governments have stopped counting the infected and dead or no longer have the resources to do so, despite the increasing spread of COVID-19. The future of the pandemic remains unclear, but its devastation appears in virtually all aspects of everyday life. There are rapid changes and transformations in the economy and society of every nation-state, with many unanticipated consequences appearing daily.

The idea for this forum emerged from a discussion of the Editorial Board of the *JAS* in March, when it was clear that we were in the midst of the pandemic. The Board agreed that scholarly analyses of the early period of the pandemic were needed to provide a longer-term context for interpreting the history of the present, while recognizing that many works will be written on later phases and developments. The essays in the forum provide a range of important perspectives on the social, cultural, and political impact of COVID-19 in Asia from scholars in anthropology, history, media studies, and political science. The contributors to “The Pandemic” are DAVID ARNOLD, MARY AUGUSTA BRAZELTON, JAEHO KANG, KATE McDONALD, JOHN HARRISS, and KENNETH POMERANZ.

The second part of this issue includes four articles. PRAKASH KUMAR examines the importance of US projects of modernization in India as a way to rethink the normative colonial and national debates on agrarian development in the twentieth century. The article by HARALD FISCHER-TINÉ considers the history of the YMCA’s Literature Department from the 1910s to the 1930s, which contributed to the construction of knowledge called “Third-Stream Orientalism” that focused on the religions and cultures of South Asia. LEIGH K. JENCO and JONATHAN CHAPPELL provide a major critique of the interpretations of “empire” in the writing of Chinese historiography, with a special focus on “New Qing History.” Finally, JULIAN KUTTIG and BERT SUYKENS study the use of new social media in student politics in the construction of digital public spaces linked to structures of power in Bangladesh.

I want to thank Ann Avouris and Cambridge University Press for kindly agreeing to include the essays in “The Pandemic: Perspectives on Asia” as part of the Coronavirus Free Access Collection. On behalf of the Editorial Board, I also want to extend my appreciation for the hard work of the reviewers of articles and books, the workers and staff, and the editorial and production teams who ensure that the *JAS* continues to be published in this very challenging time.

—Vinayak Chaturvedi