

Editorial

At the outset of a new editorship, I want to air some thoughts about *The Journal of Asian Studies*—its strengths and weaknesses, its needs and future course, and a few of its procedural prerequisites.

Major scholarly periodicals can play a central role not only in disseminating recently arrived-at research results, but in maintaining the intellectual vitality of the communities they serve. They must seek constantly to stimulate and strengthen scholarly interaction. The question is, how? For the *JAS*, however, prior questions must be dealt with—fundamental questions of self-definition. Whom does the *Journal* serve? Whom should it serve? Does “Asian Studies” remain an intellectually valid and a viable organizing concept? What can this journal do best? On what should it stake its claim to the time and money of potential readers?

The starting point for the *JAS* is that it is the scholarly publication of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS). No AAS, no *JAS*—and conversely, one suspects, no *JAS*, no AAS, since the *Journal* is one of the principal benefits of AAS membership. Of course, not all readers of the *Journal* are AAS members, but without the willingness of those members to join the Association, the financial resources of the *Journal* would wither.

The fact that the AAS membership is this journal's prime constituency raises problems which have long been familiar to *JAS* readers. The most common complaint directed at the *JAS* is that it fails, particularly in its article pages, to publish enough material germane to the interests of those who are dissatisfied with it. The *JAS* constituency is extraordinarily diverse, in terms of area specialization, discipline, and temporal interests. It is natural that some—probably nearly all—*Journal* readers would like more *JAS* space devoted to *their* geographic areas, *their* disciplines, *their* research-related interests.

Perhaps as a response to this state of affairs, recent years have seen the emergence of many new publications—newsletters and solid journals in both area studies and topical fields. At first glance, it may appear that these more specialized publications will tend to make the *JAS* superfluous to the intellectual and professional lives of more and more AAS members.

I do not think this is so. The very characteristic of the *JAS* which arouses the most criticism is in fact the *Journal's* greatest strength—or, more correctly, the *Journal's* greatest potential strength, since a lot depends on what the *JAS* is in fact able to publish. The strength of the *Journal* lies in its breadth. To publish in the *JAS* is to reach not a hopelessly diffuse, but an excitingly wide-ranging audience: not just modern China specialists, or Buddhologists, or South Asian literature scholars, or Japan *senmonka*, but all of them. What the *JAS* offers is a rich opportunity for unanticipated, eye-opening contact with Asianists who might otherwise never be encountered.

Given its broad constituency, the *JAS* must emphasize certain kinds of articles and essays at the likely expense of others. It must attempt to publish material which

will stimulate and inform reasonably large sections of its primary audience. It cannot confine itself to narrowly drawn write-ups of research which appeal only to the small slice of the readership which is intimately interested in the specific subjects of such articles. It must offer its audience food for thought, even in articles which seem distant from many readers' concerns. With these objectives in mind, let me outline the *Journal's* hopes with regard to the submission of manuscripts.

First, we welcome provocative essays, firmly rooted in scholarship, that stimulate both dialogue and research.

Second, while recognizing that not all research lends itself to multicultural application, the *Journal* seeks to print articles embodying interpretive issues and analytical themes which transcend the immediate domain of the authors' research; we want articles that open these issues up to broader segments of the *JAS* audience. This is not to say that *JAS* authors must be popularizers. It is to say that manuscripts which successfully place their research topics in larger intellectual contexts, and which effectively make the case for their own significance, will be particularly welcomed by the *JAS*.

Third, we would like to publish integrated sets of papers in the *Journal*. These might take various forms; a common theme might be examined in several cultural contexts, for example, or a particularly significant question might be examined over time in a single society or region. Publishing such joint ventures can raise formidable technical problems, but there is much to be gained. We welcome correspondence on this, or the direct submission of organized sets of papers. Moreover, the *Journal* will consider publishing essays on non-Asian topics as parts of such sets of papers, if they help to illuminate important Asia-related themes.

Fourth, scholarly writing need not be confined to research articles per se. The *Journal* is receptive, for instance, to "state of the field" essays along the lines of those pioneered by the AAS's China and Inner Asia Council and published from time to time in the *JAS* in recent years. Another area in which the *JAS* can do more is informing its readers about scholarly developments within Asian societies; an illuminating example of this is Professor Gluck's article in this issue. There is no need here to compile a list of acceptable topics. The point is that there is a great variety of approaches to be tried, above and beyond formal research articles, if the *JAS* is to help to enrich the intellectual atmosphere in Asia-related studies.

Fifth, something has to be said by way of editorial policy about manuscripts which are heavily concerned with methodology, quantitative or otherwise. There is certainly room in the *JAS* for occasional articles dealing explicitly with scholarly methods. But those manuscripts which claim, first and foremost, to examine Asian subjects *through the use of* fully elaborated methods must, in the final analysis, be more concerned with the Asian topic than with the methodology employed. In other words, if the methodological process either dominates (in terms of pages of text) or fails to lead to new and better understanding of the Asian topic, then the manuscript is probably not appropriate to the *JAS*.

Sixth, the *Journal* is in a particularly strong position to excel at scholarly book reviewing. We hope to increase the space devoted to reviews and to give greater attention to review articles. Ideally, the latter are not simply extra-long reviews, but rather essays on issues, constructed around the consideration of one or more (usually recent) publications. The *Journal's* Book Editors will have broad responsibility in negotiating and arranging review articles (the Editor will handle China and Inner Asia), and may be contacted directly.

It is unlikely that the changes implicit in some of the above points will produce a sudden and dramatic transformation of the *JAS*. Much depends on what we receive for consideration and publication. The *Journal* is, however, taking certain steps on its own to serve the purposes discussed above. With this issue, we begin the regular practice of printing an "Abstracts" page after the table of contents, for the readers' convenience. In future issues we will publish, simultaneously with selected articles, comments by one or more scholars in related but separate fields (for example, in geographic fields other than the articles' own), in order to expand upon the articles' themes and broaden their impact. Furthermore, with Professor Minear's essay in this issue we introduce a new category of *Journal* material, "Opinion." Under this heading we hope to print from time to time papers of modest length, whose primary purpose is to express a point of view—and thus to generate further dialogue among Asianists. Further contributions to "Opinion" are most welcome.

By way of clearing the decks, let me conclude with a few procedural notes. Readers should know that at present the once-forbidding backlog of accepted manuscripts has been largely eliminated, thanks to the heroic efforts of my predecessor, Professor Ralph W. Nicholas of the University of Chicago. I know that in recent years the well-known *JAS* backlog has deterred some scholars from sending their manuscripts to us. The backlog is down, and we hope to maintain a level of acceptances which will keep it down. Evaluation by outside readers and, if necessary, revision and reevaluation inevitably take time, but at present scholars need not expect an automatic wait of a year or more because of an excess of accepted materials.

In addition, I must unfortunately repeat some points of standard professional wisdom. It is vital that those who contribute their critical abilities to the *Journal*, as referees of manuscripts or reviewers of books, be as disinterested as possible in the objects of their scrutiny. Some research fields are small; suitable reviewers can be hard to find, and preserving a manuscript author's anonymity is at times a transparent formality. But the principle of disinterested criticism is essential to the integrity of the *JAS*; personal interest in the outcome of a manuscript's evaluation or the fate of a published work should at the very least compel correspondence with the Editor or the appropriate Book Editor. In a similar vein, the *JAS* is not able to accept manuscripts which have been published elsewhere in whole or in part, or which are simultaneously under consideration by other publications. In addition to the very real problem of copyright, *Journal* space is simply too scarce to allow us to publish material which is already in print. And we do not wish to use either our time or that of generous referees to evaluate manuscripts, only to find that they are being published elsewhere.

Finally, with regard to correspondence. Substantive, constructive, economically written correspondence is encouraged. The *Journal* can and should be an instrument of scholarly communication. We hope to publish letters which add to responsible scholarly exchange, nourish further speculation or research in significant areas, develop or dispute with previously published materials in the *JAS*. Decisions as to what to publish, including rejoinders to reviews, will hinge upon the conflicting demands on the *Journal's* pages and other editorial factors, as well as upon the content and style of the submitted letters. (A critical book review is not, in and of itself, cause for rejoinder, and certainly not reason to publish a rejoinder.) Correspondence can become the vehicle, not only for correction of perceived errors and response to perceived wrongs, but for the presentation of views and ideas of interest to many *JAS* readers. Beyond that, we welcome readers' views about the *JAS*—past, present, and future—and will try to respond quickly and constructively.