Editor’s Introduction

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The 36th issue of the Southeast Review of Asian Studies is the second and last issue of the issues produced by the Berry College faculty and student led editorial team. We turn over the editorial reins to the next editor or editors with a mixture of pride and relief.

Our intention in undertaking the roles of co-editors was to produce several issues of the journal open to more of the totality of Asian Studies. In that we have succeeded. As with the previous issue, this issue of the journal includes material drawn not only from East Asia but also South Asia and Southeast Asia. If Asia is home to three-fifths of humanity and represents an equal measure of the human experience, something faculty who teach courses about Asia are given to reminding their students and any other audience they address, then it is only fitting that the articles, essays and book reviews in a general journal of Asian Studies should be drawn from all of the regions of Asia. Beyond regional coverage, this and the previous issue also reflect something of the extraordinary variety of subject matter encompassed by Asian Studies. Herein the reader will find fascinating contributions on, and in several cases crossing the disciplinary boundaries recognized by scholars working in philosophy and religion, political science and history, popular culture and art, literature and language pedagogy. Before describing the individual contributions, we point out what readers will not find but which the editors hope to see in future issues: contributions on Central Asia, Russian Far East, and the insular Pacific as well as contributions on political geography and political economy.

The first article is an eloquent plea for a genuinely universal, which is to say ‘not Eurocentric’, philosophical inquiry. Sthaneshwar Timalsina problematizes the failure to know the cultural other by challenging the false dialogue disguising the tragic monologue of the European philosophic encounter with Indian philosophy. “How can the Mahābhārata be a concern for understanding the Indian psyche,” he demands, “but the Iliad the unquestioned standard for understanding
human nature writ large?” Rarely has an issue of such significance been articulated so succinctly in a question. Something is obviously amiss in such a peculiar privileging of some texts and idea systems over others. Timalsina argues for an approach that relinquishes the distortions entailed in the “superimposed binaries” of Eurocentrism for the encounters with texts capable of eliciting a sense of undivided pure being.

The motivations for novelist and essayist Murakami Haruki’s extensive translation of English language, especially American, literature into Japanese is the subject of Masaki Mori’s article. Among the translations are works by Truman Capote, John Irving, Ursula K. Le Guin and J.D. Salinger. Interpreting authorial motive is often difficult but Mori succeeds in identifying as crucial the fruitful convergence of creative writing and translation as Murakami drew inspiration from the voices of the selected authors.

Revelations of meaning are facilitated by encounters with cultures not only on their own terms but also in their own terms. Meiqing Sun’s article offers an innovative, flexible approach to learning that daunts many American students of Chinese as a foreign language. Fusing the Liu Shu method with the technique of ‘wild association,’ the approach exploits a universal radical of human nature: storytelling. The effective clues to character understanding and memorization found in the Liu Shu method is supplemented by the ‘wild association’ editing of character stories. As the findings reported from analysis of language student surveys show, this proves to be highly effective. Few tasks are as crucial for Asian Studies scholars working in the United States as encouraging language acquisition.

The next three articles explore the difficulty, or perhaps impossibility, of understanding interstate war, civil war and insurgency through the lens of a single ideological perspective. That few conflicts were as complex as the 1937-1945 Second Sino-Japanese War is captured by Joseph K.S. Yick in his assessment of the politics of Chen Bijun during the seventeen months before her assuming a formal role in collaborating with the Japanese occupation authorities. His tragic portrait of the rise and fall of Chen Bijun from one of the leading political figures in early 20th century China to her postwar trial as the “Number One Female Hanijan” (Chinese traitor) offers a fresh perspective on politics at its rawest. Rather than rehash the journalistic calumny that passes for histories of collaboration, Yick relates the fascinating story of rational calculation by risk acceptant leaders in an environment with weak institutional norms. Chen Bijun and her husband, Wang Jingwei, assume roles in a “Peace Movement” and a puppet government in Japanese occupied territory only after losing their
power struggle with Chiang Kai-shek for control of the Nationalist regime and a failed assassination plot against Wang Jingwei in Hanoi in March 1939. Their final bid for power ultimately fails of course because Japan was militarily defeated. Prosecuted and convicted in 1946, she is given a life sentence which is served in the custody of first the Nationalist and then the Communist governments. Here then is a properly contextualized account of a leader previously marginalized by scholars because of unsuccessful collaboration.

Quan Manh Ha’s article offers an analysis of what Louis Althusser would have described as the product of the Publishing and Distribution Ideological State Apparatus and what E. Ann Kaplan might describe as an example of cultural mistranslation of trauma. The author’s focus is on the difficult material revealed in representations, or more accurately the misrepresentations, of Americans and Vietnamese during the War in Vietnam and afterward in the United States in Lan Cao’s 1997 novel *Monkey Bridge*. What is challenged in this article is an apparent exercise in apologetics via unrealistic portrayals of major characters and descriptions of the conflict burdened by Cold War anticommunist ideology.

Synthesizing previously published accounts and U.S. Embassy cables declassified in 2006, Matthew Zipple offers fresh insight into the horrors of the so called Red Drum Murders, the counter-insurgency operations of Thailand’s Communist Suppression Command. Charles Tilly’s theory of collective violence and Samuel Popkin’s theory peasant rationality are used to make sense of a brutal campaign that took the lives of 1000 to 3000 villagers in Phatthalung Province in a period stretching from as early as 1969 to a late as 1975, when it was exposed by courageous university student activists. The state terror that Zipple describes in measured tones, including burning some of the victims alive, beggars the imagination. What is new in this article is that the author names the figure who was primarily responsible for executing the campaign: General Sant Chitpatima. Zipple also raises the issue of the complicity of the U.S. government for these gross violations of human rights. As with the nightmare that would engulf Cambodia in the 1970s, what was Washington’s role in these events? This article is notable not only for the careful exploitation of declassified material but also for its author’s identity. Although publishing an undergraduate is a break with past practice, a paper of such high quality merits a broad scholarly audience.

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Perhaps the most ambitious of the essays is Eric Brotherton’s comparison of the unmasking of the nature of being in Buddhism and the Structuralism of Roland Barthes. He directs our attention to the striking convergence of method between philosophies so separated by time and distance. Why readers should care is answered by Brotherton’s comment that both are free of a fundamental contradiction present elsewhere. Thus they are rendered unavailable for the, “misappropriation of ethics for malicious means—genocide, exploitation, and oppression.” With this he offers an unusual measure of hope for liberation in a world whose deluded inhabitants indulge themselves in evils great and small. In a sense, Brotherton’s piece provides a bookend to this year’s issue, complementing as it does Timalsina’s article which likewise highlights the hermeneutical and historical interactions between the so-called Orient and its so-called Occidental counterparts.

The image on this year’s cover is from a photo taken by John Hickman in the serene U Minh Thonze Pagoda on Sagaing Hill outside Mandalay. For the editors of this year’s issue the image of multiple Buddhas teases out our editorial agenda for these past years—to expand the coverage of SERAS from primarily just East Asia to other equally important cultural, political and linguistic regions of Asia, all areas into which Buddha himself, metaphorically speaking, emanated.

As we come to the end of our two-year period of service to SERAS we want to thank Li-Ling Hsiao, David Ross, Keith Johnson, Ken Berger and Steven Gump for giving us this opportunity and for providing countless hours of assistance. Additionally, we wish to thank the entire executive committee for the Southeast Conference Association for Asian Studies. We are honored to have been appointed to this post and hope that our work has strengthened the status of the *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* as a reputable peer-review Asian studies journal. We also wish to thank our chief technical editor, Berry graduate Koby Boatright, not only for training a small team of assistant technical
editors this year—Rachel M. Renaud and Margaret Ratliff—but for once again taking care of a host of last minute details as the issue came into the light of its publication day. May his labors be a shining example not just of Berry’s high work ethic but further provide him invaluable experience for whatever illustrious career no doubts await.