

Notes from the Editors

This issue opens with an article by the 2012 Keynote Speaker at *ASIANetwork's* Annual Conference, which was co-hosted by Willamette University. Professor Wendy Larson of the University of Oregon's essay, "Chinese Culture on the Global Stage: Zhang Yimou and Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles," addresses the work of Chinese filmmaker, Zhang Yimou. Born in the 1950s, Zhang grew up when Mao Zedong's theory of "permanent revolution" was reaching its zenith. The revolutionary aesthetic of that world, of which Zhang is a prime example, created an emotionally coherent set of ideas and forms that were expressed idealistically, passionately, and with exuberance. This aesthetic tradition emphasized bright colors, sharp outlines, and striking poses. In literature, as well as in film, characters journeyed from bourgeois to revolutionary sensibilities. As one of the most famous of the 5th class of students to graduate from the Beijing Film Academy (and thus the "Fifth Generation"), Zhang both inherited and fought against these socialist film conventions. He sought to create instead a modern cinematic language that distanced itself from the thematically clear-cut socialist films, bringing in stylistic ambiguity, while also making use of their striking imagery and visual force.

This issue proceeds with two essays that grew out of the Spring 2012 "Half the World Symposium" at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, generously supported by The Henry Luce Foundation. Our continued focus on Asian environments was guest edited by Darrin Magee of HWS Colleges. The first piece, by Bahar Davary, examines environmental degradation (she uses the more forceful "ecological genocide") and human-nature relations by comparing Muslim and Christian history of science perspectives. On the one hand, this is a theoretical piece with a post-colonial critique of the nature-society rift. On the other, it is an empirical project in which Davary argues that certain traditional practices and places in Southeast Asia, namely *adat* in Western Sumatra and *keramat* in Malaysia, offer perspectives that may go far in bridging the nature-society divide that lies at the heart of the ongoing ecological crisis worldwide. The second piece, by Jack Hayes, throws water on the idea that fire is simply conflagration and disaster by examining the ways fire has been used in modern China as a tool for managing land, people, and economies. For Hayes, fire regimes vary with political ones over time and space. These inflammatory acts of the state reflect agricultural priorities just as well as they do concerns of inter-ethnic relations. We will continue to feature articles on Asian environments in the Spring 2013 issue.

An essay by Han Li continues on a theme we have been featuring as well. Reflecting on the experience of designing and teaching a course on material culture and Chinese gardens, she explores traditional philosophy, ethics, religion, painting, calligraphy, craft, literature, architecture, and horticulture to teach students to read classical Chinese gardens as microcosms of Chinese culture. This essay provides a detailed discussion not only of the organization and reading materials used in the course, but also a reflection on how students come to understand the key elements (rocks, water, plants, and architecture) in a Chinese garden. In addition, the essay considers how teachers may use Chinese gardens built in the United States to discuss the appropriation of "Chinese-ness" in different geographical, physical, and cultural environments.

Focusing on three influential contemporary Chinese political fantasy novels, Guo Wu's article, "Imagined Future in Chinese Novels at the Turn of the 21st century," contextualizes the stories in terms of contemporary Chinese political thought and interprets them in light of the rivaling tendencies among the Chinese intellectuals since the 1990s. In doing so, Wu's article exposes the complex relationship between rising nationalism and political authoritarianism, the possibilities of fascism and federalism, the role of a strong, centralized state, and the relevance of liberal democracy in China. The article emphasizes how important fiction has been in terms of expressing political thought and concerns, arguing that these novels present a pessimistic and chilling view of China's political future.

The issue concludes with two book reviews. The first, by Robert Montgomery, will be of particular interest to those seeking to integrate the territories and peoples of the former Soviet Union into the study of Asia. His review essay examines *The Ethnic History and the Traditions of Culture and Daily Life of the Peoples of the Baikal Region* (2010). Laura Nenzi addresses a volume of interest to those teaching pre-modern Japanese history with a review of Constantine Nomikos Vaporis's *Voices of Early Modern Japan: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life during the Age of the Shoguns* (2012).

Erin McCarthy and Lisa Trivedi, Editors

With Darrin Magee, Guest Editor for articles on Asian Environments