

In This Issue

BENJAMIN A. ELMAN returns to discuss one of the perennial topics in Chinese studies, the role of the examination system. He argues against the notion that the examination system should be interpreted as a mechanism providing social mobility in late imperial China. Instead, he views the Ming-Ch'ing period examinations as a means of political, social, and cultural reproduction for the prevailing social system. Elman also adopts a cultural relativist stance to attack the presentist notion that the examinations somehow held China back from modernization. He rejects approaches that evaluate the late imperial period only in terms of a universal process of modernization and argues instead that the examination system and the educational process built around it functioned as a gyroscope that stabilized China over half a millennium.

The next three articles, by DANIEL LITTLE, RICHARD W. WILSON, and PRASENJIT DUARA, all address the question of relativist and universalistic interpretations in a more direct fashion. Each author suggests a stance that Asianists should take in their search for cross-cultural meaning. All of the contributors realize the faults of both previous universalistic and relativist approaches, but all continue to search for some general meaning. These authors each call upon Chinese examples, but as *JAS* editor DAVID D. BUCK's introduction shows, the issues they raise are general ones for all Asianists, regardless of geographic or disciplinary focus. In publishing this forum, the *JAS* is endeavoring to promote cross-regional and cross-disciplinary consideration of problems common to Asian Studies.

In our concluding article, EVELYN S. RAWSKI masterfully summarizes the trends in recent scholarship on the Ming-Ch'ing period (Rawski uses the pinyin romanization "Ming-Qing" in her title and throughout her article). Her survey shows the steadily widening range of topics in socioeconomic studies of the period, as well as the increasing commonality of research questions among Ming-Ch'ing specialists with historians of other regions within Asia, as well as with those studying other areas of the world. Rawski's article is part of an ongoing project of the Association for Asian Studies' China and Inner Asian Council and marks the eighth such specially commissioned piece to appear in the *JAS* since 1977. A complete list of the previous state-of-the-field contributions is appended to her article.