

Editorial Foreword

The seven research articles in this issue share a common interest in studying how processes of modernisation were conceptualised and localised by both foreign and local actors. Several of the studies are set within the context of the region's encounter with Western colonialism and explore how Southeast Asian ecologies, food cultures, urban spaces, business practices, narcotics and literary forms were transformed as a result of interactions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Through empirically rich analyses, the research featured in this issue draws attention to complicating conventional tropes about the region and its defining characteristics. Our lead articles consider the ongoing processes of indigenisation and modernisation in mid-century Thailand. Paul McBain's inter-textual analysis demonstrates how a well-known story, *Jan Dara* (1966) should be read as a 'Buddhist Modernist novel', a critique of Buddhist moralist discourses of its time. Where earlier interpretations of the famous novel regard it as an example of erotic fiction, McBain demonstrates that by situating the text within the discourses, linguistic techniques and concepts through which Thai modernity was debated and expressed, we are able to view *Jan Dara* as a form of this broader regional indigenisation.

Sinae Hyun's contribution examines indigenisation through the lived experiences of an American missionary-intelligence-development officer operating in the borderlands of Thailand, Burma, and Laos. Through a series of interviews with Gordon Young, Hyun reveals how external-internal objectives, policies, and expectations between the 1950s and 1970s were often understood and experienced differently by foreign and internal actors, drawing insight into how the Cold War was indigenised by Thai elites.

Shifting to an earlier era, Choo Ruizhi's article examines the cultural, technological, and socioeconomic effects of introducing new freshwater fish species into the British Malayan ecosystem by foreign and local stakeholders. Placed within the context of broader acclimatisation projects across colonial Asia, Choo directs his attention to how these experiments in British Malaya involved the cooperation of local expertise, adding an ecological dimension to how we understand colonialism in Southeast Asia. While other articles in this issue consider how industrial technologies, urban zoning, and narrative techniques were associated with modernity, Choo's research shows how these ecological interactions reveal similar dynamics in play.

The introduction of new animal species in the Malayan context is mirrored by Darmanto's study about the introduction of rice into the Mentawai ecosystem and the latter community's rejection of it as their main staple. Introduced to the Mentawai first by the Dutch and later by the Minangkabau—who are regarded by the Mentawai as the 'face' of modernisation—the research shows how rice served as a symbol of modernity and identity but was deemed at odds with Mentawaiian

social rhythms and dietary sensibilities. Reassessing the connection between modernisation, industrialisation and the nation-state is the subject of Jeremy Goh and Koh Keng We's study of Chinese business in pre-Second World War Singapore. Focusing on the biography of overseas Chinese businessman Lim Peng Siang, the authors argue that critical innovations to business practices and industrial technology were occurring during the colonial era as part of a broader regional dynamism, well before the emergence of government-linked companies, multinational corporations, and the nation-state.

Complicating this view from below is Keen Meng Choy and Ichiro Sugimoto's study of opium consumption by unskilled workers in colonial Singapore, a reminder of how business practices and commercial trade created different experiences for different communities. Choy and Sugimoto suggest that opium became a 'basic necessity' and a part of daily life for the many labourers who consumed it. The authors argue that by including opium into the cost of living for everyday workers in colonial Singapore, we reach different empirical conclusions on the economic welfare of society during this period.

Rethinking how new products of consumption (such as opium and rice) are interpreted and categorised in our earlier analyses of colonial Singapore and colonial Java intersects with Farabi Fakhri's re-evaluation of colonial urban housing initiatives that were introduced as part of a broader settlement policy in Dutch Indonesia. Just as the promotion of rice production incentives found little traction on Siberut Island, Sumatra, so too did the establishment of Dutch property systems—designed to manage racial interaction—fail to accomplish their intended objectives. The persistence of the *kampung* as a form of community and the inability to establish a land-owner policy for Indo-Europeans highlights the fissures and tensions within the broader indigenisation project.

The issue features a number of book reviews thanks to the goodwill and expertise of colleagues in the field. As always, we are grateful to the contributing authors and reviewers who made this issue possible.

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