

Editorial Foreword

This issue features seven articles and the welcome return of the ‘research note’. Katherine A. Bowie’s article examines cultural–political interactions through funerary practices in northern Thailand. Early twentieth-century archaeological accounts of funerals in northern Thailand report how they were sites of contestation, as these practices differed from those in central Thailand and came to represent the North’s resistance to political and cultural integration. Viewing funerary chedi as spaces of dissension, Bowie traces the story of these rites via comparative historical archaeology, and through oral interviews shows how attitudes to the deceased, corpses, and cremation reflect social divisions and notions of community that have changed over time and space.

Andrew Walker’s study also concerns northern Thailand and the central Thai state, along with the Shan states of British Burma in an account of centre–periphery tensions at the turn of the twentieth century. Focusing on the 1902 Shan Rebellion and the Myngoon (Myingun) Prince (an exiled claimant to the Burmese Konbaung throne), Walker highlights the rebellion’s diplomatic dimensions and treats Myngoon (Myingun) as a transnational figure via his movements and connections across British India, French Indochina, and Thailand. Walker’s study provides a wide angle of view that expands a rebellion in the upper Mekong region, placing it within the context of Thai/Burmese history to show the involvement of foreign interests in local disputes and rivalries. Where Bowie’s article recovers the local dimensions of centre–north tensions within the Thai state, Walker’s piece expands the scope to highlight borderland dynamics and the way international players interacted with local actors in enabling internal events.

This broader, interconnected view of northern Thailand is mirrored by Gareth Knapman’s study, which places the histories of Penang and Singapore within the broader context of settler colonialism across the British Empire. Focusing on how administrative visions of Singapore were constructed in reference to the development of nearby Penang, the article offers an inter-Asian perspective by showing how notions of sovereignty and indigeneity in Singapore were conceptualised on the basis of other Asian port settlements. Knapman demonstrates that ‘settler–indigenous’ interaction was the political mechanism that enabled a different notion of sovereignty to emerge, affecting how land was (re)allocated and who could claim it. Knapman’s study argues that viewing Singapore as a settler colony repositions the role and place of other Asian migrant communities to British colonies and by extension asks us to revisit the still relevant question of how we define and recover ‘local’, ‘foreign’, ‘autonomous’, and ‘indigenous’ experiences in the past.

Where Knapman’s article focuses on broader settler patterns of administrative organisation in British Malaya, Siew-Min Sai zooms in to explore the institutional

structures managing immigration in colonial Singapore. Sai's article examines how a 'racialised governmentality' was implemented through the history of the Chinese Protectorate, a local administrative body that advised the government on Chinese affairs. Focusing on the passage of two legislative bills created in response to broader empire-wide initiatives to apply 'protection' and 'humanitarian governance' of immigrants, Sai's research uncovers the tensions that developed between metropole and local practices that would come to affect control measures of both East Asian and South Asian migratory experiences.

Questions of race, gender, and identity animate Kate Imy's article, which explores the wartime experiences of a Eurasian female detainee during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. Where Knapman's and Sai's studies explore migratory and institutional factors surrounding the construction of belonging and affinity under British rule, Imy's important work examines how gendered and racial relationships continued in the prison camp, perpetuated by both Japanese and European actors in wartime Singapore. The article explores how a young Eurasian woman perceived, navigated and redefined British and Japanese categories of identity while interned. In broad terms, Imy's contribution joins the still relevant debate about the nature of the Second World War's effect on regional rhythms and social structures.

Two ethno-historical articles follow with studies of Laos and East Timor, respectively. Tomoko Nakata examines how the introduction of large rubber plantations in southern Laos has affected local views and practices. Comparing the livelihoods of those who adapted to the new plantation regime with those who did not, Nakata's study explores how these new conditions shaped local lifestyles, values, and social relations between 2010 and 2018.

Kisho Tsuchiya's contribution examines key texts associated with East Timor's FRETILIN party, the key independence group that emerged in the 1970s in opposition to the Indonesian military occupation. His analysis offers a reinterpretation of the different symbols, languages, and meanings that were utilised by FRETILIN and suggests that it might be considered more of a religious movement rather than simply as a political party, based on the emergence of a resistance culture that was similar to other cases of rebellion and protest in Southeast Asia. While conventional interpretations present FRETILIN as a secular, post-Cold War democracy movement, Tsuchiya suggests that an older, deeper, and more entrenched form of Southeast Asian resistance mobilisation was at work.

Finally, a research note by Brian Szuster et al. focuses on small-scale shrimp farming, the prospect of community supported fisheries in the region today, and possible related research topics for the future. As usual, we offer a healthy collection of book reviews and thank our authors and reviewers for their support of the Journal.

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