

Abstracts of Articles

“From Myth to History: Yap Ah Loy and the Heroic Past of Chinese Malaysians” by Sharon A. Carstens

This paper explores the many different biographies of the 19th century Chinese Malaysian leader Yap Ah Loy, showing how shifts in the stories reveal changing Chinese ideas about leadership and power in 20th century China and Malaysia.

“A Question of Expediency: Britain, the United States and Thailand, 1941–42” by Richard Aldrich

This article attempts to explore the reasons for British and American divergence over the question of Thai neutrality in the face of Japan’s impending advance to Singapore in 1941. It examines their failed attempts to influence Thai foreign policy by the means of their oil policies and somewhat questionable military assurances.

“Peasant Labour and Capitalist Production in Late Colonial Indonesia: The ‘Campaign’ at a North Java Sugar Factory, 1840–70” by G.R. Knight

What was the basis of labour recruitment for Java’s burgeoning sugar industry in the mid-nineteenth century? The answer most commonly made by both historians and other social scientists has emphasised ‘extra-economic’ coercion and the ‘pre-capitalist’ character of the workforce in this key sector of world market production in late colonial Indonesia. This paper, based on archival data relating to the development of Campaign labour at one of Java’s largest sugar factories, argues that the prevalent ‘forced labour’ image of the industry is to an extent misleading. Concentrating on the controversy surrounding the Indies Government-inspired ‘transition to free labour’ in the mid-1860’s, it makes a case for the emergence of a substantially proletarianised workforce in this vital area of sugar production even prior to the dismantlement of the Cultivation System a decade later.

“Kampungs and Conflict in Colonial Semarang” by James L. Cobban

Semarang grew rapidly during the nineteenth century and became an incorporated municipality in the twentieth. Its city council brought Western standards to much of the city but its efforts to improve the kampungs met with little success. Kampung improvement remained a local issue removed from national political and social movements.

“Urban Java during the Depression” by John Ingleson

In urban Java the depression was a time of difficulty but not a disaster for urban Indonesians if they retained their jobs, because of the considerable decline in the cost-of-living. The worst effects were probably transferred to rural Java, with the normal pattern of circular migration reversing as unemployed urban labourers moved back to their villages of origin.

“Living Standards and the Distribution of Income in Colonial Indonesia: A Review of the Evidence” by Anne Booth

The paper reviews the substantial quantitative evidence on living standards in colonial Indonesia in the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the data on the

distribution of income between ethnic groups and social classes. While there is little persuasive evidence that living standards either improved or deteriorated markedly, it does appear that the distribution of income both between and within ethnic groups did become more unequal in the final of decades of the Dutch colonial era.

“Marshall Aid as a Catalyst in the Decolonization of Indonesia, 1947–49” by Pierre van der Eng

Were the suspension of Marshall aid to Indonesia and the seeming threat to the economic aid to the Netherlands in December 1948 blunt instruments of United States power? This article refutes such a characterization. Attention is drawn to the financial and economic reasons the Dutch cabinet had for agreeing to the independence of Indonesia.