

## Introduction: Changing Asia

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The world is constantly changing. Rapid technological, socio-political and climate disruptions have already imposed new challenges on human life and society. In order to persist, we must learn to adopt new ways of thinking and working. The five articles in this issue of the *Asian Review* address the issue of change and new challenges in societies across Asia.

Asia is increasingly threatened by intensifying inequality and an aging population. Its neo-liberal free-market ideology has not only resulted in its widened social disparity but also in the lack of knowledge and skills needed to develop proper mechanisms to protect the public. Without proper state intervention, rural populations are left behind and are vulnerable to poverty as demonstrated in the study by Thitiwan Sricharoen about vulnerability to poverty of rural farm households in Thailand. Likewise, Marie-Helene Thomas draws our attention to the effect of modernization ideology on Asia's changing attitude towards old age and filial piety. With its youth-orientated ideology and its industrialization ambition, Asia's aging population is considered counter-productive and hence less important. Unless Asian societies can come up with a new ideology and cultural mechanism, older individuals will soon be left behind to fend for themselves as opposed to being respected and celebrated in old age.

Transborder migration is another challenging issue that Asia has to take into consideration. This can either be the result of transnational capital flows or a consequence of the world's growing refugee crisis. For decades, several countries in Asia, bound by International accords and bilateral agreements, have played host to waves of refugees who have crossed into their territories. Yanuar Sumarlan elucidates the Indonesian experience as a transit country and its refugee policies. He clearly points to his country's failure to deal with successions of international refugee crises and its inability to come up with alterna-

tives to the country's "fossilized refugee policy." A reform in refugee policy at all levels is needed—whether it is at the national, regional or international level—in order for partner countries to catch up with the evolving refugee crisis and to build a better mechanism for service delivery.

Administrative reform and capacity building for service delivery is the subject of the article by Muhammad Azizuddin. Citing case studies of local public institutions in Bangladesh, the article recognizes the constraint of administrative reform driven by a political agenda and bureaucracy. In order to achieve real reform, the country must rethink its hierarchical colonial and postcolonial administrative structures to embrace more civic involvement. It proposes that an involvement of local stakeholders in public governance and service delivery is key to the success of administrative reform and the betterment of public service.

The final article in this issue of the *Asian Review* focuses on Thailand's changing gender norms and values. Using an analysis of the rising trend of older women dating younger men, Somprasong Saeng-in exposes hidden conflicts between female desire and social values within Thai society. It has been decades since feminism was first introduced to the country. The boundary between love and sex has long since faded yet Thai society at large cannot accept these changes and confines the female population within its archaic social norms.

Changes are inevitable. Human society must learn to accept this fact and to adopt new ways of seeing the world. We may try hard to resist but, unfortunately, it is the only way to survive.