INTRODUCTION TO JOURNAL OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES (*JATI* 21)

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The latest issue of *JATI* addresses a number of areas of contemporary concern in South East Asia's self understanding, anthropologically and historically, as well as in terms of its political and economic development. The contributions to this edition fall into three discrete but related areas of inquiry, namely: regional politics and the role played by political leaders; economic development and sustainability; and history and cultural heritage. These themes link to wider international scholarship concerning the role of culture, history and economics in the always anxious process of development, but also evince the contingencies encountered in the distinctive development of South East Asia.

The volume opens with Tahir Ashraf, Nasrudin Akhir and Bahauddin Zakariya analysis of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). SAARC, founded in 1985, consists of eight South Asian states (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). In 2006, it attempted to establish a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), following, as the authors contend, in the 'footsteps' of the ASEAN Free Trade Association (AFTA). As of 2016, however, less than 1 percent of SAARC gross domestic product derived from intra-SAARC trade. This reflects, as the authors note, the dominance of India and Pakistan in South Asia and the conflict that perennially distorts their relations. Although SAARC offers the prospect of mitigating regional tensions through trade, the organization has so far failed to follow very closely in the path of consensus and non-interference developed by ASEAN since 1967.

The second essay in this section on politics examines the opposition rallies for *Bersih* (clean) politics in Malaysia after 2007. Vilashini Somiah traces the evolution of these rallies and observes an initial pattern of police and protester violence followed by a less confrontational government response to the last two *Bersih* protests. The author speculates upon the significance of violent protest for achieving political change in Malaysia.

In a related vein, Blake Respini and Herdi Sahrasad compare and contrast the role of political leaders in response to the Asian Financial Crisis (1998) in Malaysia and Indonesia. While the fall of the Suharto regime led to a democratic transition in Indonesia after 1999, no such transition occurred in Malaysia, where Mahathir Mohammad, deflected political crisis and secured the continuing political dominance of the United Malay National Organization in a spirit of competitive authoritarianism.

The second part of this issue moves on to consider contemporary issues of sustainability and economic development in a number of South East Asian states. Here Abdul Malik Kamis and Thiru Subramaniam discuss the economic development of Brunei from its British colonial experience, into its post-colonial development as an independent sultanate situated between the West Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah. The authors identify four distinct phases in Brunei's development history and note how in its post-independence phase (1984-2011) it remains dependent upon oil and gas exports to sustain its economic development model. By contrast, Muhammad Faiz Ramli and Hanizah Idris examine the importance of sustainable development for the integrity of Malaysia's developing role as an eco-tourist destination. Examining the evolution of the Marine Park at Perhentian Island in Terengganu, they demonstrate the importance of the 1997 National Ecotourism Plan (NEP) in establishing the basis for sustainable eco-tourism without undermining the island's bio diversity.

Two further studies in this section focus on contemporary sociological problems of employability for recovering drug addicts in Malaysia and issues of trust and goodwill amongst Philippine undergraduate students. Ezarina Zaki and her colleagues examine, through a longitudinal, quantitative study of recovering drug users, the impact on the employability of drug users in two rehabilitation programmes. The study concludes by asserting the importance of effective community reintegration for recovering drug users. Meanwhile, Jose Carlo Garcia de Pano surveys 167 students at the University of the Philippine Diliman to establish a correlation between goodwill, trustworthiness and competence.

The final section of this volume examines aspects of regional history and culture. Ong Kui Hua traces the neglected role that Chinese migration, following the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644, played in the evolution and development of the pre-colonial Nguyen Empire of Vietnam. Ong demonstrates the importance of these seventeenth-century Chinese migrant communities in developing settlement patterns in Hatian and South Vietnam. From an analogous historical perspective, Robert Weebers and Hanizah Idris

offer a comparative and insightful study into the evolution of British hill stations in South Asia and mainland South East Asia in the early twentieth century. Their compelling study shows how all these hill stations shared characteristics of an idealised home counties, middle-class England, familiar to readers of Somerset Maugham short stories. By contrast Danim Majarano offer an ethnographic evaluation by explores how the traditional art of the *Ifugao* community establishes a form of cultural capital, whilst Yvonne Campbell, Kamila Ghazali and Sakina Sahuri, explain how indigenous knowledge is transmitted through folk narratives using the Bidayuh Bau-Jogi community as a case study. The study draws attention to the importance of intangible aspects of cultural practices, like head–hunting, to sustaining indigenous knowledge.

Collectively, these essays offer an original and illuminating insight into South East Asian history and culture in its often bewildering diversity. They also draw attention to the importance of field research to political and cultural understanding and scholarship in the social sciences.

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