

## ABSTRACTS

### ***Emergence and modes of legitimization of local elites in Southeast Asia***

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How to define local elites in Southeast Asia today? Can scholars agree on criteria that would allow them to identify this complex and changing reality, which encompasses both ancient and modern political powers, past and recent enrichments, and inherited or conquered symbolic positions? The introductory article to this special dossier presents the twofold approach favoured in this volume, namely the analysis of the emergence of these various local elites – or « intermediaries » – and that of their modes of legitimization. We have limited the study here to a few local societies in Southeast Asia, belonging to various national frameworks (Burma, Indonesia, Laos, Vietnam, Brunei). These case studies illustrate the diversity and complexity of these elite processes, which are linked to different histories, economies and local cultures, but which also reveal comparable situations or trajectories.

### ***The Genesis of Local Elites at the Lao-Vietnam Border***

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This article investigates the production of local elites in the borderland area of Sepon-Huông Hóa, located between the province of Savannakhet in Laos and the province of Quảng Trị in Vietnam. The Phutai, a sedentary ethnic group settled in the plains and the foothills of Sepon in Savannakhet, and the Bru, a highland people found on both sides of the border, participated in different ways, either voluntarily or unwillingly, in a process of mutual appropriation involving external powers and local populations. The communist revolution during the Indochina Wars integrated Phutai and Bru into the revolutionary state (through education and / or the army). The communist movement also relied on the legacy of pre-colonial and colonial institutions, and the people they produced, to launch its process of political and social transformation and state formation. The Phuthai elite that emerged in the

aftermath of the war in Sepon thereby became part of a new social class as leading civil servants. Members of the post-war Bru elite attained a different kind of social status: thanks in part to their long-practised mobility and linguistic skills, as well as their accumulation during and after the war of political capital, they have held the position of brokers of the Lao and Vietnamese states in this borderland area.

***School education, war and the revolutionary party's civil servant: local elites and ethnicity in northern Laos***

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The paper focuses on the emergence of intermediate elites belonging to ethnic minorities in Laos from the case study of a province. While almost all positions of responsibility were in the hands of the dominant populations (Lao, Vietnamese, French) from the 1960s onwards, the ethnic origin of civil servants in Phongsaly province became much more diverse. Based on interviews and archival data, the history of this process is briefly retraced from the pre-colonial period to the present day, with emphasis on the pivotal period of the liberation war. We analyse the direct and indirect effects of the war on the formation of this intermediate elite, particularly through access to school education. This diachronic approach highlights the transformations in the conception of political power, in relation with ethnicity.

***The worth of the lu-gyi. Village affairs and forms of engagement in central Myanmar***

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The present paper analyses power relationships in a village of central Myanmar through the role of its big men (*lu-gyi*) and the way they legitimise a local political order. The question of the *lu-gyi*'s worth relates both to the nature of social relations and to the history of contemporary Myanmar: what room for village space, its history and morality in the making of power beyond the issues of patronage and merit? This article takes up this question anew by describing how the *lu-gyi* in Gawgyi village craft their position through three situations: a Buddhist novitiate, an engagement ceremony and the resolution of a local conflict. This approach allows to show how they craft their worth by making village affairs a space of collective engagement where people are evaluated.

***The use of formulas for conferring titles to court dignitaries in Perak and Brunei: a preliminary investigation on the origin and functions of the ciri***

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The lecture of an invocation in “pseudo-Sanskrit,” the *ciri*, has so far remained in Perak (Malaya) and Brunei during the ritual conferring court distinction. In addition to the leaflets preserved in these two sultanates, several manuscripts of the *Sulalat al-Salatin* (*SS al. Sejarah Melayu*) give the text of the *ciri* used during the enthronement of the founder of the Malaka dynasty. The synopsis of the *ciri* included in the *SS* shows that they are variants of the same formula, thus opening some clues as to the original title of the Malaka dynasty, particularly in relation to the kingdom of Malayu and Ādityavarman. The study of the six *ciri* dating back to the 19th century used in the conferring of court dignities, one in Perak and the other in Brunei, reveals distinct origins, the Brunei ones being partly written in Arabic. The existence of a ‘Perakian’ *ciri* model suggests that some of the *ciri* in force in the Malay world might have been preceded by a preamble whose use would have been maintained only in Perak. The pseudo-Sanskrit part of the Bruneian *ciri* is closer to the *SS ciri*. The contributions of the approach to local history can only invite to the intersection of manuscript, epigraphic and archaeological sources, and more broadly to their comparison with contemporary Malay royal rituals.

***Poetry in the sound system. The ritual orality of contemporary Toraja elites (Sulawesi Island, Indonesia)***

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Song, dance and speech have always held a prominent place in the rituals of the Toraja, a highly stratified society on the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia. Performed over several days and nights, they participated in the transformation of the deceased into ancestors and consecrated noble families. The article discusses the changes in modes of orality from pre-Christian Toraja society to contemporary Toraja society, whose traditional elites now compete with the newly rich. A new type of ritual orality is now provided by a class of young professional orators who declaim their speeches using powerful sound systems. Cultural capital, no longer reserved only for the heirs of the traditional nobility, is now monetized for new elites.