In This Issue

ANN LAURA STOLER focuses on the relations between the Javanese population that lived and worked on the estates of North Sumatra and the people's militias (*laskars*) that occupied these estates and controlled much of their economic life during the Indonesian struggle for independence (1945–49). She describes a shift in the involvement of the workers from relatively passive providers of labor power to mobilized political activists, in response to the Dutch reoccupation of the plantation belt in 1947. Although the *laskar* members and the plantation poor were of different ethnic and class origins, they were linked by changing ties of dependency and shared experience, which shaped both the patterns of colonial resistance and the estate labor movement that later emerged.

GILLIAN HART notes that efforts to explain the transformation of rural economy and society have typically invoked commercialization, technology, and demography as the main engines of agrarian change. She argues that evidence from regions of Java and Bangladesh with important demographic and technological similarities dramatizes the limitations of theories that neglect the structure and exercise of power at different levels of society. Using the profound contrasts between Java and Bangladesh in structures of state power and national accumulation, she suggests an alternative approach to the analysis of agrarian change.

A prominent convention in the religious (*bhakti*) poetry of the Hindi-speaking regions of North India is the registering of the poet's name within the confines of the poem itself. JOHN STRATTON HAWLEY examines the poetic genre called *pad,* asking just what such signatures imply. He concludes that they have to do with announcing the authority that is being claimed for a given composition. Because the phenomenon of naming the poet has much to do with the proximity of poetry and hagiography in Hindu *bhakti,* it raises questions about the meaning of artistic and religious identity and the relation between originality and tradition in many cultures.

Throughout the Qing dynasty, men and women from nearly every social class brought complaints of injustices to Beijing in the hope of obtaining the throne's imprimatur for redress. JONATHAN K. OCKO asks why a regime that ostensibly abhorred litigation as subversive of social harmony would maintain a mechanism that prolonged the litigious process. He notes that no emperor succeeded in insulating capital appeals (*jingkong*) from political and class struggle. No matter how dysfunctional the capital appellate process became, the throne would neither overly delimit nor eliminate it for, ironically, it was an instrument of social harmony, revealing and remedying defects in governance, if not in society.

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