EDITORIAL

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This second issue of *Southeast Asian Media Studies* makes a distinctive contribution to Media Studies in the region through its emphasis on Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. While advancing knowledge of Southeast Asian media and Media Studies in these countries, the issue also highlights the increasing hybridity of the academic field through prominent intersections with studies of politics, culture, diaspora, literature—particularly poetry—and the environment.

The four articles collected in this issue bring attention to the diverse range of quantitative and qualitative approaches increasingly available to researchers—from statistical analysis and thematic case studies to literary-historical investigation and ethnographic inquiry. As theorists Julian McDougall and Claire Pollard (2020) observe, Media Studies has become markedly interdisciplinary in its examination of "quantitative and environmental questions about who is making use of what media and […] qualitative questions about how they interpret media and its function in their lives" (9). Scholars of Southeast Asian media deploy a variety of means to scrutinize issues of power, democracy, and equality in relation to the corporate structures, neoliberal agendas, and authoritarian apparatuses that impact media phenomena. Contributors to the issue, accordingly, engage with the shifting political contexts of Southeast Asia evident, for instance, in Thailand's foreign film production industry, Myanmar's post-junta social media boom, Vietnam's post-Renovation avant-garde poetry, and the Lao diaspora's (re)imagining of their homeland through beauty pageants in the United States. In developing these research subjects, the issue thus joins recent scholarship on the dynamic, ever-changing media landscapes of Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, including the books *Myanmar Media in Transition* (Brooten, McElhone, and Venkiteswaran 2019) and *Television in Post-Reform Vietnam* (Giang 2018).

The transformation of culture, society, and environment in response to the evolution of media forms is a common theme across the issue. In his article, Alexander J. Klemm appraises the trends, opportunities, and challenges of Thailand as a venue for foreign film productions between 2016 and 2018. Due to government-sponsored financial initiatives, iconic natural scenery, and myriad other factors, Thailand continues to lead Southeast Asia as a destination for foreign film production, although countries such as Malaysia are gradually catching up. As Klemm explains, Thailand's political state, currency exchange rates (in

2019, the Thai baht soared against the US dollar), services provided by Thai film companies, and audience expectations continue to affect the foreign film production sector in Thailand. Strategic initiatives implemented by the Thailand Film Office have focused on promoting Thai values while boosting tourism revenues through the positive representation of the Kingdom in foreign films. Building on his previous research into the years 2003 to 2015, Klemm employed statistical analysis of annual revenues and total productions to show convincingly that Japan, India, and continental European countries are the most film-active in Thailand. Moreover, with 157 productions during the three-year period, the United Kingdom surpassed the United States and Australia while China saw an overall upward trend in productivity in part because of the success of the Chinese comedy hit *Lost in Thailand* (2012) shot in Chiang Mai. Earning more than USD 200 million, the film became the highest-grossing Chinese film of all time. Following its release, Chinese tourism in Thailand grew 60 percent annually in 2012 and 2013. The film characterizes Chiang Mai as an exotic destination, and essentializes Thai people as generally polite and unhurried (Connell 2018, 159).

The popularity of *Lost in Thailand* among Chinese audiences exemplifies the concept of "film-induced tourism," which maintains that a segment of any tourist population chooses to visit certain places that have been depicted in feature films, documentaries, television programs, and, arguably, online media content such as YouTube and Facebook. Klemm examines in particular the recent temporary closure of Maya Beach, the backdrop to director Danny Boyle's drama *The Beach* (2000) starring Leonardo DiCaprio, as representative of the challenges of film-induced tourism in Southeast Asia. In May 2019, Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation extended the beach closure to mid-2021 in an effort to restore the coastal environment—specifically its delicate coral reef ecosystems and marine mammal habitats—develop adequate tourist facilities, and implement an online registration system that will limit visitor numbers to 2,400 per day (Wipatayotin 2019, para. 1). As Klemm remarks, the case of Maya Bay affirms the potential of films to stimulate tourism yet reminds us that unchecked tourism should be managed carefully in order to mitigate long-term impacts on culture and landscape. The limits of film-induced tourism have become apparent elsewhere in the region. A salient case in point is Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir *Eat, Pray, Love* (2006)—and the 2010 romantic drama film with Julia Roberts that followed it—which prompted a spike in spirituality tourism in Bali, Indonesia, along with a boom in hotel construction. In Bali, the development of tourism infrastructure, while conveying tangible benefits to the local economy, has precipitated the decline of the traditional Subak rice irrigation system and has brought about an array of other ecological concerns on the small island. Klemm's concise and well-argued contribution points to the potential for subsequent research into the interlinked environmental and cultural transformations arising from film-induced tourism in Thailand and throughout Southeast Asia.

My own contribution to this issue is positioned at the junction of Media and Literary Studies. My article delineates three case studies of writers and performers that, as a whole, elucidate the growing influence of social media on the activist poetry of Myanmar since the dissolution of the military junta in 2011 and ensuing liberalization of the media. Burmese online-offline communities of literary protest are mediated to a significant degree by Facebook. Following Siva Vaidhyanathan's (2018) examination of "how social media has fostered the deterioration of democratic and intellectual cul-

ture around the world" (3), the thematic text-focused analysis calls attention to the detrimental facets of social media in the country. While offering platforms for ostensibly democratized expression, Facebook and other social media have concurrently facilitated censorship and led to the imprisonment of poet-performers under the National League for Democracy administration. The predominance of Facebook has set in motion an unprecedented level of surveillance, repression, and incrimination for literary activities regarded as oppositional to the state. Reapportioning classic Burmese literary traditions, however, poet-performers active since 2011 continue to exploit of a variety of literary techniques—namely parody, satire, and metaphor—to critique the unstable political situation in Myanmar. During the 2019 Thingyan New Year Water Festival, five members of the *thangyat* performance troupe Peacock Generation Thangyat were detained for livestreaming a performance outside a Yangon tea shop. Three years earlier, Maung Saung Kha became one of the first activists sentenced under the NLD government. The poet used Facebook to publish a parodic poem about tattooing an image of then-President U Then Sein on his body.

As my article claims, the explosion of social media and Internet-enabled mobile telephony will continue both to foster and constrain poetry as an avenue for political expression. Notwithstanding its dialectical nature, this media landscape has enabled poets to voice the concerns of repressed ethnic minority groups within Myanmar and in exile. Mayyu Ali is a Rohingya poet, blogger, and activist who heads the Youth Empowerment Center at Kutupalong, the largest refugee camp in the world, located in Cox's Bazar. After his village was burned in August 2017, he fled to Bangladesh where he uses social media-based poetry to communicate the plight of Rohingya communities to global audiences. Mayyu Ali's commitment can be understood in contrast to Aung San Suu Kyi's recent denial of allegations of genocide (Bowcott 2019) and in agreement with the UN's subsequent condemnation of Myanmar's human rights abuses against Rohingya Muslims (Associated Press in New York 2019). What's more, further research into digital-literary activism in Myanmar and neighboring refugee communities might also investigate the responses of poets to environmental abuse and degradation. Poet-activist Maung Sein Win, for instance, deploys social media as a literary groundwork for critiquing the construction of the Myitsone Dam on the Irrawaddy River and warning against the local implications of the global climate catastrophe. Engendering a mode of ecodigital activism, Chin poet Mya Kabyar also advocates the conservation of the Chin Hills ecosystem in Chin State, north-western Myanmar. While poetry enhances national and international awareness of interconnected environmental, social, and political issues in the country, the medium simultaneously places poets under greater government control. This is the "Janus-faced character" of social media asserted by the article. As poets devise methods of minimizing authoritarian scrutiny in the NLD era, new digital-literary approaches will no doubt be formulated and classical Burmese themes reinvented.

Similarly positioned at the confluence of Media and Literary Studies, Trần Ngọc Hiếu's article provides a valuable historical synthesis of avant-garde Vietnamese poetry published in online literary magazines during the early twenty-first century. Trần Ngọc Hiếu applies the concepts of deterritorialization and the carnivalesque to enunciate the impact of the Internet on contemporary Vietnamese poetry and the ascendency of online literary magazines generating a transnational ground for Vietnamese literary expression during this period. As also evident in the example of Burmese social

media-based activist poetry, Vietnamese Internet poetry between 2000–10 encouraged political resistance and subverted literary orthodoxy. According to Friedrich Block, Christiane Heibach, and Karin Wenz (2004), digital poetry—variously described as e-poetry, new media poetry, cyberpoetry, computer poetry, and digital literature—is characterized by "medial changes in language and language-based communication in computers and digital networks. Digital poetry thus refers to creative, experimental, playful, and also critical language art involving programming, multimedia, animation, interactivity, and net communications" (8). In other words, as Wenz (2010) argues further, digital literature "is based in its production, execution, and reception on the use of the computer as a medium" (112). Trần Ngọc Hiếu redresses the lack of critical attention to Internet poetry in Vietnamese literary historiography through close readings of e-poetry published in the pioneering online journals *talawas, Tiền Vệ* (*Avant-garde*), *Da Màu* (*Colored Skin*), and *eVăn*. The theoretically-informed and historically-contextualized discussion furnishes a compelling basis for subsequent research into the Internet poetry of Southeast Asian nations.

Whereas the first three articles apply empirical, literary, and historical methods to Southeast Asian media, the final contribution to the issue develops an ethnographic framework for understanding the Lao diaspora's construction of their pre-revolutionary past through the Miss Songkhan beauty pageant in the United States held during the Lao New Year celebration. Characterizing ethnic beauty pageants as diasporic media, Daryl M. Gordon postulates that the pageant serves as a transnational space through which the Lao-American community negotiates cultural transformations, gendered identities, and nostalgic feelings for a life that can no longer exist. Gordon interviewed members of a Laotian Buddhist temple in the Northeastern US—and also participated regularly in festivals and celebrations—in order to identify the "inward-facing" elements of diasporic media in the Lao-American community. A resonant example from her research into historical memory was each pageant contestant's use of the pronoun *kanoi* to refer to herself. Meaning "little slave," the term symbolizes the hierarchical language conventions of the Lao monarchy prior to the revolution. Informants in the Lao PDR regarded the pronoun as excessively submissive and antiquated. Gordon's article underscores the benefits of leveraging ethnographic approaches in studies of media within Southeast Asia but also in relation to the Southeast Asian diaspora. Related studies might further investigate the negotiation of identities through diasporans' interactions with the natural environments of the hostland, as explored, for instance, by anthropologist Anna Tsing's (2015) in her ethnographic research into Lao-American mushroom gatherers in the Pacific Northwest of the US.

Southeast Asian Media Studies is indeed an exciting area of research with potential synergies with numerous other fields, including Cultural and Environmental Studies. Towards this aim, volume 1 of the journal focuses on the media of Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam whereas Volume 2 in 2020 will develop thematic emphases on critical mass media histories, indigenous peoples and media, and glocalization. In conclusion, I encourage readers to contribute their research to the journal in support of Media Studies in the region.

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