

## Editorial Foreword

Language and power on the one hand and communal violence on the other are the overarching themes of the four research articles and research note — focusing on Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia — in this first issue of volume 46 of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, along with a review article and an exceptionally rich book review section.

George Dutton's opening article traces the lexical and intellectual genealogy of the term 'revolution' in late nineteenth to early twentieth-century Vietnam. Dutton shows that adoption of the term 'revolution' in political discourse was complicated by linguistic and cultural associations that made its meaning fluid. While initial usage of the word by southern Vietnamese scholars drew from the French language, northern political thinkers and activists adopted a sinic neologism that had been coined by Japanese lexicographers. By the early 1920s 'revolution' had achieved currency among Vietnamese intellectuals in both ideographic and romanised form. The final consolidation of its meaning was, perhaps unsurprisingly, the work of Ho Chi Minh, who stressed the conceptual and historical difference of 'revolution' from other forms of political protest and in so doing, foreclosed the polysemy of the term in the early stages of its circulation.

The political power of words underlies the topic of the second article, where Sascha Helbardt, bringing together ethnography and media studies, considers the role of community radio stations in establishing a public sphere in the context of Southern Thailand's ongoing 'Malay Muslim' insurgency. Rejecting at the outset common wisdom that sees community radio stations as representing ipso facto outlets for grassroots voices, the author studies their emergence in the decade of the 2000s, when Thailand's body politic suffered dramatic fracturing along both political and ethnoreligious fault lines. Accordingly, a different fate attended to community radio stations broadcasting in the Northern and Northeastern provinces, which are opposed by the central authority as mouthpieces of the Red Shirt movement, and in the South, which some local officials at least see as having the potential of increasing mutual understanding between Buddhists and Muslims and defusing potential violence. This social duty has to contend, however, with strong commercial interests, media

censorship, and insurgents' threats and actions to silence non-partisan voices on radio.

The relationship of violence to transmigration is the subject of the first of three articles about Indonesia. Shane Barter and Isabelle Côté examine transmigration from Java to the archipelago's outer islands organised in the course of the twentieth century by both the colonial and postcolonial states, and find that the process has been largely peaceful despite its massive volume. Often blamed as the cause of Indonesia's frequent internal conflicts and a means for the 'Javanisation' of Indonesia, transmigration's bad reputation is reassessed in this article, for the areas that witnessed the most extensive state-sponsored transmigration have been the least affected by communal and ethnic violence, while spontaneous migration has generated far more violent responses. The source of social conflict, conclude the co-authors, is not transmigration in itself, but the arrival of 'dominant migrants' who outclass the local population in terms of their economic and social capital.

The fourth article reverts to the opening article's focus on the language of politics by addressing the politics of language in early postcolonial Indonesia, where lexical and orthographic standardisation of romanised *Bahasa Indonesia* curbed the literacy, and hence authority, of Muslim scholars and religious leaders proficient in Malay written in Arabic script. The author, Kevin Fogg, traces the history of the Indonesian language from the colonial era through the beginnings of decolonisation, arguing that linguistic reform at the turn of the 1950s not only limited participatory politics by disqualifying Muslim teachers from governmental positions, but also decreased literacy in the Arabic language, and thus its viability in the context of Indonesia's pursuit of political, cultural and technological modernisation. The final if unintended outcome of linguistic reform, the author concludes, was thus a significant power shift.

Philip Smith's research note considers how the work of Indonesian artist, FX Harsono, addresses the historical experience of violence directed against ethnic Chinese Indonesians and its traumatic legacy marked by silencing and cultural amnesia. This research note, which discusses a number of recent works by Harsono (such as his 2013 exhibition at the Jogja National Museum), offers a tantalising preview of a forthcoming special issue of *JSEAS* devoted to the region's visual and performing arts.

Singapore politics has recently shown some timid moves towards pluralism, and challenges to the postcolonial narrative that locks party, state, and nation, which has increased scholarly interest in the city-state. Alan Chong's review article considers four recent books that approach Singapore's political system from the institutional perspective of historical

actors and the critical perspectives of academics. Eighteen more books are considered in this issue's review section.

To our readers best wishes for an intellectually enriching Year of the Goat from the *JSEAS* editorial board.

Maurizio Peleggi