

Editorial Foreword

In 2010, the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The inaugural issue appeared in 1960 under the title of the *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, which was in use during its first decade. The change to the journal's current name in 1970 reflected the institutionalisation of area studies programmes in US universities as the framework for the study of non-Western societies, and the increasing prominence in it of the social sciences.

As an outlet for scholarship about Southeast Asia from within Southeast Asia itself, *JSEAS* has paralleled in its development the region's momentous, and ongoing, transformation from decolonisation to globalisation. Needless to say, both 'Southeast Asia studies' and its object of enquiry are today significantly different from what they were 50 years ago. Two shifts in particular deserve attention. The first is the decreasing appeal of area studies vis-à-vis newer disciplines such as cultural, postcolonial and women's studies, which may appear better equipped to deal with the complexities of contemporary Asia and have since established their own journals. The second is the advent of the Internet and electronic publishing, which have vastly expanded the circulation of knowledge by overcoming material and spatial constraints. The new research opportunities afforded by the digitisation of rare books, out-of-print monographs and the back issues of journals (including those of *JSEAS* which are now available on line) are obvious to all academics.

Thanks in part to the implementation of a new production system by Cambridge University Press, it is now possible to adopt a sharper editorial focus for *JSEAS*. While the wide disciplinary scope of *JSEAS* will remain a qualifying trait of its identity, the articles in regular issues will from now on coalesce around some common themes, methodological concerns, or geographical areas (special monographic issues were already published in the past, and will continue to be). An Editorial Foreword, a feature introduced in this issue, shall provide a preview of the contents and concurrently foreground contact points between the articles.

Opening this issue, characterised by the felicitous predominance of articles by women scholars, is Alexandra Kent's examination of an 'existential conundrum', that is, the reconciliation of social and gender differentiation with spiritual unity in the context of post-conflict Cambodia. Drawing from anthropological data, development and security studies, and feminist theory, Kent argues that the concept of *dharma*, which Cambodians take as the ordering principle of the natural and social world – and hence as the guarantor of their security – is not gendered, despite its traditional ascription to male actors; accordingly, recourse to the spiritual realm may provide a tool for criticising gender disparity in Cambodia's social order, and also for altering how gender relationships are practised and conceptualised in daily life. The next article, by Sarinda Singh, presents an ethnographic account of the posting

of low-ranking Lao officials to the uplands, where they take up bureaucratic positions at the nexus of state authority, developmental schemes and the rural population. The insights derived from studying 'the lives of marginal officials who constitute the bureaucratic frontier' lead Singh to question prevalent notions about upland-lowland distinctions and state authority in Southeast Asia. Rather than as agents of the encroachment and subjugation of the uplands by the lowland state, bureaucratic migrants may be seen to embody the state's promise of prosperity while they themselves tend to develop an awareness of the limits of such promise.

Both articles that follow examine the intersection of national cultural politics with that of an international organisation such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Annabel Vallard analyses through the ethnographic method the impact of two UNESCO initiatives designed to preserve and promote 'traditional' handicrafts on the state-sponsored production and commercialisation of hand-woven textiles in Laos. Underlying this dynamic is the broader question of competing definitions of cultural heritage at the local, national and international level. One particular garment, the *phasin* (worn by women across the various Tai-speaking ethnic groups), illustrates the Lao state's investment in textiles as both an important economic activity and a source of national identity. Concurrently UNESCO, by awarding certifications to certain textile companies, provides international authentication of these textiles as cultural artifacts and of weaving as intangible cultural heritage. These initiatives, concludes Vallard, are selectively appropriated by local textile entrepreneurs, who participate with the state and international organisations in defining the terms and objectives of cultural politics. In her article Anna-Katharina Hornidge discusses the deployment by the Singapore government and UNESCO (which Singapore rejoined in 2007 after a 22-year hiatus) of the notion of creative industries as a 'boundary concept', which provides a meeting ground and thus enables cooperation despite their contrasting orientations towards culture. Surveying shifts in UNESCO's position towards the relationship between culture and market, as well as in Singapore's cultural politics, Hornidge argues that the reconceptualisation of creative industries as a socio-economic developmental strategy could reconcile the Singapore government agencies' unapologetically market-oriented definition of culture and UNESCO's continuing emphasis on cultural diversity and freedom of expression.

The last two articles are both by historians, although they differ markedly in their methodological approaches. Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied studies the establishment of the Muhammadiyah Islamic movement in Singapore during the past half century 'through the interface of social, political and ideational histories'. Founded in Java in 1912, and subsequently exported to other parts of Southeast Asia, the Muhammadiyah has, since its introduction to Singapore in the late 1940s, adopted a strategy based on the symbiotic relationship between the movement's leaders and members, the forging of ties with other local Muslim personalities and organisations, and a continual reformulation of its ideology. By grounding the study of a transnational religious movement in local Singapore history, Aljunied claims a separate history and identity for what he calls the 'other' Muhammadiyah. In the final article, Stefan Eklöf Amirell reassesses the nature of female rule in seventeenth-century Patani in a comparative perspective that highlights other cases of women-ruled

polities. Drawing from a range of historical sources, the author challenges previous scholarly claims about the powerlessness and promiscuity of the Patani queens, and explains the reason for female rule in Patani in the need to respect the line of succession, and thus ensure dynastic stability. The necessary condition for this was, as in early modern Europe, the queen's chastity, by virtue of being widowed or unmarried.

Rounding off this issue is Robert Wessing's research note, which provides an etymological, lexicographic and epigraphic analysis of Tarumanagara, the name of a west Javanese kingdom from the fourth to seventh century, which, he proposes, referred not to the indigo plant, as commonly believed, but the philosophical underpinnings of Indic cosmology.

Last, but not least, this issue features eighteen book reviews written by both senior and junior scholars. Although often underappreciated, book reviews are in fact a crucial instrument for scholars to keep up-to-date and an important ingredient of the academic debate (as well as the lifeblood of academic book publishing). Under the capable stewardship of Peter Borschberg, the book review section of *JSEAS* has expanded considerably in the past few issues, and now offers the fullest coverage of new publications about Southeast Asia to be found in any journal.

In conclusion, our editorial aim is to further the role of *JSEAS* as the most authoritative journal in the field by publishing innovative scholarship that seeks to redefine the boundaries of Southeast Asian studies for the twenty-first century.

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