

Editorial Foreword

The research articles in this latest issue of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* cover a diverse range of subjects even as their geographical scope is limited to Burma, Indonesia, and Vietnam. In addition, Benedict Anderson's contribution to Thai Studies is assessed in a review article followed by the characteristically extensive book review section.

In the opening article Nile Green draws a fascinating sketch of the transformation the Indian Ocean region's religious landscape underwent in the colonial era by tracing the antagonism between Burmans and Indian immigrants in British Burma to religious rather than economic motivations. Green's analysis of colonial Burma's increasingly plural and competitive 'religious economy', in which Buddhism no longer enjoyed state patronage, takes the lead from a hitherto unknown travel book on Burma written by an Indian Muslim, and published in Lucknow in 1893. Although Muslims proportionally represented the largest population increase in colonial Burma, this book surprisingly provides no information about the lives and work of the local Indian community that might have served migrants from the subcontinent; its central concern is, rather, the refutation of the 'religion of Burma' by means of a disputation — whether factual or imaginary is not ascertainable — between the author and Burma's pre-eminent Buddhist authority. Adapted from that of Protestant missionaries in India, the Indian Muslim preachers' polemical style, concludes Green, ended up fuelling colonial Burma's notorious communal strife.

The following two articles form an 'analytical bundle' in that they examine inter-related aspects of the social history of the Dutch East Indies during the economic depression of the 1930s. John Ingleson reconstructs the activity of the multitude of charities that formed in Java to complement the limited support offered to the poor and unemployed — Javanese as well as European/Eurasian — by the colonial state's welfare system. Women were a special concern, for those who moved from the stricken countryside to the cities in search of employment ended up joining the thousands of women who had lost their jobs. Charities were run by both Muslim and Christian (Catholic and Protestant) institutions, and staffed by both Dutch and Indonesian middle-class individuals; but their policy of helping exclusively the 'deserving poor' — a status that needed to be ascertained prior to the provision of poverty relief — is also revealing of moral and cultural preconceptions that were shared by the European and Indonesian middle classes. After all, as the author remarks, charities aimed to alleviate urban poverty (and they were successful in doing so), not to change the class structure of colonial society.

Upik Djalins's article, next, broadens the picture by considering the controversy provoked by the demand for land ownership advanced in the 1930s by the impoverished Indo-European community as an aspect of the wider debate on colonial

citizenship. Though making up 85 per cent of the European population in the Dutch East Indies, Indo-Europeans had no rights to own land under the 1875 act that limited ownership to the native population. Largely employed in the civil service's lower ranks, Indo-Europeans faced increasing competition by educated Indonesians from the 1910s onwards, and as a result their social status became precarious. The campaign to own land launched in 1930/31 by the Indo-European Association was strongly opposed by the Indonesian intelligentsia, who were further antagonised by the ad hoc commission set up to consider the request. But the commission's consultative approach marked a novelty in colonial policymaking and, by eventually upholding customary law (*adat*), opened up a space for forging the idea of Indonesian citizenship.

The last two research articles are both concerned with Vietnam even though they tackle greatly different topics. Relying on a wealth of primary and secondary sources in Vietnamese as well as Japanese, Ueda Shinya reviews the financial and governmental structure of the Trịn Lords, whose rule held sway over the Red River delta area in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Having initially gathered large numbers of disenfranchised military officers, the Trịn Lords subsequently strengthened central administrative control by absorbing literati with extensive personal networks in the Delta region. Eunuchs also played a prominent role in the Trịn financial organisation while concurrently holding appointments as military commanders. These findings allow the author to qualify the historiographical view of the Trịn Lords' as a 'government of military men' in favour of a more nuanced picture of the period that preceded the ascendancy of the Nguyen dynasty.

The issue comes full circle with the last article, which returns to the subject of religion. Tam T.T. Ngo analyses the social implications of the mass conversion to Evangelical Protestantism of Vietnam's Hmong ethnic minority over the past quarter century. Opposed by the state for being instigated by US-based preachers, conversion has also split the Hmong community, which has suffered considerable socioeconomic dislocation since the start of economic reform in the mid-1980s. The article's ethnography reveals the dilemmas faced by both the converted, for whom conversion is a way of escaping the demands of clan hierarchy and reconnecting to the Hmong diaspora in the West, and the unconverted, for whom conversion (causing the repudiation of ancestral worship and spirit offering) is a betrayal of Hmong identity and the cause of conflict and division within the community. In addition to the new antagonism between converts and unconverted, the Hmong continue to be regarded with suspicion by the Vietnamese state, which in order to hinder Protestantism has promoted a revival of the Hmong practices and beliefs it had previously forbidden as superstitious. Thus, both conversion and opposition to Protestant Christianity reflect attempts at political and cultural domination as well as resistance to it.

In his extensive review article, James Ockey assesses the contribution of Ben Anderson (one of his teachers at Cornell University) to the study of Thai politics, history, and culture on the occasion of the publication of a volume that gathers Anderson's essays on these subjects since the 1970s. Last, but not least, 16 book reviews complete this issue. As always, we trust you will find the articles and reviews presented here of interest and academic value.

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