

Editorial Foreword

This final issue of volume 45 of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* features four research articles: on the environmental history of Vietnam; on the transformation of the Vietnamese commemorative landscape; and two more on the political and diplomatic history of Malaya and Brunei. This issue also contains a note on Javanese indigenous historiography, a review article focusing on environmental and economic change in the Mekong Delta and the extensive book review section that is *JSEAS*'s point of pride.

In the opening article, Li Tana sketches the history of the Red River Delta's northeast, heartland of Đại Việt during the first half of the second millennium. Marshalling a wealth of Chinese and Vietnamese contemporary documents and secondary sources, Li shows that the delta region experienced sustained economic, demographic and cultural growth from the twelfth through thirteenth centuries before overpopulation, excess exploitation of natural resources, floods, droughts and a misguided dyke-building project caused rapid environmental degradation in the fourteenth century, which was followed by political upheavals. Environmental history turns thus into a cautionary tale about reckless development in present-day Southeast Asia.

Next, Marina Marouda brings together historical and ethnographic methods to study the ritual rehabilitation, in post-socialist Vietnam, of the Nguyễn dynasty's monarchs. From being denounced in the nationalist-socialist historiography as feudalist traitors, the Nguyễn kings have now been redeemed and elevated to the status of ancestral figures and powerful spirits that cater to the needs of post-*doi moi* Vietnamese religiosity. The inscription in 1993 of Huế, capital of the Nguyễn dynasty, on the UNESCO World Heritage list added international cachet to this rehabilitation, as the revival of the cult of the royal dead has been married to the promotion of Vietnam's former imperial sites as tourist destinations.

The following two articles contribute new perspectives on the end of empire and decolonisation in British Malaya and Brunei. Low Choo Chin examines the repatriation of communist supporters to mainland China and Taiwan as the preferred counter-insurgency strategy in the early years of the Malayan Emergency. Relying on records from the British Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, Low demonstrates that the policies of mass detention and deportation lacked sufficient logistical support and were

weakened by legal, political and humanitarian concerns. The eventual failure of the strategy of repatriation affected Malaya's future political developments, most crucially race relations and the debate on citizenship, by planting the seeds of communal tensions in the postcolonial era.

After making an appearance in Low's article in his capacity as Britain's Commissioner-General in Southeast Asia from 1948–1955, Malcolm MacDonald returns as the central figure of the following article, which examines his role in Brunei's decolonisation. B.A. Hussainmiya argues that MacDonald's 'intimate' diplomatic association with the Brunei royalty was key to the Sultanate's political survival after the Second World War. Piecing together information from a variety of archival sources, the article provides a largely laudatory narrative of MacDonald's empathetic relations with the local sultans and his support of autocratic government in contrast to the vision of democratisation harboured for Brunei by other colonial administrators and some Bruneians. Incidentally, Hussainmiya's article lends support to historian David Cannadine's argument about 'ornamentalism' being the ideological cement of the British empire.

In a stimulating research note, Robert Wessing takes the lead from a seventeenth-century feud between the sultan and the prince of Banten as recorded in the local chronicles to expound on the nature and function of indigenous Javanese historiography in the early stage of colonial penetration.

Tim Gorman's review article connects ideally to the opening article by discussing four monographs on the environmental transformation of the Mekong Delta region that stem from a research initiative by the University of Bonn in collaboration with Vietnamese academic institutions — evidence of the growing interest in Southeast Asia amongst continental Europe's academia. Finally, the publications under review include studies on the region as a whole and on Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam specifically. Overall, seventeen monographs are reviewed in this issue.

As our editorial board takes on from the next issue a leaner configuration to better deal with the changing demands of running an academic journal, I wish to thank a number of my colleagues in the Department of History, the National University of Singapore, for the assistance provided over the past few years; and in particular, Bruce Lockhart, whose knowledge and generous advice have guided several authors in the revision of their articles for publication. For the upcoming volumes of *JSEAS* we have in store special issues that can be expected to chart new directions in the study of the region's diverse societies, cultures and histories.

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