

Editorial Foreword

The research articles featured in this latest issue of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* address themes concerning global and regional interaction, local variance, agency, competition, and localisation — all classic tropes in the epistemology of the region. Exploring the ways in which Southeast Asian communities formulate, understand, and express their worldviews continues to draw scholars to the numerous encounters that have occurred over time and space. Where conventional approaches might have framed these interactions in terms of the ‘external’ and the ‘internal’, the following studies complicate this picture by illustrating the multiple situations and spaces within which such encounters have taken place — at festivals, temples, production studios, in the frontier, or even within the pages of indigenous texts. Individually, nearly all of the articles examine local experiences in both a sub-regional and global context. Taken together, the articles suggest that what constitutes the ‘local’ in Southeast Asia continues to be mediated and defined according to particular conditions and circumstances.

Our lead article begins with Alexander Wain’s fascinating investigation of two seminal Peranakan texts that have contributed significantly to our understanding of the region’s early encounters with Islam. Wain’s study evaluates the historical origins and ‘career’ of the *Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, two texts that point to the establishment of Chinese Muslim communities in Java in the first half of the fifteenth century. By critically re-examining both the content and the context within which the two manuscripts were discovered and published, Wain asks new questions concerning the veracity and authenticity of both texts. In doing so, the article raises broader issues concerning authorship and the production of local knowledge; the interaction between and among colonial scholar-officials and local interlocutors; and the epistemological linkages between colonial archives and the local repositories within which these texts were first placed. Readers will appreciate the way in which the article engages larger methodological issues concerning textual authority, inter-textuality, the construction of the ‘local’ in Southeast Asia, and the entangled roles that different interpretative communities play in the making of our histories.

Where Wain’s article takes us deeper into the textual landscape within which the *Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* were likely produced, Els Bogaerts’s article takes readers more deeply into the ‘televisionscape’ of Javanese television culture to highlight the ways in which media content is made for local consumption. Through her analysis of television programming and production in Central Java, Bogaerts’s article makes the production and expression of ‘the local’ in Indonesia her object of study. The article examines how the television industry in Yogyakarta contributes to the mediation, dissemination, and defining of the local for a primarily central Javanese audience. Bogaerts shifts readers’ attention to the ‘televisionscape’ of

two Yogyakarta television stations in order to explore how local forms, *kearifan lokal* (local wisdom), and local vernaculars are expressed and disseminated in relation to notions of the foreign, the national and the sub-regional. By situating regional programming within the context of Yogyakarta, Bogaerts argues that notions of the local are created from and defined through the industry's promotional strategies, its regional print-media, commercial practices, practitioner experiences, and legal frameworks. In broad terms, Bogaerts's innovative research addresses classic themes of localisation, technology transfer, and the phenomenon of regional variation; but in doing so the article provides new insight into how these mediation processes are undertaken through her study of Javanese television production in Central Java.

The following article by Maria Myutel keeps readers focused on the subject of Indonesian television but problematises notions of the local by shifting the discussion away from programming content to exploring social relations within television production houses. Her study examines local hierarchies and material practices in an Indonesian setting through her research on minority dynamics in the workplace. Through her examination of an Indonesian-Indian community (Sindhis) who dominate the *sinetron* (soap-opera) industry and drawing from broader insights from critical media studies, Myutel suggests that 'social relations within production studios can be seen as a microcosm of larger society'. By directing our attention to domestic television production culture, Myutel demonstrates that notions of class, gender, foreignness, indigeneity, power, and community shape and complicate ideas about being local and being Indonesian. More broadly speaking, the article reminds us of the way in which transregional interaction between South and Southeast Asia continues to influence the development of social relations amongst local communities.

While transregional interaction continues to be an important part of understanding 'local' dynamics in Southeast Asia, Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. reminds us that micro-studies of sub-regional communities continue to be relevant. Through his comparative study of the sugar industry at two different sites within the Spanish Philippines, Aguilar Jr. highlights local socioeconomic variances as a result of different spatial, environmental, and economic orientations to both the state's institutions and the global economy. The first case study, a large-scale Calamba estate under Church management and supported financially by Chinese-mestizo middlemen, represented a conventional Luzon enterprise that was well-connected to the state municipal authorities. The second site, situated on what was still considered to be the 'frontier' island of Negros, was run not by Dominican friars as in Calamba, but by immigrant landowners who were financed directly by foreign merchants who enjoyed access to global capital and new milling technologies; enabling haciendas to enjoy a loose connection to the colonial authorities. Where the Hacienda de Calamba was 'an enclosed world', largely integrated, and under the Spanish state's tax regime, the article presents Negros as 'a completely different world' from the Spanish centre — unruly, fragmented, and more of a multi-centred system of haciendas — enabling the Negros sugar industry to avoid the tax demands of a declining colonial state and survive late-nineteenth-century drops in sugar prices. Through a comparison of land acquisition practices, labour management, systems of crop cultivation, finance regimes, social structures, migratory patterns and ensuing resistance movements in each of the two settings, Aguilar Jr. demonstrates how the local sugar

industry consisted of a mixture of spaces, institutions, and practices that had as much to do with local dynamics and proximity to the state as it had to do with its connections to the global market.

If Negros's development as a 'resource frontier' during the Spanish period was achieved as an alternative to the conventional church-state enterprise, the next article by Sinae Hyun suggests that the establishment of a 'development frontier' of Thailand during the Cold War provided the means and rationale for the state to expand. In broad terms, the article explores the role of the Thai monarchy in promoting national integration and grassroots development projects during the Cold War. Specifically, the article examines how the Princess Mother's patronage of the Border Patrol Police and its role in the development of Thailand's rural highlands paved the way for a resurgent monarchy in affairs of state. She argues that the Princess Mother sought to reinvigorate monarchical power and its role in nation-building by aligning the throne's domestic agenda with American anti-communist programmes and patronage of the Border Patrol Police. Through the Princess Mother's patronage of this elite corps of counterinsurgency units and its 'civic action' programmes, the monarchy gained credibility as a promoter of nation-building and protector of highland minority groups. By sponsoring initiatives that focused on education, health and sanitation, community and rural development, village security and narcotics suppression, the Princess Mother ensured that the Thai monarchy's future as a key stakeholder in national affairs was re-established. The manner in which the monarchy appropriated and customised Cold War programmes and partnerships to fit its own institutional priorities will be of interest to readers working on centre-periphery relations, integration, nation-building, and the politics of development in the region.

Questions of community formation, local agency, and Asian interaction are key components in the final article by Nathan McGovern, who examines the history and origins of local Brahman communities in Thailand. McGovern returns readers to the subject of localisation by exploring the emergence of Thai Brahmans within the broader history of cultural interaction between South India and the kingdom of Ayutthaya. Where Maria Myutel's earlier article noted how particular aspects of South Asian affiliation within Central Java's Sindhi communities were retained, McGovern argues that over time, the sociocultural boundaries linking Thai Brahmans to South India began to dissipate in favour of more locally defined practices of belonging and prestige. Through a comparison of contemporary festivals celebrated in South India and Thailand and an analysis of sacred texts, poems and hymns, ritual calendars, and the use of images, McGovern makes the case for a common ritual tradition that suggests that the Thai Brahmans had significant Tamil roots. The article reconstructs the history of the Thai Brahmans, on the basis of Thai-language sources including chronicles, poems, inscriptions, the well-known Three Seals Law, and oral accounts by contemporary members of the community. While the emergence of the Thai Brahman community can be regarded as a chapter in the broader story of South and Southeast Asian connections, McGovern's main contribution lies in his emphasis on the intermediate role and local connections that Brahman communities in southern Thailand had with those in Bangkok. Indeed, it is in his examination of the way that the 'Thai sources treat the origins of the Brahmans and how these narratives changed over time' that will be of significant interest to those in the field. Through

a careful textual analysis of key Thai language sources, McGovern traces how depictions of the Brahmans once associated with India began to be incorporated into legendary myths associated with the Thai nation.

As always, the research articles are followed by a healthy selection of twenty book reviews covering the field's most recent and exciting research. I must thank the previous editorial team (again) under the able leadership of Maurizio Peleggi for assembling this collection of articles and for giving me the honour of introducing them.

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