

EUROSEAS 2010

Panel: New Theoretical Approaches Towards Southeast Asian Studies

PAPER ABSTRACT 1

Author: Vincent Houben, Humboldt University Berlin

Paper Title: Theory and Writing of Southeast Asian History

Southeast Asian history as a body of academic knowledge situates itself halfway between the discipline of history and area studies. Because any historical explanation is culturally embedded, the question arises how a historian of Southeast Asia should deal with the past of this region.

Historiography over the last eighty years shows a definitive shift towards an Asiacentric perspective, turning colonial history either into an extension of European history or of a specific phase of cross-cultural engagement.

However, the problem of using what kind of theories and concepts when writing Southeast Asian history has been part of an ongoing debate. The tendency in the 1960s and 1970s was to adopt social science 'universal' categories of explanation or to stick to historical narratives based on an understanding ('Verstehen') of the past on its own terms. Since the 1970s the fields of social sciences and humanities as well as area studies have been transformed through the impact of multiple turns – linguistic, postcolonial, spatial and others. Current globalization theories add another dimension to Southeast Asia as a study field of history. At this juncture we have left the grounds of 'post' and entered into the domains of 'multi', 'trans' and 'inter'.

Where does this leave the historian of Southeast Asia nowadays and how can he/she express connectedness and uniqueness at the same time? Neither the use of universal categories (mostly Western scientific terms claimed to be universal) nor the adoption of emic key terms to capture the essence of locally and temporarily bound phenomena seem to work out well. The format of composite terms (mandala-state, theatre state, plural society, network democracy and so forth) may be too structuralistically rigid, whereas histories of interconnectedness seem to highlight one dimension at the expense of others. In my paper I want to think beyond disciplinary theory, classical area studies and histories of entanglement, arguing that writing Southeast Asian history has the potential to generate theoretical concepts of yet another kind. This sort of theory has to emerge from empirical historical study, which is then framed on an abstract level through a 'translative' process thereby arriving at middle ground which is open to specification and generalization at the same time.

PAPER ABSTRACT 2

Author: Heinzpeter Znoj, Institut für Sozialanthropologie, Universität Bern

Paper title: The new historical anthropology of highland Southeast Asia - a case study from central Sumatra

As Tania Li (1999) has observed, in Indonesian – and by extension, in Southeast Asian – studies a striking division of labor among the disciplines has existed until recently. Historical and political economic studies traditionally focused on the lowlands, where political power, trade and social and economic change were supposedly located exclusively, while anthropological studies focused on the highlands, where local culture seemed to survive against the odds of general modernization and state integration. A difference in method certainly contributed to this division of labor. Written sources and statistics, that could later be studied by historians and political economists, tended strongly to be produced in the coastal areas, where the maritime powers – among them the colonial powers before the 20th century – were located. Far less written data were produced in and about the highlands, which therefore became the focus of anthropology, whose fieldwork method of participant observation was ideally suited for the investigation of such small-scale “traditional” and “authentic” societies. Anthropologists’ focus on oral sources often led to the negligence of written sources about the highlands, so that their interpretation from a coastal perspective remained unchallenged. Consequently, and in accordance with the then current orientalist de-temporalization and de-contextualization of the ethnographic object, ethnographies of these societies treated them in isolation from outside developments.

This division of labour among the disciplines has become much less pronounced not in the least under the impact of interdisciplinary area studies programs since the 1960s and the 1970s. Anthropologists of Southeast Asia are far more history-conscious now than a generation ago.

I will present the short case study of a particular rice-growing calendar that exists exclusively in the highlands of Jambi province in Sumatra, i.e. the planting and harvesting of rice according to the *Hijrah*, the Islamic luni-solar

year. I will demonstrate that it cannot be understood without a combination of ethnographic and historical data and show that its historical-anthropological interpretation opens up new perspectives on the anti-colonial resistance against the Netherland's Indies, and how it continues to shape local society up to today.

Li, T. M. Editor. 1999. *Transforming the Indonesian Uplands: Marginality, Power and Production*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers

PAPER ABSTRACT 3

Author: Gwynyth Øverland

University of Agder, Institute for Religion, Ethics, and Society /
Regional Trauma Centre (RVTS Sør)

Paper Title: Reconfiguring Cambodian resilience -Area study knowledge-production in a study of Khmer rouge survivors

In the project, "Trauma and Resilience - a Refugee Perspective", survivors of the Khmer Rouge period who were said to be doing remarkably well, were asked "the salutogenetic question" (Antonovsky, 1987): not, why are they sick, but why are they healthy? Research participants were chosen among those who 1) were exposed to the kind of events for which the Khmer Rouge period is known, but 2) did not develop a disabling post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

An eclectic cluster of theories formed a logically interconnected framework for observing and understanding the participants' meaning. Under the meta-theoretical umbrella of constructivist social philosophy, the framework spans from sociology and sociology of religion (Weber, Berger) to substantive theory from the abutting fields of anthropology (Mead, Geertz, Ebihara, Ledgerwood) and mental health (Frankl, Mollica, Eisenbruch, Summerfield), with its accounts of and research on trauma and resilience. Meeting across the boundaries of disciplines in a shared ontology and interest in meaning, the aid of this eclectic mix of thinkers was enlisted in reconfiguring the meaning of the survivals and reawakening the sociological imagination.

Through an inductive / abductive analysis of the biographical narratives of 30 "successful" survivors, the project is progressing towards an understanding of the nature of their religious nomos (Berger 1967) and how it has worked for the participants. The nomos, this cognitive and normative edifice internalised in

the course of socialisation, then used by the individual in his subjective ordering of experience, is one of the keys to their survival and normalisation.

PAPER ABSTRACT 4

Author: Sophorntavy Vorng, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen

Paper Title: 'Spatial Hierarchies and "Situational Stratification": A Bangkokian Perspective on Class and Globalisation Theory'

In this paper, I suggest that despite assertions to the contrary, geographically anchored studies do indeed have the potential to generate new theoretical insights beyond the boundaries of classic area studies. As evidence, I present two examples based on recent field research in Bangkok. In the first example, I argue that while market forces have intensified the role of material wealth, education, and cosmopolitanism as new idioms of social differentiation, these inequalities engendered by global capitalist accumulation have mapped onto – and exacerbated – pre-existing hierarchies connected to indigenous concepts of space and power, and revolving around the regionally pervasive notion of the city as the ruling centre. Theoretically speaking, this suggests that paying close attention to localised constructions of space and place can offer a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which global processes are culturally expressed than frameworks positing a simplistic articulation between 'local' and 'global' domains. Also marked in Asia is the emergence of new middle classes groups concentrated in urban areas. My second example contends that conventional 'Western' concepts of class have limited utility in terms of defining the nascent Thai middle classes. In contrast, an emic approach which also incorporates status provides some more concrete parameters of middle class identity. Nevertheless, the Thai class and status system is also highly fluid and relational, and operates according to a principle I term 'situational stratification'. With further development, this is a finding that could offer a way of theorising stratification in a manner which breaks out of paradigms referencing static and rigid categories, to illuminate the dynamic nature of class and status differences in everyday social life.

PAPER ABSTRACT 5

Author: Anton O. Zakharov, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences

Paper Title : Early State Formation in Southeast Asia in the View of Collective Action Theory

Recently Dougald O'Reilly (2007) offered to define the polities of mainland Southeast Asia in the first millennium C.E. as 'chiefdoms'. These 'chiefdoms' transformed into 'empires' nearly the ninth century. The political evolution took form 'chiefdom – empire'.

Maritime societies, such as Srivijaya or early Javanese *kratons*, also can be described as chiefdoms while in the late eighth century they became 'states'. Roy Jordaan and Brian Colless speak about the Sailendra Empire (2009). It leads to the same conclusion that the political evolution was from chiefdoms to empires.

But were political developments so uniform and inevitable? I suppose they were not. First, the cases of the fifth century Borneo and West Java give examples of the chiefdoms ('realms') which did not developed into empire. Second, the emergence of early polities was inextricably intertwined with wars and not with trade. The earliest epigraphy always mentions victories or defeated enemies or armies or possible insurgents. But to establish a political organization, leaders need to find support of their commoners who should pay taxes or tributes to finance the emerging political institutions. Early inscriptions refer to gift giving and the relatives of the ruler. It seems that if monarchs could not ensure the loyalty of the commoners their polity ceased to exist. Public goods, such as safety, irrigation, roads, or new religious practices/beliefs, had to be established for the stability of new political formation. Some ideas were adopted from India (so-called 'Indianization').

Therefore, the neo-evolutionist methodology should be reinterpreted by means of collective action theory and constructionist paradigm. Early political developments in Southeast Asia began with rivalries between neighbouring communities seeking for their own advantages (in trade or in access to lands). The victors had to establish at least tribute relations with the defeated. It turned to chiefdom. From then on, the chiefs had to keep order and to prevent rebellions. They could be unsuccessful in these undertakings as it's attested for the polity of fifth century Borneo ceased to exist. But the emergence of complex political organization influenced further developments in the area and resulted in new rivalries. Chiefs tried to find new means to power, and if they were successful, the polity developed internally accumulating levels of government and symbolic resources as well as providing new quality of public goods to its taxpayers.

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Author: Michel Fournié, Professor – Vietnamese studies, INALCO-Paris

Paper Title: Area studies versus disciplinary studies: the “APPEALS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE” from the case study of the implementation of the "Study and Follow President Ho Chi Minh's Exemplary Morals" campaign in the SRVN.

PAPER ABSTRACT

“The magnanimity of a politician is not only seen in his good deeds to individuals, but also in his propulsive force for the entire community”

(extract from “Gold and fire”, short story, Nguyễn Huy Thiệp (Văn Học, Hà Nội, 1995)

“President Ho Chi Minh, one of the greatest heroes in the country's history of struggling for national independence and freedom, a great ideologist, a bright example in revolutionary morals and a great man of Vietnamese and world cultures”

(Forever study and follow Ho Chi Minh's thought and morals, Nhân dân / May 28, 2008)

From the perspective of political science, a feature common to all authoritarian powers is the preservation of power and thus its influence on the population, "the masses". From the sociological point of view, apart from periods of conflict and thus precluding the use of brute force, an authoritarian government must take the necessary steps to maintain consensus, more or less willing, of the majority of the population. In the absence of a genuine process of democratic expression - at least from the "western" standpoint - for the diversity of opinions and political leanings, an authoritarian government tends to use, among other things, a "mobilization of minds" based on a historical dimension and cultural affiliation to a "community of destiny" that must be preserved and developed thus ensuring their continuum of power on behalf of the "Great national unity".

The most common resort is to the national sentiment against the enemies of the interior and/or the exterior. Other factors most often mentioned include, in addition to a heightened religious faith, recourse to the evocation of a historical and charismatic character - "big man" - in reference to Bowen / Mousson, 1/2000, presented as a role model for contemporary generations or those to come. This option will be all the more implemented as the society undergoes a process of rapid change, challenging strong traditional values.

Currently, in southeast Asia, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has a particularly significant case: a one-party regime, a societal crisis with a ruling party seeking to strengthen its hold on the population in order to carry on its action towards a society of “The New man” (*Con người mới*) while « promoting traditional moral values and fighting moral decline, red tape, corruption, squander and social evils » (Practice Hồ Chí Minh moral precepts – “Nhân Dân online”, 2008).

Thus, in addition to the economic renewal policy of Aggiornamento established since the 6th Congress of 1986 (*Công cuộc Đổi Mới xây dựng chủ nghĩa xã hội*) in the context of the generalization of the doctrine of market economy with a socialist orientation (*Xây dựng thể chế kinh tế thị trường định hướng xã hội chủ nghĩa*), the regime launched a national 5-year-campaign (2007/2011) entitled "Study and follow President Ho Chi Minh's exemplary morals" (CUỘC VẬN ĐỘNG "HỌC TẬP VÀ LÀM THEO TẤM GƯƠNG ĐẠO ĐỨC HỒ CHÍ

MINH) thus contributing to finding proper avenues to cope with the complexity of a fast-changing society...

Based on the experience of much-publicised past campaigns of the Communist world, like that of model-worker Aleksei Stakhanov of the former Soviet Union, or, still on-going, that of the model-soldier, Lei Feng, humble lorry-driver of the People's Republic of China, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has set up a vast popular movement aimed at consolidating socialist moral values and building a socialist society in which people have upstanding morality, firm political will and a cultured lifestyle and are able to develop healthy and progressive social relations.. The campaign is also targeted at promoting the traditional moral values of Viet Nam. In anticipation of the final evaluation, scheduled on Ho Chi Minh's birthday anniversary on May 19, 2013, intensive learning courses and essay competitions for Party members and the public at large are organised during the whole duration of the campaign.

Besides promoting revolutionary values to develop a “socialist citizen” and encouraging individual commitments, the campaign, focusing more on Hô Chi Minh’s moral precepts than on Hô Chi Minh’s ideological thought, is based on learning the Four Revolutionary Morals (namely: be truly industrious, be thrifty, have integrity, be honest) and one core principle: public-mindedness and selflessness (*Bốn đạo đức cách mạng: cần, kiệm, liêm, chính và chí công vô tư*) while preserving and promoting the nation’s age-old cultural values.

From a concrete empirical research on the on-going campaign (2007-2011) “To learn and follow Ho Chi Minh’s moral example” to the construction of national identities in SEA based on historical, political, social and cultural values, the paper intends to provide some elements to determine if these *Asian/Marxist/charismatic leader* approaches of governance could contribute to the emergence of a *third expanse* between disciplinary and area studies in the field of societal and cultural aspects of bureaucratic policy with a specific focus on the efficiency of political systems based on the prevalence of images of powerful historic personalities in order to contain the ever-developing *individualistic attitude* opposed to the traditional Asian sense of collectivism in a “harmonious society” of the “happy medium” (*Trung dung / Juste milieu*).

Abstracts for presentation at the panel on:

Area Studies of and within Southeast Asia. Problems and Prospects of Regional Theorizing within Global Flows,

Convenor: *Prof. Dr. Christoph Antweiler*, Universität Bonn

Sixth *EUROSEAS Conference*, School of Global Studies, Göteborgs Universitet

Abstracts

Problems and Prospects of Area Studies on and within Southeast Asia

Christoph Antweiler, University of Bonn

Southeast Asia is a diversified cultural realm with a high potential for generating theory. The region gave rise to several important concepts of the social sciences and cultural studies, e.g. *mandala state*, *plural society*, *involution*, *thick description* and *strategic group*. Area Studies are gaining a new momentum in Europe and Southeast Asia as well. Within the Bologna process new area-oriented studies were established at universities of several countries. In a world of trans-cultural flows we should ask again, what are the strengths and weaknesses of Area Studies. The potential of Area studies is to go beyond the current methodological nationalism and extreme relativism to seek for regional patterns or culminations of cultural flows. The dangers are e.g. misplaced concreteness and the tendency to overlook trans-boundary processes.

Some of the questions to be discussed are: What are useful ways of systematic comparison of societies and cultures within Southeast Asia? What is the relevance of interdisciplinary but regionally specific vs. disciplinary but regionally unspecified research? What are the specific contributions of classics in area studies which are useful for area-oriented theory work nowadays? What are political implications of Area Studies? Why do most researchers from Southeast Asia confine their research and teaching to their own culture or country? What chances lie in new approaches to critical regional studies coming from within the region? Specific topics potentially addressed in the papers could be: general traits of Southeast Asia despite the tremendous diversity, family resemblances of Southeast Asian cultures, Southeast Asian sub-regions, regionally controlled comparison, border regions of Southeast Asia, Area Studies as geopolitics, Southeast Asia as an imagined region, local concepts of Southeast Asia as a whole, strategic regional essentialism and alternatives to “Southeast Asia” (e.g. *Southeastern Asia*, *Asia Pacific*, *Pacific Asia*, *Australasia*). Regarding the current research scene in Europe we could also discuss – last not least – the question whether Area Studies are a clever means of current European science administration to cut down localized social science and cultural studies.

Political Science and the state in Southeast Asia

Wolfram Schaffar, University Hildesheim

The renaissance of studies on the state in political science has inspired a new interest in studies on the state in Southeast Asian countries. Area studies have to cope with the question whether they can add anything to a general theory of the state, or, less ambitious, in how far the state in Southeast Asia shows particular features which justify an area studies approach to it. The corpus of literature on the state in Southeast Asia roughly falls into three categories which can be characterized due to the criterion, in how far they acknowledge and conceptualize a specific regional quality of the state in the area.

Approaches drawing on ideas of modernisation theory would deny that there is anything special about the state in Southeast Asia. Peculiar features are seen as pre-modern and are expected to get leveled to global standards in an overall trend of modernization. In this respect, modernisation theory meets concepts of globalisation where not only a leveling of state structures is expected, but the notion of state itself is predicted to lose importance in favour of a more fluid and global set of regulating structures (global governance).

A second type of approaches can be traced back to concepts like Dependencia or World System Theory from the 1970s and 1980s. As fundamental critique on modernization theory, these approaches argue that the position of a country in the global economy and the resulting dependencies on industrialized countries limit the development options and predetermine a development into a specific direction. Since most of the countries in Southeast Asia fall under this category, many peculiarities of the state can be explained by the position in the world system. However, the peculiarity is not defined in terms of a region, but in terms of a structurally defined position. As such, these approaches can explain how and why the state in Southeast Asia is different from the state in Europe, but they fail to explain differences between the state in Latin America and Southeast Asia.

Thirdly, approaches informed by cultural studies and anthropology have proposed analyses of the state in Southeast Asia which capture distinct, culturally or religiously grounded features: In concepts like Mandala state, Theatre State, the state and its specific structure derives from specific concepts of power. Other approaches draw on culturally or historically specific trajectories of development and challenges of state building in the Southeast Asian area.

Although some of these analysis have influenced the general theory of the state (e.g. Anderson's analysis of "the nation as imagined community"), it is not clear, in how far these concepts can be transferred to other countries outside the area.

After a brief introduction to the above mentioned approaches, I will discuss how the notion of "contested modernization" and concepts of the state as "material condensation of social power relations" (Nicos Poulantzas) can capture recent developments of the state in Southeast Asia and account for specific features in the area.

Epistemic Cultures of Southeast Asian Studies: The Making of a Cultural Area

Rüdiger Korff, University of Passau

Knowledge on Southeast Asia is produced in highly diverse and structurally heterogeneous epistemic cultures. A main structural difference is that in the region research on Southeast Asia is a mainstream activity, while in Europe such studies are regarded as studies of specific issues. For researchers the difference is that for scholars in Southeast Asia to study Southeast Asian issues is part of everyday academic work. For those from Europe field research in the region takes place under special conditions outside of routine academic work. Furthermore, English as the main language in which current research is published implies relative exclusion of scholars from the region, as well as those from non-English speaking regions of Europe.

This has the double implication that firstly limited, often specialized local epistemic cultures of southeast Asian studies evolve with little interaction, like a German or French discussion, a Thai and Vietnamese or Indonesia etc. discourse. Secondly, the English (British and American) discourse is directly connected through the language with the international discourse. This leads towards a certain dominance, and valorisation of knowledge through which local discourses are ignored and pushed to the periphery. Keeping in mind the argument that innovations and “scientific revolutions” (Kuhn) are usually initiated from the fringes and peripheries, the question is how these discourses can be integrated into the knowledge production process.