

Editorial Foreword

Themes of law, place, and performance characterise several of the ten articles that are featured in this expanded issue. From early modern Myanmar to early twenty-first century Philippines, the discussions in the following pages examine the how different regional communities respond to different mechanisms of state rule. While several of our authors zoom in on the intricacies of governance or the forms through which states exercise their power, many of the studies in this issue devote considerable thought towards explaining how different Southeast Asian actors over time and space negotiate their interests and priorities.

Our SEA BEAT contribution, focusing on topics in more contemporary settings, provides a sobering public health assessment of communities living in the Shan State, the site of recent armed conflict in the borderlands between China and Myanmar. In their article ‘Drug harms amongst youth in Shan State, Myanmar: Community responses and increased vulnerabilities’ Sai Aung Hla and Sai Kham Phu examine drug use in Myanmar and the various ways families attempt to cope with the effects of this addictive behaviour. Placing the issue of drug use and rehabilitation within the context of borderland geo-politics and socio-economic transformation, the study focuses on the intersection of drugs and borderland development to relate how these dynamics shape the coping mechanisms available to families whose members take part in the drug industry as producers, suppliers, and consumers. The article’s focus on family coping strategies highlights longer term undercurrents beneath the recent armed conflict.

Keeping our focus on the borderland zone between Southeast Asia and China, Christian Daniel’s article ‘Buddhist kingship and governance in the Dali Kingdom, 1400s to 1200’ offers a reinterpretation of how inter-kingdom competition between the state and elites has been understood. By comparing Dali’s twelfth to thirteenth century kingship practices in the context of classical Southeast Asian Buddhist models, Daniel reassesses the actions of the eighteenth century monarch Duan Zhixing and his attempt to portray himself as a *Dharmaraja* or righteous king to assert his authority. In doing so Daniels makes the argument that Dali-kingdom political organization fits models of early Southeast Asian kingdoms more accurately than the Tang-Song models proposed by existing scholarship.

Like the kingdoms of Dali, Southeast Asian courts were complex social settings that reflected inter-Asian connections. Katherine Bowie’s article explores the presence of eunuchs in the early-modern Burmese courts of Arakan, Toungoo and Ava to uncover the potential of examining this unique community of officials-courtiers that permeated the courts of Asia in Myanmar. Through the scrutiny of European traveler and colonial administrator accounts, she expands conventional understandings of the role of this court community. Her study examines the origins, numbers, and relevance of identifying eunuchs as Muslims, opening new questions about the

orientation of Burmese courts and their connectedness to elite practices and spaces elsewhere. Bowie invites scholars to reorient both the political centres of Myanmar and its courts by zooming in (and out) via the story of eunuchs, treating them both as deeply embedded officials within the Burmese courts and also as a possible trans-Asian category of technocrat that was present across the Indian-Ocean world.

Southeast Asian trans-Asian connections to monarchy, ritual spaces, and political spectacle carried on into the era of the Second World War under the Japanese, according to Kevin Blackburn's original analysis of war-time Singapore. In 'The role of State Shinto and sport in integrating Singapore into the Japanese Empire, 1942–45' Blackburn explores the impact of sport as an emblem of State Shinto and Pan-Asianist propaganda, represented by the construction of a shrine, *Syonan Jinja*, in occupied Singapore. The study considers the ideological, commemorative and performative significance of the shrine and explores how plans to establish a 'Greater East Asia Olympics' at the Singapore site was part of a broader, imperial plan to foster regional affinity with Japan and worship of the emperor through participatory sports across the Empire. Highlighting the significance of the *Syonan Jinja* and Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival, Blackburn illustrates how the Imperial Japanese government used sporting events to promote State Shinto and *Nippon seishin* (the right spirit) as the foundation of the Japanese polity. The strategy aimed at connecting Singapore both in mind and body into an essential component of the Japanese Empire.

Where sport, space, and the sacred fostered integration into Empire, the impact of ritual ceremony and space is also a core idea in Trude Laura Renwick and Bronwyn Isaacs's 'Power and ritual in the city: Mourning and political juncture at Bangkok's Sanam Luang'. The authors critically examine Sanam Luang (Royal Field) as a site of political contestation and community expression by exploring the ritualisation of the site as a political space and its transformation over time, to represent different things to different constituencies. Through tracing the historical evolution of Sanam Luang's political significance and a close investigation of the national funeral of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej in 2016 and public protests in 2020, the authors highlight how urban spaces are contested and constructed by state and non-state actors often via the same symbolic language and practices.

Expressing social commentary in urban settings is a parallel theme found in Michael D. Pante's 'A coachman's tall tales: The street humour of *Kuwentong Kutsero* and radio broadcasting in twentieth century Manila'. The study delineates the intellectual and social genealogy of the titular radio comedy sitcom before and after the Second World War, in which the main character narrates using the voice of a grassroots urban coach-driver (Kutsero). The article is a chronological description of how this distinctive media form *kuwentong kutsero* (coachman stories) evolved, from its prewar prototype to its religiously motivated and eventually secular rendition. The article focuses attention on the figure of the coachman, a ubiquitous character in urban Manila and the role he played within radio content as a public figure to promote discussions concerning issues of the day. Quoting from the scripts, the author places emphasis on the language used in these sitcoms: the ironies, trickery, and different registers all served as sites of power negotiations with the various authorities when the programmes were produced. The embellishments, cynicism, and disbelief associated with Kutsero comedy constituted an important subversive force in popular media, serving both to disseminate information and entertain, until the phasing out of radio as a whole.

The next three articles consider the nature and epistemological function of law in colonial Burma, Dutch Indonesia, and contemporary Philippines. Ian Brown's article examines the expansion of the rule of law in colonial Burma through an examination of the declining use of capital punishment for murder cases. Focusing on local dynamics and the evolution of the colonial administration system in Burma in primarily the 1930s, Brown explains that despite a rise in cases of murder, the number of convicted murderers who were hanged for their crime fell by the end of the first four decades of the twentieth century. The study highlights how local socio-economic and political shifts within British Burma in the inter-war period shaped the manner in which law was implemented and practised.

Sanne Ravensbergen's article 'Meetings and minutes: Spaces of law making and legal translation in colonial Indonesia' delves into law-making procedures in nineteenth century West Sumatra. The analysis centres on the minutes of nine codification meetings held in 1865, in which the draft regulations of colonial law were discussed by local elites and Dutch officials. Employing a micro-history approach, this article reveals the procedural and genealogical intricacies of colonial knowledge production. This analysis sheds light on the dynamic negotiation and dialogue between Dutch colonisers and local elites, exemplified by the translation of adat law in the Malay context into a clearly articulated form of law.

José Duke Bagulaya's article 'Spectres of a dictatorship: Law's limit concepts in Lino Brocka's *Orapronobis*' examines the disjuncture between constitutional principles and practices through a film that was directed by one of the authors of the 1987 Constitutional Commission. Focusing on the film's unusual relationship to the making of the 1987 Constitution and to Philippine law itself, the article considers and compares the uneasy years of political transition following the collapse of the Marcos regime while highlighting the way law's limits were visually expressed through the film *Orapronobis*. The author discusses the film's transgressive horrors and excesses as means to depict the Philippines' political paradoxes between a constitutionally arbitrated normativity and the turbulent state of emergency rule.

Finally, Greg Bankoff's article '1881, a singularly uneventful year: Everyday death, destruction, and disaster in the Spanish Philippines' examines natural disasters and their social reverberations in Filipino provinces previously overlooked for their 'less-than-cascading' scale. The article examines the significant impact that geophysical and meteorological forces have had on the daily lives on rural and provincial Filipino communities in 1881. Bankoff proposes that the frequent, more minor hazards brought forth by everyday disasters in the rural areas and countryside prove to be more significant in encouraging long term socio-economic adaptation and cultural change than the infrequent major events that tend to draw the historian's attention.

While this issue will not showcase book reviews because of our extended number of research articles, we look forward to featuring reviews of the very best books in Southeast Asian Studies in the new year. A special note of thanks to our graduate student assistants Ms Joita Das, Mr Xing Aodi, and Mr Wang Leizhi for their good work this calendar year.

Maitrii Aung-Thwin