

Introduction

THE EDITORIAL BOARD AND TEAM are proud to launch the new *Asian Studies* with this first issue of 2013. Reborn as the “Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia,” it has been refreshed and strengthened with a new editorial staff, a full organizational structure, and a new cover and format. Auspiciously, the new *Asian Studies* also appears as it celebrates its 50th year of publication, having been founded in 1963, making it one of the oldest academic journals on Asian issues and concerns. To the usual content of academic papers and book reviews, the new format adds sections on commentaries, literary works, and travel narratives (forthcoming) – in recognition of the diverse ways that Asian peoples express their ideas, dreams, and aspirations.

The articles in this issue take off mainly from a historical base, which is then used to analyze succeeding events and circumstances. While not confined to one single theme, the articles nevertheless hew faithfully to the journal’s new advocacy of providing critical perspectives and introducing new ideas that aid in expanding knowledge and understanding of the Asian region.

George Aseniero presents a novel and radical perspective on José Rizal via an examination of the Filipino hero’s annotations to Antonio de Morga’s *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* and the constitution of *La Liga Filipina*. Aseniero argues that Rizal’s political ideas have a venerable pedigree that dates back to medieval Spanish political history. Aseniero notes the parallels between Rizal’s political writings and the ideas embodied in the 1812 Cádiz Constitution and uncovers the hitherto relatively unknown influence of the socialist-anarchist Spanish politician, Francesco Pi y Margall, on Rizal’s own political ideas.

Tsui Sit and Tak Hing Wong chart the developmental trajectory of China from the perspective of rural society. They show how rural China has played crucial roles in the industrialization and modernization of the

country, whether as sources of land, surplus, and labor or as buffers which enable Chinese society to endure the various attendant crises of rapid urbanization and capitalist development. Both these processes have resulted in the “siphoning of resources from the rural areas, land expropriations, erosion of local enterprises, and environmental degradation.” As an alternative, Sit and Wong present an overview of the rural reconstruction movement in China based on the “small peasantry and village community” and stress the continuing importance of rural society for the country’s subsequent economic and political development.

Looking at the ceiling murals of Southeastern Cebu in the Philippines, Reuben Ramas Cañete draws much-needed attention to local and regional traditions of the country. Relying on a “political aesthetics” framework, Cañete also provides highly detailed descriptions of the murals, their forms, themes, relationship to the architectural features of the Church, and authorship, among others. Cañete also compares and contrasts the five different murals and, utilizing an interdisciplinary angle to art studies, traces their emergence alongside the booming trade-based economy of Southeastern Cebu in the late 19th to the early 20th century.

Neal Matherne describes how the Pilipino Cultural Nights (PCN) events in Southern California “strategically manipulate the symbols of homeland (both the Philippines and the U.S.) through singing, playing instruments, acting and dancing.” Participating in one PCN, he takes us through four acts, interpreting it through the existing studies on Asian-American performance, its relation to Philippine-based performance groups, and its implications in the construction, if not imagining, of the Philippines by Filipino-American communities. Matherne provides us with an illuminating glimpse of how Filipino diaspora communities see and relate to their homeland.

In the commentary section, Kinhide Mushakoji examines a new concept of citizenship, one that straddles traditional state boundaries and results in dual or multiple identities that are poised to take the place of a single national identity. In East Asia, this is brought about by the crisis

facing the region's developmentalist states, which were created based on the modern but now increasingly irrelevant Westphalian model of absolute territorial sovereignty and a single national identity. The rise of two social forces figures prominently in this reconfiguration of identities – the growth of mobile diaspora communities and the increasing influence of a communitarian civil society. Mutually beneficial alliances between these two forces and sedentary citizens are a “precondition of any sustainable alternative to the neoliberal order.”

In another commentary, George Aseniero returns with an elaboration and further scrutiny of Rizal's relationship with Francesco Pi Y Margall. Aseniero solidifies his argument that the Spanish leader's socialist ideas could only have permeated the Filipino hero's own political aspirations for the country. Aseniero contends that the examination of *La Liga Filipina's* statutes within this context rather than that of the Enlightenment would surface a more complete Rizal persona—one not only concerned with shedding the colonial yoke but also creating “a civil society based on reciprocity and distributive justice.”

Nurul Momen describes how political parties have a huge influence on the judiciary and law enforcement in Nepal. He offers two examples and stresses the need for accountability and access to justice, which, he writes, is “the keystone to good governance.”

Asian Studies is fortunate to have two Palanca award-winners to inaugurate its literary section. Thomas David Chaves's *Winter Scene in the Desert of Gansu* is, among other things, a lament for the Silk Road. The persona (who comes across as time-traveling pilgrim) bemoans its emptiness and bewails the mindless tourism and commercialism that have befallen the place. Such imagery is contrasted with the Silk Road's shifting climates, changing landscapes, and more importantly, the memory of the Road as a teeming crossroads where different faiths, cultures, and economies once met.

Celine Socrates' *Alone: Three Haikus* departs from the Zen-Buddhist underpinnings of the haiku and instead adopts it to highlight the terror

felt by the lonely. A haiku usually stands alone and have the barest of narratives, if at all, but in creating and numbering a trilogy of the form, Socrates creates a story that moves from day, through dusk, to sunrise. It is interesting to note the irony and contrast between such progression and the stasis of the lonely persona.

The new *Asian Studies* will strive to live up to its reconstituted role in the context of an Asian region emerging as an important and influential player in global affairs. But more importantly, it will also act as a critical platform for expressing Asian peoples' hopes for a better life.

Eduardo C. TADEM
Janus Isaac V. NOLASCO