

Editorial Foreword

In this third issue of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* for 2013 we have put together six research articles and a review article that deal with the localisation of technology, science and art as well as education in the early modern, colonial and postcolonial eras. While articles are individually available to readers of *JSEAS* in its electronic version, their close thematic interconnections make this issue as a whole a worthy read. This is, indeed, the underlying principle behind all the *JSEAS* issues published in the last three years, each seeking to make a holistic scholarly contribution that exceeds the sum of its parts.

The first two articles both focus on the geo-cultural spaces formed before and during Southeast Asia's 'age of commerce' along seafaring routes. Derek Heng reviews naval strategies in the Melaka Straits with regard to the diplomacy, state formation and economic development of pre-modern port polities. Making use of Arabic, Chinese, Malay and Indian epigraphic and documentary sources, the article analyses the role that Malay states' fleets played over three distinct historical phases spanning c.500–1500 CE. During the first phase (seventh to eleventh century), 'there was no need for a constant naval presence in the region, given that the nexus of economic exchange occurred beyond the region itself'. Naval strategies in the second phase (up to the late thirteenth century) 'reflected a shift in the way in which Melaka Straits polities functioned within the context of the larger maritime Asian economy'. The third phase witnessed 'the increasing use of the navy to determine geopolitical outcomes in the region', a process reflected in 'the development of a vocabulary pertaining to naval warfare'. Challenging common academic wisdom about the maritime nature of pre-modern Malay polities, Heng concludes that they should instead be regarded as largely land-based powers, and that it was only in response to transformations in the maritime Asian economy 'that the Straits navies began to develop into proactive tools of intra-regional economic competition' — a move 'which in turn led to fundamental changes in the nature of Malay society'.

Next, Jennifer W. Nourse traces the shift in the meaning of the term *dukun*, a Persian loan-word that entered the Malay language to define healers who derived their reputation from Persia's renowned medical and pharmaceutical traditions, but later assumed, in the context of the imposition of Arabic Islamic orthodoxy and early colonial penetration, a derogatory connotation that hinted at the alleged backwardness of indigenous medical practice. Moving from this instance of sociolinguistic change, Nourse's fascinating article draws on Sheldon Pollock's concept of cosmopolitanism to examine the adoption of foreign languages in Southeast Asia (e.g., Sanskrit, followed by Persian and Arabic, and European languages later still), and the systems of faith and knowledge that are encoded and transmitted through them. Such 'supra-languages' establish a dialectical relationship with vernaculars

and the local cultural traditions associated with them: ‘As friction and power struggles between literary traditions, religious beliefs and scientific practices led to divisive debates, medical practitioners like *dukun* became fodder for acrimonious accusations.’ Sociolinguistic changes in the meaning of *dukun* signalled the reconceptualisation of medicine from ‘art’ to ‘science’ in the Malay archipelago — although, concludes the author, such a transition has never been fully accomplished.

The theme of the encounter between ‘local’ (Eastern) and ‘scientific’ (Western) medical theories and practices carries on in the next article by Michitake Aso, which examines the production of knowledge about malaria in colonial as well as post-colonial Vietnam. The investigation of malaria was initiated by the colonial regime through its ‘industrial hygiene’ system that explored the disease’s environmental causes and developed prophylactic measures. During the 1930s ‘knowledge production about malaria in rural French Indochina took on a patriotic hue’ as sanitary strategies developed for plantation workers penetrated the central highlands inhabited by ethnic minorities. Even medical treatises written by Vietnamese underscored ‘hierarchical visions of race in malaria prevention’. After the division of Vietnam in 1945 and the wars that followed, ‘patriotic hygiene became a means for both sides to mobilise rural populations’. Politics rather than biomedicine determined anti-malaria measures in both the North and the South during the following three decades, as foreign aid from the United States, China and the Soviet Union affected knowledge production. Yet Aso argues by way of conclusion that measures adopted in both the DRV and RVN fit analytically into ‘neither the category of “neocolonial science”, with a clear genealogy of empire, nor “nationalist science” stemming from patriotism’.

Questions of cosmopolitanism, nationalism and cultural modernity are also addressed, from the perspective of popular culture, in Peter Keppy’s article on the ‘jazs’ age in colonial Indonesia and the Philippines. Colonial Southeast Asia’s own ‘roaring twenties’ saw the emergence of novel artistic forms and consumer practices — commercial entertainment, and its associated venues and technologies, being a prominent one. At the centre of Keppy’s narrative are two fascinating figures of entertainers: Filipino composer-cum-impresario Luis Borromeo and Malay Opera singer-actress Miss Riboet (one of whose records appears on the cover). Despite their different social backgrounds — Borromeo belonged to the *ilustrado* elite, Miss Riboet came from a humble Javanese family — both ‘contributed to home-grown entertainment in which modernity, cosmopolitanism and nationalism were conjoined’. Both also appealed mainly to the urban upper and middle classes, ‘who unintentionally helped to “discipline” or “cleanse” these theatrical formats of anticolonial or subversive content’; yet it was precisely the conjoined processes of depoliticisation and empowerment that, according to the author, ‘defined popular culture in a colonial context’.

The final two articles consider education in, respectively, colonial and postcolonial Indonesia. Agus Suwignyo examines the Dutch East Indies’ educational policies in the problematic 1930s. The Great Depression severely impacted education policy, in particular the implementation of reforms seeking to make the colonial and metropolitan school systems equivalent. ‘This postponement also disrupted the project of cultural dissemination by which docile subjects were to be made [for] the switch of the government’s focus from Western to indigenous schooling rapidly stimulated the growth of independent education’, which was the breeding ground of the nationalists. Economic

recovery since the mid-1930s led to the revival of reforms in both curricula and administration, with the idea of indigenising Western schooling to suit the local sociocultural context. One reason for indigenisation was economic, since running the Dutch schools was much more costly than running indigenous schools; the second was the high level of illiteracy; the third reason was political, as the colonial government sought to counter the growth and influence of the 'unofficial schools' that were mushrooming in both towns and villages. 'Yet while colonial policymakers were aware of the politically strategic position of the vernacular schools and teachers,' concludes Suwignyo, 'they failed to understand the entire dynamics surrounding education and society.'

Finally, Chang-Yau Hoon's article puts to the test Indonesia's motto, 'Unity in Diversity', by investigating how multicultural citizenship is taught in a Chinese Christian Protestant school in Jakarta. Taking the lead from the National Education Act of 2003, which proclaims the plural and non-discriminatory nature of education, the article asks whether Chinese Christian schools function in this context as sites that 'promote multicultural and inclusive education on citizenship' or, rather, reproduce 'difference, intolerance and segregation'. To answer this question, Hoon applies 'schoolyard ethnography' to a microanalysis of 'the multifaceted views and identities of the students in the school under study'. While proud assertions of Indonesia's ethnic and cultural diversity on the Chinese students' part suspiciously reflect state indoctrination, their reluctance to consider public universities as a future option is revealing. Hence, the author concludes, 'no matter how valiant the effort of a religious school, with apathetic parents and students cocooned in their own ethnic and religious "bubbles", teaching multiculturalism can be an insurmountable task'.

Student activism has been one of the last century's most significant and (as recent events in the Middle East show) enduring political innovations, and also one that originated in Asia, with China's May 19 Movement of 1919. This movement later inspired politicised students elsewhere in East and Southeast Asia. Wang Gungwu, a doyen of historians of the overseas Chinese who was himself educated at the University of Malaya in the 1950s, brings both his academic expertise and personal experience to a review article *JSEAS* is extremely pleased to present about three recent volumes on student political activism in Asia. In addition, this issue features fifteen regular book reviews.

It is an intriguing paradox that, at a time when the publishing industry, and university presses in particular, are figuring out future scenarios where electronic publishing will be dominant, there has been a phenomenal growth in academic publications about Southeast Asia. Accordingly, when *JSEAS*'s new course was charted about three years ago, we agreed that expanding the book review section would be of great service to our readers. This offering of the broadest selection of reviews of books on Southeast Asia in any journal has been achieved thanks to many colleagues, whose much appreciated collaboration we gratefully acknowledge along with that of the articles' referees.

As always, we trust you will find the articles and book reviews here useful for continuing conversations within Southeast Asian studies as well as within and across disciplines.

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