

INTRODUCTION

Margins and Mobilities in Asia: An Introduction

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Sometimes, deciding on the theme of an issue of a journal is akin to looking at a gestalt. Unless it's a special issue, one never really sets out with a theme in mind, and just take off from the submissions on hand. By the time one has enough manuscripts, you just take a look at everything and see if there's a gestalt, i.e. a pattern, a common thread. For this issue, what emerged were margins and mobilities, and the interplay between them.

On the one hand, a certain strand of scholarship is rightfully dedicated to foregrounding, if not advocating for, the marginalized. Kara David's article on the Aeta does just that, as do Axle Tugano's travels to the fishing communities of Southeast Asia; Anril Tiatco, Bryan Viray, and Olivia Nieto's ethnographic study of the tourism industry's stakeholders in Intramuros, Manila; Sol Dalisay and Michael Tan's study of overseas Filipino workers in Hong Kong and Taiwan; and to a certain extent at least, Su-Hie Ting's and Kho's discussion of identity in multiethnic Malaysia. Likewise, Aries Arugay tackles a book that foregrounds, among other things, the margins in Philippine society and in the democratization literature in the country.

On the other hand, a significant amount of research today has focused on the mobilities that characterize social life. Jason Morgan reviews two books that highlight that global nature of East Asian art, yet another instance of recent transnational approaches to many disciplines. Tenny Kristiana discusses a book that looks at 1965 Indonesia from a global

lens. Abdulwahid Panganting's account of a brief visit to Indonesia also exemplifies the comparative nature of area studies research, as does Noel Moratilla's poem, which, among other things, highlights Filipinos' travel to and engagement with the broader Asian society. We also see the mobility of Filipino folk beliefs, which "travel" to Europe in Antonio Sison's short fiction, *Trinidad: The Three Who Knock* while the theme of independence in Margaret Chavez's poem involves a metaphorical movement of sorts, one attendant in the notion of freedom. Michelle Santos's *The Eve* by contrast captures a life deprived of mobility (this is how I read the story at least) and a society that would literally lose all movement, in the eve of the Enhanced Community Quarantine.

But it's not as if margins and mobilities are distinct phenomena. They are mutually and dialectically imbricated. Mobilities breed margins, and margins desire mobilities. The migration of Filipinos abroad does entail movement, but it also marginalizes many of them in the process, becoming invisible, often second-class citizens in their destination countries. At the same time, the marginalized seek to escape the margins, as some Aeta in Pampanga province in the Philippines establish a better life for themselves, if not for their communities. And then of course, Malaysia has always been haunted by the desire of Malaysians of Chinese and Indian descent to have a much greater voice and presence in society, which has historically been Malay-dominated. Also, Axle Tugano's travels to Southeast Asia's fishing communities exemplifies a modest form of transnational engagement, but it also draws attention to the margins of Southeast Asia. Zuriel Domingo's review of *Underground Asia* examines a work that takes a global approach to Asian history in the early 20th century, but nevertheless approaches the subject from below, drawing attention away from high politics that focuses on the state, colonial administrators, and the like. And while a book like *Tuberculosis in Singapore* focuses on the city-state, the experiences recorded there has global implications, not least because COVID-19 has foregrounded questions of medicine and the diverse social contexts within which it operates.

We thank all the contributors for their support and patience throughout the entire publication process, and hope that readers will find this issue a modest contribution to the study of Asian societies today.