

## In This Issue

In his presidential address, TETSUO NAJITA reflects on modernity—both how to achieve it and how to define it. Najita begins from his own experience of studying the Japanese intellectual Andō Shōeki, who challenged the prevailing monarchist political system of the eighteenth century with appeals to a sense of natural community based on the Tokugawa pattern of agricultural labor and production. He continues by invoking Andō Shōeki both as a thinker who offered a fresh perspective on the Tokugawa world and as a symbol of those who would challenge the orthodoxy of their particular time. Thus, Najita suggests, the whole question of modernity should be challenged by fresh visions or new readings of familiar works. Najita notes that some scholars of Asia have an aversion to the whole topic of modernization, but it is a topic that cannot be avoided. The best we can hope for, he suggests, is to discard approaches that produce only caricatured and essentialized representations of the past and substitute instead a fresh and alternative vision of history such as Andō Shōeki himself did. Najita feels especially at this moment, with the certainties of the Cold War period dissolving before our eyes, that we need to be open to new visions and new modes of criticism, for they are essential forms of intellectual surpluses required to sustain modernity.

JOHN C. SCHAFER and THẾ UYÊN show how the novel form in modern Vietnamese literature emerged in southern Cochinchina and not, as most Vietnamese and foreign scholars previously had agreed, in the North. Schafer himself, in a jointly authored article with Cao thị Nhũ Quỳnh, “From Verse Narrative to Novel: The Development of Prose Fiction in Vietnam,” presented the case for the sudden development of the novel in the North in our pages (*JAS* 47.4 [1988]:756–77). Here, Schafer and Thế Uyên present an account of a slow evolution of the Vietnamese novel in a southern setting. They argue that the southern author Hồ Biểu Chánh’s *Who Can Do It?* (1912) is clearly a modern novel that should be differentiated both from earlier southern narratives and later works by northern writers such as Hoàng Ngọc Phách’s *Pure Heart* (1925) and Nguyễn Trọng Thuật’s *The Red Melon* (1925), which previously had been seen as examples of the first Vietnamese modern novels. They trace the southern Vietnamese novel back to the Chinese scholar-beauty and knight-errant romances and show how writers in Cochinchina made important adaptations in the process of creating the modern novel. The key changes were the substitution of prose for verse narrative, the use of the demotic script *Quốc ngữ* rather than Chinese characters, the creation of protagonists living in contemporary Cochinchina rather than in historical Chinese locales, and the introduction of new forms in plot and theme from French popular fiction. The authors suggest that difficulties in locating sources, plus regional prejudices, have hidden the true role of southern fiction in the development of modern Vietnamese literature.

ALISON DRAY-NOVEY places her account of the Beijing police during the Qing period in a strongly comparativist interpretative scheme. Based on her careful study of Qing records for the period from 1650 to 1850, she concludes that the principles used to organize police activity in Beijing are common to other large pre-industrial cities throughout the world. She believes that bringing together large numbers of people into a city inevitably creates “a world of strangers” requiring some sort of spatial divisions if order is to be maintained. Thus, she concludes that

spatial divisions based on differentiated urban subcultures are both natural and inevitable. This is true even in societies in which appearance was a primary social marker. Consequently, the main purpose of the police is to reinforce and sustain this sense of spatial order. She illustrates her argument by showing how Beijing police practices including gate-keeping, foot patrols, branch police stations, household registration, special police clothing, and even multiple, overlapping police jurisdictions all served to maintain codified principles of social identity in pre-industrial urban China.

In a review article, ANDREW J. NATHAN takes up themes connected with the February 1991 *JAS* issue on cultural relativism. He begins with the obvious principle that all arguments about cultural distinctiveness and cultural relativism are based on comparisons. His first point is that "a culture's uniqueness or non-uniqueness is not a characteristic of the culture itself, but of the way its attributes are conceptualized." He illustrates this by arguing that a cultural quality that seems unique at one level of abstraction usually can be compared at a higher level on "the ladder of abstraction." His second point turns on defining two basic conceptual approaches used in discussing these questions: the hermeneutic and positivistic. The hermeneutic requires the interpretation of some text or body of data to discover a pattern of meaning; the positivist measures some quality. He especially is concerned when hermeneutic conclusions are drawn from positivist research, but also believes that positivist research is often misdirected through improper use of hermeneutic insights. In research on China, Nathan feels that positivistic approaches have not been used enough; nevertheless, the positivist research completed so far raises doubts for him about claims for Chinese cultural distinctiveness commonly advanced in hermeneutic writings.

THOMAS METZGER's review article looks at the sociologist Chin Yao-chi (Ambrose Y. C. King) as a major Chinese social science thinker and attempts to place Chin within the context of recent Chinese intellectual history. Metzger sets forth his own list of four essential qualities within modern Chinese thought: (1) a utopian desire for an open society largely free of selfish impulses; (2) an emphasis on reason (*li-hsing*), both as a capacity inherent in all humankind regardless of culture and one which lies within our intellectual and moral grasp; (3) a sense of "epistemological optimism" about the teleological nature of history; and (4) a conviction that intellectuals as a social class have a role in discovering the system and embodying reason for the benefit of all. Metzger believes that Chin's work avoids some of the pitfalls of utopianism and a superior role for intellectuals, but otherwise reflects common elements of the modern Chinese intellectual milieu. Metzger's main point, however, is that Chin's work has been so shaped by these common Chinese assumptions that he stands quite distinct from the dominant trends in recent American approaches to Chinese society—the rational choice and cultural relativist schools—and thus represents an alternative to American scholarship on China.