

Editorial Foreword

The research articles featured in our latest issue draw attention to some of the field's more enduring questions about the region's dynamism. How have new ideas, world-views and technologies been adapted to existing traditions, practices, and circumstances? How have changing contexts and environments affected the way social groups express belonging and affiliation? How have Southeast Asians adapted to and reconstituted competing and often shifting sources of authority, legitimacy and modernity?

Individually, the articles explore processes of identity formation, modernisation, post-conflict reconciliation, adaptation, and place-making in a wide range of regional settings—from mountain hermitages in rural Thailand to royal temples in Bangkok, from universities in the Philippines to publishing firms in Japan, and from the coastal enclaves of Nguyen-controlled Vietnam to the coastlands of Timor-Leste. The majority of articles are historical, stretching from the seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth century, with the exception of our lead article that highlights findings from extensive interviews conducted in 2017–18 and over fifty years of fieldwork. Each article focuses on the lives of different Southeast Asian communities: hermits, healers, civil servants, elites, intellectuals, academics, translators, scribes, migrants, merchants, and soldiers. The articles attend to the ways that both state and non-state groups have adapted to shifting circumstances over time and space.

Collectively, the articles take readers into the sub-regions of Southeast Asia, into the personal experiences of minority communities, into the emotive reaches of the translation process, and into the recesses of the region's spiritual, ritual, and performative cultures. They remind us that while trans-regional and border-crossing impulses continue to transform how we think about the territorial/intellectual boundaries of Southeast Asia, the depth of our research into local societies, languages, histories, and cultures still matters.

Paul T. Cohen's article, 'The death of a northern Thai hermit: A case study of religious transition and schism in a Buddhist community', explores the way the dissident 'holy man' traditions of the late 1800s and early 1900s have endured and shifted in the highlands of Chiang Mai, Thailand. Cohen's ethnographic study of how religious followers of Phra Pho Pan responded to the influential forest monk's passing reveal sharp divisions amongst his former trainees and associates. These fissures have in turn affected how three sacred locales that were once associated with the hermit's life and his unorthodox teachings are now perceived by his followers, the sangha, and the state. The contests over Phra Pho Pan's legacy and his 'utopian sites' not only reflect the continuing processes of adaptation that are part of a broader regional history of Buddhism, but also highlight the divergences that emerged within

a community as a result of changing centres of authority, new gender roles, and the ongoing processes of state integration.

Remaining in Thailand, Arjun Subrahmanyan's 'Worldly compromise in Thai Buddhist modernism' takes readers to Bangkok in the 1930s to explore the role that modernist monks and court officials played in creating new forms of Buddhist thought and practice in the wake of European imperialism. Subrahmanyan analyses shifts in Buddhist doctrinal interpretation that arose in response to the rise of Secularism and Science. He also charts the growth of this Buddhist reform movement in the 1930s and the increasing importance of a developing religious infrastructure that provided both the capacity and the forms for modern ideas about Buddhism to be circulated. Buddhist ideas featured in new journals such as *Buddhasasana* and other print media contributed to the spread of reformist culture and notions of *siwilai* (civilisation) amongst civil servants and other elites while providing a new vocabulary to articulate their loyalty to the monarchy, the new nation-state, and the sangha. Ultimately, the Buddhist tenets that promoted reform were the very principles that curbed their transformative potential.

The next two articles by Brendan Luyt and Takamichi Serizawa on the Philippines also examine the role of a developing 'informational infrastructure'. Luyt's 'The early years of *Philippine Studies*, 1953–1966' charts the history of the publication, the institutional context in which it was produced, and the key actors that were involved in its production. Luyt's reconstruction of the journal's origins and the growth of mechanisms to disseminate knowledge about the Philippines highlights the role and motivations of the Jesuits and key university faculty in the process of nation-building. In connecting the founding of the journal by the Catholic Church to the nation's Cold War security agenda, Luyt's research highlights how the intersection of knowledge production, religion, and politics contributed to the construction of the Philippines as an intellectual unit and eventually as a field of study.

While the Catholic Church's contribution to knowledge about the Philippines was intended for the country's intellectual elites, Takamichi Serizawa's provocative research illuminates how Japanese intellectuals were drawn to Filipino scholarship about the Philippines in post-Second World War Japan. Serizawa's study shows how Japanese intellectuals' bid to understand Japan's shifting relations with America drove demand for Japanese translations of seminal Filipino humanities texts. This translation project provides a glimpse of how a genre of Southeast Asian Studies that was fashioned in the Philippines became part of Japan's attempt to reconcile its own past as both an Imperial power and an occupied territory following the end of the Second World War. Readers familiar with Takeuchi Yoshimi's and (later) Chen Kuan-Hsing's call for an 'Inter-Asian', comparative methodology will no doubt appreciate Serizawa's analysis of the individual, institutional, and intellectual contexts that attracted Japanese translators and readers to Filipino research on the Philippines.

If the advent of an 'Inter-Asian' method was an Asian response to Euro-American colonialism and the ascendancy of the West as a civilisational benchmark, using Asian references to gauge one's place was more likely the norm for Southeast Asians in the precolonial period as Indic, Sinic, and Persian civilisations were the gold standard of the day. John D. Wong's 'Improvising protocols: Two enterprising Chinese migrant families and the resourceful Nguyễn court' examines how powerful Chinese migrant

clans fleeing to the region in the seventeenth century were able to integrate successfully into different groups of the southern territories in what today is Vietnam. Arguing that Chinese migrants coming to Vietnam used different approaches in their engagement with the Nguyen court, Wong challenges the conventional view that the standards and norms of the Chinese court were marginalised in the south (and embraced in the north) by demonstrating that Chinese migrants modified references to Chinese political norms according to local demands and circumstances. Some clans referenced Chinese standards of allegiance to the Nguyen court while others evoked a more fluid, shifting, 'frontier spirit' in territories beyond the Nguyen state's direct control. Just as religious affiliation to certain forest monks reflected spatial connections (or disconnections) to the Thai state/sangha in Cohen's article, Chinese migrants in Wong's study adjusted their own affiliations and family genealogies to adapt to a network of power that was already flexible and accommodating of these shifts.

Our final article, 'The Maubara Fort, a relic of eighteenth-century local autonomy and Dutch–Portuguese rivalry' by Steven Farram explores the way that local elites adapted to and took advantage of broader inter-European rivalries in Timor to form new allegiances. Using the eighteenth-century Dutch Maubara Fort as his focal point, Farram demonstrates how a Timorese principality sought an alliance with the Dutch in order to improve its own political and economic position amongst other rival principalities. Reconstructing the anatomy of this relationship and the ensuing challenges the principality faced from rivals and the Portuguese, Farram's article shows how the penetration of European actors into Asian trade patterns created different types of solidarities over time and space that point to the uneven and fluid manner in which territories like Timor were socially constructed on shifting local and broader geopolitical foundations.

Our research articles are followed by a robust book review section covering Asia and Southeast Asia. As always, the editorial team is grateful for the continuing support provided by our authors, referees, and book reviewers.

Maitrii Aung-Thwin
Editor