

## Preface

With this issue, *Asia Major* resumes publication in a new form. The original series, edited by Dr. Bruno Schindler, came to an untimely end with the rise of National Socialism in Germany. Dr. Schindler revived it in a "New Series" in postwar Britain, publishing under the aegis of the three British universities then involved in serious academic studies of the Far East, Cambridge, London, and Oxford. After Dr. Schindler's death in 1964 it was most ably edited by Professor Walter Simon, who maintained its high standard of academic excellence, and published a wide variety of articles representing the many new directions taken by studies of East Asia in the 1960s and the early 1970s. The new series came to an end in 1975, the victim of the economic crisis of the early 1970s and the simultaneous impoverishment of British universities by a succession of governments which showed no interest in academic excellence and which have systematically deprived research in the humanities of financial support.

We revive the journal on another continent, and in an academic world greatly changed since we ceased publication. When Dr. Schindler founded *Asia Major* in 1923 the academic study of East Asia in the West was confined to a handful of specialists, who were generally thought of as engaged in what their universities called "Oriental Studies" and who were expected to be able to turn their hands to any subject by virtue of their command of the language. Even when the journal was revived in 1949 the idea of "Oriental Studies" still persisted, and the entire profession of academic specialists working on China and Japan both in Europe and in North America could easily have been accommodated in a lecture hall of modest proportions. The study of the Far East remained an exotic speciality that attracted few students and had almost no effect upon studies of the humanities in general.

The world of East Asian Studies in 1988 is a very different one. The idea of "Orientalism" is gone, its passing unmourned. The educated public has become aware of East Asia both as an area of crucial political and economic importance and as a region whose cultures are fully worthy of scrutiny. We now work in an academic world where almost all major universities provide teaching in East Asian history and culture, and where the study of the Chinese and Japanese languages is no longer the exotic pursuit of a tiny number of devotees, but attracts thousands of students annually. The standards we demand of our students have risen equally dramatically.

These changes have led to a vast explosion of knowledge about East

Asia. Forty years ago a moderately energetic scholar could still keep abreast of all the important work published on China, both in the humanities and in the social sciences, and could be expected to have a broad acquaintance with the entire Western-language literature on the field. That happy era ended in the early 1960s, as the profession grew rapidly in an era of university expansion, and as more and more specialists from the social sciences began to work seriously on China. Few scholars now can keep track of new work on China and Japan, except at the most general level, and fewer still have any idea about new writing on Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, Tibetan, or Inner Asian Studies. Few of us think of ourselves any more as East Asian scholars, even though a knowledge of Japanese scholarship has become an essential part of the training of all serious scholars of China.

Even within Chinese Studies the old sense of identity as a Chinese scholar, an identity largely defined by a common command of language and reading, has largely disappeared. We are no longer general-purpose sinologists; we have become Chinese historians, or students of Chinese literature, of Chinese thought, of Chinese art, or law, or economics. And even that degree of generality is breaking down; more and more we are becoming defined as Han historians, or experts in Ming law, in Yüan drama, in early-Ch'ing finance, or in Sung Neo-Confucianism. We have, like the academic world as a whole, increasingly become specialists, with an ever more detailed command of our own speciality and with ever-shrinking general horizons.

The pattern of publication has followed a similar trend. In the last two decades the short studies which would once have found a means of publication as articles in scholarly journals have increasingly been published in the symposium volumes generated by specialized scholarly conferences, and in the ever-growing number of specialist newsletters.

The scholar working on China has also had to adjust to another major change. The refounding of *Asia Major* in 1949 coincided with the beginning of a dark period for scholarship in the humanities and social sciences in China. Little new was published, and contacts with Western scholars were spasmodic and dangerous. For more than two decades the rapid growth of Chinese studies in the West progressed in almost total isolation from the main academic world in China. When *Asia Major* ceased publication in 1975, a tiny handful of Chinese scholarly journals was just resuming publication after the cultural desolation and deliberate intellectual devastation of Mao's last decade. Apart from archaeology, current scholarship from China made little impact on our profession. We resume publication in a much happier time. Serious academic publication in China, once a trickle, has

become a deluge. It is difficult to remain informed about new books and newly founded journals. For the first time since the 1940s we can openly enjoy serious professional contacts with our colleagues in China, renewed contacts that have enriched us all.

In this new and in many ways confusing academic atmosphere, what does the new *Asia Major* hope to provide? We believe that there is no longer intellectual justification, nor a readership, for a journal attempting to publish detailed original scholarship on the entirety of China, Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, India, and Inner Asia, as the original *Asia Major* once did. We intend primarily to publish articles dealing with China, and with subjects concerning China's relations — cultural, political, and institutional — with its Asian neighbors.

We believe that ever-narrowing specialization, although it has vastly increased our knowledge of China, has also had a negative effect on our profession, by obscuring the general context in which this specialized knowledge needs to be understood. This is doubly unfortunate since more and more highly trained specialists find themselves teaching in academic settings that require a broad general understanding of East Asia and its history and culture rather than the highly detailed knowledge demanded in a doctoral dissertation. We hope to contribute to such a broad level of understanding. We intend to concentrate upon the humanities, but will also publish serious academic studies in any discipline that would be of interest to all students of China and of Chinese culture in general. We would exclude only highly technical scholarship, for example in economics, that would be unintelligible to the ordinary historian or scholar of the humanities. We believe such research is appropriate to the professional journals created for it.

We publish in our first number only articles dealing with pre-modern China. However, this is not the result of deliberate policy. We welcome any scholarly, well-researched articles on modern history and literature, and on all aspects of contemporary China. We also hope to publish articles drawing attention to new or unfamiliar source materials, and surveys reviewing current trends of scholarship in China, Japan, and elsewhere.

*Asia Major* will have a new form and a change in its emphasis. We aim to publish articles across the whole field of Chinese Studies. We have no set editorial positions. But in one particular we intend to continue the policy set by our distinguished predecessors; we intend to accept only articles of the highest scholarly standards which present first-rate research in a form that will persuade non-specialists of their importance.

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