

Editorial: Forty Years of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*

This year marks 40 years of publishing for the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, during which time the journal has grown and flourished. It is likely that few of its recent contributors and readers would remember or be aware of the journal's origins in opposition to the American war in Vietnam, a general dissatisfaction with mainstream academic studies of Asia, and abhorrence with the way some in the academy were aiding US war efforts.

In May 1967, the philosopher Bertrand Russell initiated the International War Crimes Tribunal or what became known as the Russell Tribunal. The Tribunal met in Stockholm from 2 to 10 May 1967. French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre joined with many members and witnesses to investigate American foreign policy and military intervention in Vietnam. Two of the witnesses were Malcolm Caldwell and Gabriel Kolko, and Peter Limqueco was with the Secretariat of the Tribunal. The three spent considerable time discussing events in Southeast Asia and continued to exchange views on the region after the Tribunal concluded.

The following year, Vietnamese forces launched the Tet Offensive and shocked the world. All cities and major towns in the American-occupied south were simultaneously attacked, including the compound of the US embassy in downtown Saigon. This offensive marked the beginning of the end of the US war of aggression in Vietnam, when the Pentagon finally realised that the war could not be won.

In May 1968, students revolted in France. Students took to the streets and seized the Latin Quarter (renamed the Heroic Vietnam Quarter), while workers occupied their factories. Throughout the world, demonstrations took place in solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle. Those were days of rage and creative optimism. A weakened USA ushered in a sinister period of accommodation with the Soviet Union. *Détente* among the superpowers was followed by ping-pong diplomacy with China, objectively prolonging the war in Vietnam.

All of this was background to an autumn 1969 academic meeting in Stockholm, where Erich Jacoby and Gunnar Myrdal sought to draw the policy conclusion from Myrdal's three-volume work, *Asian Drama*. There were well-known academics among the participants, including Thomas Balough, Ronald Dore, W. F. Wertheim, Tarlok Singh, Daniel and Alice Thorner, to mention a few. There was also a group of younger and radicalised attendees, including Malcolm Caldwell, Frederick Clairmonte, Biplob Dasgupta, Peter Limqueco and Ernst Utrecht. A generation and political gap was reflected in the analysis of Asian reality and in ideology. It was during the nights, in after-dinner discussions, that the idea of a journal that would challenge the then orthodoxy was hatched. This was to be a periodical that would

support the liberation movements in Asia and challenge the status quo. And, thus, the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* was born.

The journal has endured through 40 years of both socialist and capitalist crises. It has faced technological and generational change. And, it has succeeded despite the re-establishment of conservative control of universities throughout the world, including Asia, reflected in the rise of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism.

After four decades, it is time to rededicate our commitment to challenging the status quo, for we believe that society can only progress when the political, social and economic establishment is challenged. We reaffirm our support for scholarship that is liberating for all and provides justice for the oppressed. This commitment was no easy task when the journal was founded in 1970. It is no easier now. As capitalism has been embedded almost everywhere, there are numerous challenges but also some opportunities for politically committed and progressive academic research.

Long-time readers will have noticed many changes as the journal has had to deal with the challenges of politics and ideology, as well as the technological revolution. Universities, like all institutions in capitalist societies, have been shaken by neo-liberal economic and social policies. Academic teaching and research is now far more intertwined with international capitalist enterprise, where academics and students are subject to disciplines of measurement, testing and political orthodoxy. Inevitably, the journal's contents reflect these developments.

We thank all of those who have subscribed to and read the journal and especially those who have written for the journal, completed book reviews, served as editors and on the Editorial Board, and the many who have reviewed papers. Without the remarkable contributions by these supporters, the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* could not have navigated through 40 years of tumultuous change and challenge.

We have specifically acknowledged some of our editors and editorial board members in recent volumes. These include an interview with Noam Chomsky in volume 37, articles, review articles, reviews and commentaries in volumes 38–40 by Melanie Beresford, Catherine Chiu, Alec Gordon, Vedi Hadiz, Kevin Hewison, Ray Kiely, Gabriel Kolko, James Petras, Rajah Rasiah, Herb Thompson and Richard Westra and the re-publication of an article by the late Malcolm Caldwell with an appreciation of him by Alec Gordon. In volume 41, we will publish major articles by Tom Brass, Jim Glassman and James Petras.

The journal faces the twenty-first century with Gramsci's epitaph firmly in mind: "I'm a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will" (*Letter from Prison*, 19 December 1929).

While academic fashions come and go, the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* remains committed to progressive politics. The arrow on our cover still points to the left.

Peter Limqueco
Kevin Hewison
Co-editors