

Editorial Foreword

The *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* inaugurates its 47th volume with an issue featuring six research articles that are equally divided between those dealing with contemporary phenomena and those dealing with historical topics. In addition, the book review section makes its return.

The first two articles consider tensions and contradictions in the efforts to rebuild societal order and re-establish the rule of law in postwar Cambodia. Alexandra Kent discusses in a comparative framework the ongoing trial of the most notorious surviving Khmer Rouge leaders by the multinational Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia and the simultaneous evictions of resident communities from the capital. Under way since the early 1990s, the forced eviction of urban ‘squatters’ was softened in the decade’s latter half owing to pressure from NGOs and civil rights groups, but by the early 2000s was again widespread, as property prices in Phnom Penh skyrocketed. Kent’s analysis highlights the hypocrisy of the ‘model of liberal peace’, whereby the political and economic interests of the dominant elites in Cambodia are disguised behind the rhetoric and performance of humanitarianism.

Lisa Arensen’s article, next, moves the focus from Phnom Penh to the Cambodian countryside as she examines resettlement in a landscape that still carries the traces of the country’s recent history of violence. This endeavour is made more complex by the fact that those who now find themselves living side by side in the resettled village of Reaksmei Songha were on different sides during the conflict that preceded and followed the Khmer Rouge regime. Based on her ethnography, the author argues that the material exigencies of resettlement were critical in reconstructing a sense of communal belonging and solidarity around the common experience of struggle, an experience that has sidelined the previous civil-war divisions. By reaching such conclusions, Arensen’s article incidentally makes a counterpoint to Kent’s.

The third article considers the rather different conditions of Thailand’s countryside. Its authors, Robert Dayley and Attachak Sattayanurak, critique constructions of the Thai ‘peasant’ as a social category by submitting that no meaningful analysis of the unprecedented transformation of Thai agrarian society over the past 50 years can be possible unless the conceptual categories employed also change. Keyed to the bourgeoisification of the peasantry noted by several analysts is a novel rural politics that, unlike older modes of everyday resistance, seeks to establish productive connections to the sources of political power. In the current political divide between the Bangkok elites and the empowerment-seeking provincial population, the perpetuation of stereotypes about the purity and docility of peasants helps to exorcise the dynamism of a rural political economy that is fully integrated with metropolitan and global markets yet also engaged in multiple forms of collective action.

The section on historical essays opens with Brendan Luyt's examination of American colonial forestry in the Philippines. The author challenges the thesis that Empire forestry, as developed by the British in (mainly) India, was a globally successful movement by arguing that its transplantation in the Philippines failed to adequately address the local context. Relying on the Bureau of Forestry's annual reports from the interwar years, Luyt shows that the colonial American variant of Empire forestry did not succeed in creating a sustainable forestry policy in the Philippines because of its disavowal of the landowning elite's views on forest use as well as ignorance of the economic realities of landless peasants. These oversights compounded the effects of the Bureau's shortage of funds and personnel in making its policies ineffective.

In the following article, Anthony Reid recovers evidence from recent geological surveys as well as indigenous court chronicles and Dutch colonial documents concerning the occurrence of two seventeenth-century tsunamis — the first off Java's southern coast in 1618; the second in the province of Aceh (northern Sumatra) in 1660. At the time such natural disasters were understood not as seismic events but floods, and tended to be unreported unless they affected European lives and interests. The degree of disruption wrought in 1660 by what Reid suggests was a tsunami is inferred mainly from the fact that the local VOC was closed in 1663, and in the later period the Sultanate of Aceh never recovered its earlier importance as a trading hub. A rather different case is made for evidence of a hypothetical tsunami in the Yogyakarta region, which Reid extracts cautiously from Javanese sources (often much later than the events they describe) and seeks to fit in the recorded history of Java, though acknowledging the need for more geological research.

The availability and reliability of evidence is a concern that emerges also in the final article, which takes us much farther back in time. Following their archaeological discovery of iron-smelting furnaces dating to the eighth–ninth centuries CE in north-west Laos, the authors — Olivier Évrard, Thomas O. Pryce, Guido Sprenger and Chanthaphilith Chiemsisouraj — attempt a reconsideration of the theory whereby the acculturation of the region's upland groups resulted from contacts with more advanced lowland settlers. Owing to the absence of epigraphic and monumental evidence, documenting the history of mainland Southeast Asia's upland groups without relying on the biased lowland-centred perspective has hitherto proved unviable. The article examines the evidence of early iron smelting in Laos' Rmet area in light of local mythology regarding bronze (not iron) objects produced by 'ancient metallurgists' and the continuing importance attached to ancient bronze ritual drums by Rmet. These various elements are drawn together to propose two alternative interpretations of upland myths about metallurgy and their relationship to lowland societies.

We dedicate this issue to the memory of the late Cheah Boon Kheng, an esteemed historian best known for his works on the Malayan Communist Party and the Malayan Emergency, whose professional life and scholarly contributions are retraced in an obituary by Albert Lau. Professor Cheah Boon Kheng was an honorary adviser to *JSEAS*, and his nonconformist mind and intellectual generosity will be greatly missed by the entire community of Southeast Asian scholars.

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