

NEGOTIATING RESILIENCE, INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE, AND CULTURAL CONNECTIVITY IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHEAST ASIA

Issue Introduction & Editorial Synthesis

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The current issue of the *JATI-Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* comes at a time when the region is undergoing profound geopolitical shifts, shifting economic realities, and complex institutional transformations. In bringing this collection together, our goal is to explore how different institutional layers—from state-level maritime boundaries to grassroots, community-run organisations—are adapting to maintain social stability, ensure administrative transparency, and safeguard a shared cultural legacy across Maritime and Mainland Southeast Asia.

The Macro Picture: Geopolitics and Economic Anchors

We begin this volume by looking at the broader regional anxieties that shape Southeast Asian diplomacy and fiscal choices. Imran Ali Sandano takes a hard look at the gridlock surrounding ocean governance in the South China Sea. His study unpacks the realities of international legal frameworks such as UNCLOS, showing how they often serve more as a shared vocabulary for tense diplomatic standoffs than as a true regulatory standard. Given the ongoing struggles within ASEAN to establish a binding Code of Conduct with China—a dilemma previously dissected in this journal by Singh (2017) and Bautista (2014)—Sandano argues for a more pragmatic pivot. He suggests focusing on non-sensitive, functional cooperation, like marine conservation and maritime safety, to build trust where sovereign diplomacy has stalled. This aligns closely with broader conversations in global maritime law, where scholars such as Gao and Jia (2013) point out that low-stakes administrative partnerships can defuse territorial tensions without forcing states to relinquish their sovereign claims.

This macro-regional perspective carries over into domestic economic policy, as seen in the work of Roop Chand Hindu. Turning the spotlight on

Mainland Southeast Asia, the author uses an Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model to identify the drivers of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into Thailand. Their numbers show a clear picture: political stability and solid financial institutions matter far more to international investors than basic labour costs. This empirical finding builds on earlier work by Lim (2015) in this journal on how massive transnational projects change local economic geography, while echoing global investment theories by Busse and Hefeker (2007), who demonstrated that multinational firms prioritise institutional predictability over almost everything else when entering developing markets.

Inside the System: Data Governance and Local Cooperatives

The focus then shifts from state-level economics to the inner workings of public and social institutions. Digital transformation is reshaping state bureaucracy, a trend that Adi Firman Ramadhan, Farzana Parveen Tajudeen, and Noor Ismawati Jaafar capture in their study of data governance in Indonesian public universities. Looking at eight different institutions, they show that secure, reliable data management is crucial for strategic choices and public trust. However, their findings make it clear that the real challenge isn't the technology itself, but the organisational culture. This maps perfectly onto observations made by Janssen, van de Voort, and Wahyudi (2017) in *Government Information Quarterly*, who argue that effective data oversight succeeds or fails based on institutional willpower and clear operational roles, rather than simply buying better software.

In a similar vein, but within a highly specific cultural and religious setting, Kasetchai Laeheem examines what makes organisations resilient in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces. Studying Islamic cooperatives in this politically complex and economically marginalised, Muslim-majority area, Laeheem uses Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to see what keeps these community financial hubs afloat. Interestingly, while a strict strategic focus keeps day-to-day operations running smoothly, it is the deeply ingrained "shared organisational values" that ensure long-term survival. This piece adds a crucial layer to *JATI's* ongoing documentation of minority community adaptation—recalling studies such as Karapan and Susuwan (2021)—and supports Choudhury and Hoque's (2006) theories on the tangible economic strength of faith-based, grassroots microfinance models.

The Grassroots: Juvenile Justice and Transnational Music

The final section of this issue brings the discussion down to community actors and the cultural ties that stitch the region together. Siti Balqis Mohd Azam and her co-

authors address a glaring gap in Malaysian social policy: the practical hurdles faced by probation officers and counsellors working with juvenile offenders under the Bond of Good Behaviour Order. Their qualitative fieldwork in Kuala Lumpur uncovers serious bottlenecks, particularly poor coordination between agencies and a lack of unified rehabilitation programs. Their findings echo recent legal scholarship, such as Zainah et al. (2025) in the *UUM Journal of Legal Studies*, highlighting the urgent need to empower community-level networks if we want diversion programs to actually work and keep young people out of prisons.

We close the issue by stepping away from laws and numbers to look at shared history. Abdul Rachman and an international team of researchers offer a comparative musical analysis of *keroncong* accompaniment styles in Indonesia and Malaysia. While the instruments themselves are identical across borders, the authors show how local tastes have subtly adapted the music, blending in *langgam Jawa* in Indonesia and *joget* rhythms in Malaysia. This study honours JATI's long history of treating local art as a living archive of regional identity. It also links back to ethnomusicological work such as Yampolsky's (2010) classic text, proving that *keroncong* is much more than a historical footnote of colonial influence; it remains an active, transnational language of kinship (*serumpun*) that easily crosses modern border walls.

Read together, the papers in this issue offer a multi-layered look at how local preferences, bureaucratic realities, and cross-border identities continuously shape security, justice, and social resilience across the contemporary Southeast Asian landscape.

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