

## Abstracts

### **The Pasts of a *Pāḷaiyakārar*: The Ethnohistory of a South Indian Little King**

NICHOLAS B. DIRKS

This article examines a text containing the late eighteenth-century family history of a line of South Indian “little kings,” or *pāḷaiyakārars*. The text provides the basis for a discussion of the Maravar caste of the Tirunelvēli region in southern Tamil Nāṭu and the notions held by this and other related groups concerning royal appropriateness and sovereign authority, political and social relations, and kingly privileges and gifts. Further, the text is seen as a cultural form of “history” that has an integrity of its own. Indeed, a structural analysis of the text reveals that the text can not be separated into “fanciful” and “historical” sections, and that underlying assumptions about the past are revealed by the form as well as the content of the text. The results of this analysis are seen to have significance not only for understanding how the past is viewed from within, but also for how it must be analyzed from outside the cultural context. Thus, ethnohistory is asserted to be not simply one agenda *for* “history” but a way of setting the actual agenda *of* “history.”

### **Food, Famine, and the Chinese State—A Symposium**

#### **Introduction: Food, Famine, and the Chinese State**

LILLIAN M. LI

This article delineates new approaches to the study of food and famine in Chinese history. Drawing primarily from the three other articles in the symposium, the author asks in what ways the Chinese state, primarily in the high Qing period, affected population growth, agricultural production, natural cycles, and food distribution, and what a historical perspective suggests about the People's Republic of China's efforts to feed its population.

#### **Food Supply and Population Growth in Southwest China, 1250–1850**

JAMES LEE

Between 1250 and 1850 the population of Southwest China increased from 3 to 20 million people. In this essay, the author delineates two periods of population growth—a small one from 1250 to 1600 and a large one from 1700 to 1850—and relates their spatial and temporal characteristics to agricultural production. His conclusions challenge the popular assumption that frontier populations in China grew because of improved agricultural techniques or increased arable land. In the Southwest, between 1250 and 1600, population doubled because of the government investment in agriculture, but, between 1700 and 1850, population quadrupled because of the development of local mining industry. In Qing China, as elsewhere in

the early modern world, major increases in population were often a consequence of early industrialization.

### **Official Goals and Local Interests: Water Control in the Dongting Lake Region during the Ming and Qing Periods**

PETER C. PERDUE

Both the population and agricultural production of the Dongting Lake region in Hunan and Hubei provinces developed rapidly from the late Ming period through the mid-Qing period. During this period, the interests of local dike builders in clearing more land increasingly came into conflict with the efforts of Qing officials to prevent floods by supervising dike repairs and preventing overbuilding of dikes. Although local landowners accepted state subsidies to restore damaged dikes in the early Qing period, their power to resist state authority over water control increased through the eighteenth century. By the early nineteenth century, official prohibitions on dike building were ignored, and a series of disastrous floods occurred.

### **Food Riots in the Qing Dynasty**

R. BIN WONG

Competition over grain supplies produced conflict when the people controlling large stores of grain failed to sell or lend grain at prices and in quantities demanded by the people needing grain. These conflicts, known generally as food riots, took place within a general political economy of grain circulation that spanned a wide variety of local situations. A brief sketch of different types of grain circulation and forms of food rioting establishes the setting for case studies that show the range of possible food riot situations and official reactions to the problems posed by food riots. Materials from the case studies are then drawn on to address the general questions of why rioters acted as they did, why their actions became a common type of conflict in the Qing dynasty, and why food riots persisted through periods of political strength and weakness.