Editor's Note

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This issue of *China and Asia: A Journal in Historical Studies* (CAHS) features two articles that examine issues of international relations in areas to the south of the Himalayas that affected China and Chinese during World War II and the early Cold War period, a historico-philosophical mediation on Asia as a principle for conceptualizing ideas of universalism, and a new contribution to the journal's ongoing commitment to fully investigate the Zheng He voyages of the early fifteenth century.

The first article, by Jie Gao, is a close examination of a diplomatic tussle in 1940 between British Burma and Imperial Japan that had serious ramifications for China. In 1940, with the Second Sino-Japanese War stuck in a stalemate, the Japanese pressured the British to close the Burma Road, an important supply route between British Burma and Yunnan Province, crossing over parts of the Himalayan mountain range. Fearing that the provision of war materiel to the Chinese over this road would prompt a Japanese attack, and doubtful of their preparedness for defending against such an attack, the British signed a confidential memorandum to close the road. In return, they expected Japan to make concessions towards establishing peace in East Asia. Three months later, realizing that the Japanese would not oblige, the British re-opened the road.

Gao examines this event in detail, documenting the complex calculations of the British, but also illuminating the precarity of China's position at that time, caught between Japan's belligerence and Great Britain's wavering support. What Gao also shows is that ultimately the closing of the Burma Road did not protect the British from any of the outcomes they feared. In the end, the Japanese did attack British territories in Asia, and when they did, those territories were still ill-prepared for such an attack.

Peace eventually came to Burma, Yunnan, and the Burma Road, however in the immediate post-war years the greater Himalayan region found itself subject to a new form of warfare, the secretive conflict of international espionage. Perhaps nowhere was this phenomenon more pronounced than in the

Himalayan town of Kalimpong. Now a small city in the state of West Bengal, in the immediate post-war years, Kalimpong was a thriving trading center and educational hub. Located near passes that connect the Indian subcontinent with Tibet, traders of various nationalities lived and worked in the town. In the nineteenth century, the British gained control of the area from the Kingdom of Bhutan, and by the early twentieth century Scottish missionaries had established schools there. By the 1940s, those schools had been joined by others, including a Chinese school, the Kalimpong Chung Hwa School, the topic of the second article in this issue.

In particular, Lisa Lindvist Zhang and Prem Poddar examine the Kalimpong Chung Hwa School as a site of international espionage, intrigue and politics. That a school could find itself caught in the web of such powerful forces had much to do with its location and the time period that Zhang and Poddar investigate. The late 1940s and early 1950s, the period that the authors study, was one that saw the transition from British to Indian rule in Kalimpong, as well as the transition from Nationalist to Communist rule in China. The location of Kalimpong, already important as a trans-Himalayan trading center, now took on new significance in the emerging Cold War given its location in, near or between different countries with competing political and ideological positions.

In the middle of this “nest of spies,” as Kalimpong at that time has been labeled, were the teachers and administrators of the Kalimpong Chung Hwa School. Some of these individuals were watched closely by the Indian security personnel, and Zhang and Poddar examine reports by Indian security agents against other sources of information in an effort to understand to what extent certain teachers at the Kalimpong Chung Hwa School were actually involved in politics or were simply categorized as such in the complex world of intrigue that was 1940s and 1950s Kalimpong. In the end, the authors leave us with challenging questions about the limits of our ability to understand the past from historical sources and human memory.

The third article in this issue by Sun Ge presents the reader with even more profound questions, as the author engages in a historico-philosophical analysis of the concept of Asia and its relation to issues of universality and specificity. Over the past few decades as China has come to play an ever more prominent role on the world stage, there have been efforts by scholars around the world to consider whether we are seeing the emergence of a new world order, and what a world order led by, or influenced by, China would look like. History has played an important role in these discussions, as scholars have looked to the Chinese past to try to get a sense of the potential intellectual models that could serve as a foundation for a global age that is not dominated by the West and Western ideas. Here, discussions about the premodern Chinese view of the

world as *Tianxia*, or “All Under Heaven,” have been one topic that has received considerable scholarly attention.

Discussions about *Tianxia*, however, invariably center on China, the source for the concept, and that has led some scholars to argue that theorizing a new global order from the concept of *Tianxia* will simply create a Sino-centric vision of the world as an alternative to a Western-centric one. In her article, Sun Ge seeks to move away from discussions that can lead to Sino-centric perspectives, and instead engages with the broader concept of Asia. Recognizing that it is possible to see “Asia” as a Western construct, the author nonetheless points out that the idea of Asia is today regularly invoked by people around the world for practical and intellectual purposes. Sun Ge thus seeks to investigate this concept, and through her investigation, attempts to develop what she terms the “Asia principle,” a means to conceive a universality that allows for more local specificity than current concepts of universality.

Finally, the fourth article in this issue takes up a topic that CAHS has engaged with since its first issue, the early-fifteenth-century Zheng He voyages. In this article, Angela Schottenhammer examines the role of violence in these voyages. While the Zheng He voyages are usually depicted as peaceful missions to establish relations with foreign countries, Schottenhammer demonstrates that they were not devoid of conflict. In particular, Schottenhammer documents a clear example of the use of violence for imperial aims by examining the interactions that Zheng He and the Ming court had with a Chinese “pirate” in the Straits of Melaka by the name of Chen Zuyi. By documenting and examining this episode, the author reminds us of the need to qualify some of the overarching assessments about these famous voyages.

In reading these four articles, we are also reminded of the richness and diversity of topics that fall within the broad sphere of intellectual and historical inquiry under the overarching theme of “China and Asia.”