

EDITORIAL

Editorial Foreword

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Reading the articles in this issue of *The Journal of Asian Studies*, I am reminded of how analytical perspectives within traditional academic disciplines are focused and sharpened by scholarship anchored in area studies. Grounded in fine-grained interdisciplinary research, Asian studies is a domain of scholarship that contributes new theoretical approaches to the study of anthropology, language and literature, political science, and history, as these and other disciplines extend beyond the boundaries of regional specialization. Covering a range of topics, the articles collected here highlight important ways in which Asian studies brings interdisciplinary perspectives to bear on fundamental questions of broad, general significance.

The articles in this issue of the *JAS* are not linked together thematically. Nevertheless, interesting points of connection can be emphasized—in particular, the dynamics of translation across boundaries of knowledge and experience, and the tensions among governance, revolution, and ideology.

In the lead article, Kenneth M. George and Kirin Narayan develop the concept of technophony to understand the transformation of Vishwakarma worship in India and the way in which the logic and practice of deification provides a perspective on dramatic changes in the conceptualization of labor. Focusing on a deity that is often associated with specialized artisanal craft production within the bracket of local caste group identity, George and Narayan show us how Vishwakarma worship animates the identity of publics in contemporary India. These publics are defined by new forms of labor and expanded conceptualizations of the power—at once sacral and secular—manifest in creative work, manufacturing, technology, and collective identity.

Histories of language translation and transliteration raise profound questions concerning the politics of knowledge. National policies on the use of scripts to facilitate communication and translation highlight this dramatically. In his critical analysis of Chinese script reform, Uluğ Kuzuoğlu provides us with new insights into the formation of international revolutionary ideology at the interface of Sino-Soviet interests. By examining the close and complex relationship between the development of the Chinese Latin Alphabet in Shanghai during the 1930s and the Unified New Turkic Alphabet in Baku, Kuzuoğlu's research offers a new framework for understanding the politics of codified transliteration designed to animate revolutionary consciousness so as to transcend the boundaries of language.

In his analysis of the relationship among discourses about authority, the legitimacy of rule, and the practice of governance, John D. Wong focuses on the history of political rhetoric in the context of Hong Kong and the claims made for and against the institutionalization of government legitimacy. Through an examination of the relationship between a rhetoric of “prosperity and stability,” on the one hand, and “democracy and freedom,” on the other, Wong provides a nuanced perspective on the continuity of contention in the formation of political discourse. Recognizing significant changes in the articulation of authority and resistance in the contemporary moment, Wong's analysis, which frames a history of political activism with reference to agitation and protest in Hong Kong during the mid-1960s, reminds us that neat binaries of rhetorical juxtaposition often mask more complex realities of governance and forms of opposition that devolve from state authority.

Through a close reading of the publications of exiled Taiwanese socialists in Hong Kong, Mark McConaghy engages with arguments concerning the nature of Sinophone studies and the history of socialism in Asia. Arguing against the binary structure of minoritized communities defined against a backdrop of China-centrism, as well as against the logic of ethnic cohesion framed by a narrative of political and economic development, McConaghy makes a case for understanding the situated socialism of Taiwanese political activists in terms of dialectical synergy involving the convergence of

local and revolutionary history. In doing so, he demonstrates how a fine-grained, deeply contextualized reading of dislocated politics can radically problematize both master narratives in area studies, as well as the disciplined critiques of those narratives.

In a revisionist interpretation of how South Korean literature influenced North Korean poetry and drama in the 1960s, I Jonathan Kief engages with the problem of politicized boundaries, both on the ground and in the mind. He explores the dynamic tension produced by the state's inhibition of self-expression and the creativity of the artistic imagination. In part, this imagination is made possible as a consequence of national boundaries taking on much greater significance than can be contained by the artifice of geopolitics. Kief's reading of literature and literary history against the grain of politicized distinctions and essentialized nationalism produces critical insights into how the past is imagined and the construction of histories that creatively work imagination to the end of revolution.

This issue also includes a collection of five essays on the South Korean Candlelight Protests of 2016–17. In this forum, the authors take up a set of concerns that are important for understanding political tensions and the force of a dramatic and powerful social movement in Korea. But they also engage with critical questions about the limits and possibilities of protest and revolutionary change within the structures of capitalist democracies more broadly.

As Albert L. Park points out in his introductory essay, the protests, which focused on corruption and nepotism at the highest levels of state politics, must be understood more broadly in terms of the tensions and contradictions apparent in authoritarianism and democratic forms of government. The case of political activism in Korea sheds important light on how power is consolidated within the structures of capitalist democracies and how resistance is articulated. The forum essays explore this articulation on three conceptual planes: space, temporality, and depth.

An important aspect of the Candlelight Protest movement is how it enabled the performance of protest in ways that are reflexive, self-conscious, and oriented toward the expression of shared interests and the problem of identifying meaningful terms of solidarity. Jennifer Jihye Chun examines the way mass protests produce centers and margins, and how spatialized dynamics point to new forms of dramatic activism that reflect the precarity of labor in the context of neoliberalism. Ju Hui Judy Han takes up the question of temporality as problematic in moments of social and political activism. As the terms of solidarity are defined to focus on issues deemed to be of immediate concern, Han explores what this means for those whose interests are deferred. How does revolutionary political activism reinscribe problematic forms of normativity? Han critically examines the way in which inclusive, “family-friendly” protest produces its own form of displacement in the marginalization of queer and transgender priorities. As Hyun Ok Park shows, through an analysis focused on responses to the Sewöl ferry disaster, protest and critique not only displace agendas from center to margin, based on different priorities, but also shift public attention to levels of concern that change the nature of activism, transforming a deep critique of neoliberal capitalist deregulation into a less systemically focused criticism of administrative mismanagement and failed governance.

As Michelle Williams points out in the forum's concluding essay, it is important to understand the Candlelight Protest movement with reference to global patterns of marginalization, precarity, exclusion, and erasure, each of which is symptomatic of the ways in which democracy not only accommodates but masks the hidden—as well as the not so hidden—injuries of neoliberal capitalism. Recognizing the limitations and challenges of new, globalized forms of political activism, Williams reminds us of how complex forms of power give rise to creative responses that can best be understood in terms of academic perspectives anchored in area studies.