

## Editorial Foreword

Following on from Barbara Watson Andaya's appraisal of the scholarship on women's history in the previous issue of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, the current issue opens with two articles that investigate the political agency of women in early modern Aceh and late colonial Malaya. The southern Philippines under American rule are the focus of the next two articles, while the last two pursue individual topics: the underground trade between Burma, Thailand and Yunnan since 1962; and the codification and interpretation of the Việt myths of origin.

In the opening article Sher Banu A.L. Khan revisits a trope of the historiography on classical Southeast Asia — O.W. Wolters' 'men of prowess' — in light of previously unexamined records about the seventeenth-century Sultanah of Aceh, Safiatuddin Syah, to argue for a transition in the conception of power from (male) charismatic authority to gender-neutral Muslim piety. The article refutes the thesis that its seventeenth-century queens were responsible for Aceh's decline in power in the face of early colonial penetration. Focusing on the Sultanah's handling, through among other methods epistolary exchanges, of the previous Sultan's contentious order of jewels from the Dutch, Sher Banu propounds Safiatuddin Syah's ability to reach a compromise between diverging interests. The negotiations show 'the evolution of what was to be the Sultanah's decision-making style and her management of the male elite during her reign' — 'a distinct departure from the period of her male predecessors' — marked by shared decision-making and generous religious patronage as a source of legitimacy.

Next, Mahani Musa recovers the female side of the history of a 'forgotten army' by examining women's involvement in the Malayan Communist Party from its origins in 1930 to its demise in 1989. Along with participating in the anticolonial and anti-Japanese struggles in a variety of roles, women in the MCP (both ethnic Chinese and Malay) also pursued female emancipation and gender equality — objectives that reflected local conditions of subordination and poverty as well as the affirmation of women's rights, which was part of the Communist International's agenda. In fact, discrimination was rife even within the party's ranks. The author writes that 'while memoirs written by MCP leaders claimed that all combatants were treated fairly and equally regardless of gender, interviewed former women combatants from the second generation claimed otherwise'. The policing of matters of the heart was also an issue, especially after the MCP army's relocation to southern Thailand created more opportunities for male–female interaction, the analysis of which makes the author conclude that 'their gender was never a totally separate issue for female comrades'.

Women fall under the scope of the next article as well, where Michael Hawkins discusses the discursive gendering of the natives in the Philippines' predominantly

Muslim south under American military rule in the early twentieth century. The article examines specifically the American discursive representation of violence against women in the Moro province by government and press reports, which stigmatised polygamy and slavery as evidence of native misogyny and gender oppression, and implicitly 'affirmed notions of masculinity, chivalry, civilisation and purpose among the colonisers'. Hawkins points out, however, that 'this discourse of victimisation was not totalising', for matrifocal aspects of the Moro social organisation were acknowledged while the Moro men's virility was downplayed vis-à-vis that of the colonisers. Consequently, the Americans were able to cast themselves as 'protectors of womanhood in Moro Province ... while simultaneously exercising a virile form of masculinity that redefined American exceptionalism at a time of severe identity crisis' at home.

The focus stays on the Muslim south in the early 1900s in the following article, where Nobutaka Suzuki examines the drafting of bills concerning the colonisation of Mindanao by the Philippine Assembly. This legislative body, as distinct from the Philippine Commission, was created for the political education of the natives under American tutelage and entrusted to the Christian Filipino elite (*ilustrado*) and had no jurisdiction over Mindanao, with its majority Muslim population. Resenting such limitations, Filipino assemblymen sought more rights and responsibilities even over the non-Christian regions. The Assembly's proposal between 1907–13 of nine bills concerned with the colonisation of Mindanao intersected with the debate over the proposal to incorporate it into American territory and the Mindanao Muslim leaders' demand for continuation of US military rule, which had provoked the *ilustrado*'s nationalistic agitation. In this context, the bills affirmed that 'Mindanao was part of the Christian Filipino elite's territorial map and was not for the Americans to own or administer on behalf of the Moros they had conquered'.

Next, Wen-Chi Chang's article investigates the centuries-old black market economy that has flourished along the borders between Yunnan, Thailand and Burma and continued even after the latter nationalised industry and trade in 1962. Conducted by Yunnanese refugees from PRC under the protection of the ethnic insurgent groups as well as state agents, cross-border smuggling 'became a widespread form of resistance against the stifling state-controlled economy'. In fact, smuggling continued unabated even after the shift to a market-based economy in 1988. Adopting a non-state-centric framework based on the concepts of the 'popular realm' and 'everyday politics', the author analyses oral interviews with Yunnanese black-market traders to argue that, in intricately constructed developing nations where there are no clear lines between legal and illegal trade such as Burma, 'the authorities may change their role as protectors and initiators of rules to that of transgressors'. Smuggling, though challenging state regulations, was marked by competition and contestation among different factions and thus the popular realm 'never united to topple the repressive regime'. Indeed, the opening of the market economy in the late 1980s further integrated Yunnanese traders into the state system of cliental patronage.

Finally, Nguyen Thi Dieu's article presents an intriguing analysis of Việt myths of origin from their initial codification in the fourteenth century to their interpretation by colonial and national scholars in the first half of the twentieth. Centred on the deeds of the eighteen Hùng Kings, worshipped as deities in the Red River Delta

region, this mythology had by the fifteenth century become fully integrated into official historiography. At this juncture 'Việt scholars initiated the task of reconstructing the national past based on salvaged texts and imperially ordered the transcription of existing folk tales'. By then, the Hùng Kings epic had also achieved wide currency in oral and performative forms throughout the Red River Delta; as a result, 'numerous versions "embroidered" earlier versions, recreating myths and inventing traditions that were then accepted by the villages — which had *originated* them — reinforcing and perpetuating the [Hung Kings] spirits' materiality and potency through village worship'. Eighteenth-century Confucian Việt intellectuals criticised this 'popular mythographical construction' and early-twentieth-century colonial scholars read it through the critical lens of philology, fuelling a debate about the Việt nation's historical origins that climaxed in the years of the conflict between the North and the South.

Readers of *JSEAS* have no doubt noticed that over the past two years review articles written by established scholars have become an almost regular feature. Jonathan Rigg's review article of six recent books on the environment in this issue ideally complements our recent monographic issue (43:3) on land tenure and agricultural questions. In addition, 16 books on the region are appraised in the Book Review Section.

As always, we trust the research articles and reviews in this issue will contribute to enlivening the academic debate on Southeast Asia worldwide.

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