

## Editorial Foreword

In broad terms, our present issue focuses on state–society relations, in particular, on the delineation, management, and tensions over the public sphere. Many of the articles highlight the competition amongst stakeholders to establish social norms, control resources, and demarcate boundaries of social relations, spaces, and community. These encounters—often involving state actors, elites, and members of various publics—are examined via museums, performances, urban settings, film, development projects, and universities to highlight the different locales within which these interactions take place. From another perspective, the studies in this collection also reveal how a range of public interests are embedded within these processes of commemoration, translation, electrification, collaboration, and normalisation.

Our issue begins with Samson Lim’s article that provides readers with a spatially-sensitive, ethnohistorical reading of Bangkok’s electricity power system from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Combining an urban studies lens with a material, symbolic reading of the city’s electrical system, Lim’s analysis treats electrical infrastructure and its networks of dissemination as an expression of class privilege, disenfranchisement, and power (in all senses of the term). The article urges readers to consider the visibility of infrastructure, the state’s capacity to harness elite capital and manage energy as a manifestation of its authority and patronage. By tracing the analytical connections between electricity and social inequality, the article demonstrates how forms of privilege, distinction, and disenfranchisement within urban society can be uncovered via the study of infrastructure.

The intricate dynamics between the Thai monarchical state and business elites in the development of electrical infrastructure resonates with Khaw Mooi Hock and Edmund Terence Gomez’s study of how power relations amongst local and transnational elites emerge from and contribute to state-to-state economic interactions. Focusing on three Belt and Road Initiative mega projects, the study tracks how China–Malaysia collaborations involving state-owned enterprises produced particular relationships involving Malaysian power elites and Chinese transnational corporate elites. The authors examine how state–state interactions create the conditions for novel types of relations amongst local and foreign elites to emerge at the project level, blurring distinctions between the public and private sectors.

A similar opaqueness between the public and private is raised in Usep Abdul Matin and Julian Millie’s article concerning the state’s role and authority over scholarly treatments of Islam in Indonesia. The article traces the story of a dispute between a state Islamic university and intellectuals within the Sunni community over the awarding of a PhD that was accused of threatening the religious sensibilities of the public. At one level, the controversy became a public contest over what constituted methodological innovation in the Islamic sciences and whether those techniques of

inquiry could be protected under state law. For other stakeholders, at stake was the state's responsibility to protect 'the symbolic arrangements' that represented public well-being.

Our next four articles consider contests over public heritage, memory, and commemoration. Martin Grossheim's article examines the memorialisation of China's war with Vietnam (1979–89), focusing on both official and private commemorations in Vietnam on the 40th anniversary of the war. Reviewing museum exhibitions and other public spectacles, Grossheim argues that increasing geopolitical tensions with China have inspired more official references to the conflict after decades of near silence. The study compares how the Vietnamese remember the Sino-Vietnamese War in relation to the commemoration of the conflict with Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Grossheim highlights the role of war veterans in this commemoration and how they have influenced the frequency and content of these events.

Hitomi Fujimura's study of early public actions by Karen Baptist intellectuals in colonial Burma reflects how minority communities established their status in dialogue with both coloniser and colonised groups. The article examines how the Karen Baptists utilised celebrations of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 to serve as a platform to make 'bi-directional claims' about their political identity to both British and Karen communities. Focusing on a public speech presented in English and Sgaw Karen, Fujimura argues that the idea of Karen solidarity was expressed by affirming loyalty to the British on the one hand while at the same projecting a sense of national unity via an assertion of 'Karen-ness' on the other.

Fujimura's focus on bi-directional claims is mirrored in Hamzah Muzaini's study of the Moluccan migrant community in the Netherlands who struggle with the challenges of maintaining their ethnic and political identity in a foreign land while being assimilated through citizenship. Muzaini examines this tension through the community's varied reactions to Barak 1B, a museum that memorialises the barracks and the broader camp where many Moluccan soldiers and their families were housed after their forced migration following Indonesian independence. The article traces the tensions within and without the Moluccan community over the representation of these experiences and how memory refracts upon more contemporary anxieties over identity and place.

Olga Dror explores representations of Ho Chi Minh in modern Vietnamese films to understand the contexts in which these films were produced and watched. Where Grossheim looks at how an international conflict within Vietnam's borders has hardly been publicly memorialised, Dror draws readers into Vietnam's film history to chart how political economic changes were reflected in cultural forms aimed for public consumption. Specifically, Dror explores how the novel promotion of Ho Chi Minh in feature films in the context of *Doi Moi* and shift to market values demonstrates a shift in official memory-making from an ideological project to the creation of an 'emotional' community. The article shows that attempts by film-makers commissioned by the state to 'normalise' Ho Chi Minh by catering to the cinematic tastes of a more youthful constituency have failed to make the iconic leader more accessible to a contemporary audience.

Finally, Oliver Crawford's article examines the first translations and translators of *The Communist Manifesto* in Indonesia in the 1920s and again in the 1940s. The

study traces how Indonesian translators ‘domesticated’ the *Manifesto* by assigning particular Malay terms and idioms to those in the Dutch and German editions, while providing explanations that revealed their own engagement and challenges in deciphering Marxist doctrine and prose. By analysing the translators’ explanatory devices (annotations and glossaries) along with the reception by readers, Crawford reconstructs the process of referencing, translation, and public consumption of this important source in the history of Indonesian communism to show how European and Malay political idioms came into dialogue more broadly.

This issue includes a substantial selection of book reviews provided by an interdisciplinary group of Southeast Asianists from around the world. To these contributors and to our featured authors, we offer our continued thanks and appreciation for supporting the Journal.

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