Southeast Asia: New Research Trends in Political Science and International Relations

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Debatte

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Introduction

Southeast Asia's strategic location at major sea-lanes of communication, its previous role as a theatre of super power rivalries, its neighbourhood to China and India, its increasing economic prosperity and its inherent political instability have secured the region unrelenting attention of political scientists. Yet, the region is politically, economically and culturally highly diverse and fragmented. This diversity is also reflected in research on the politics of the region. Southeast Asian politics – more than any other Asian sub-region – thus defies sweeping generalizations about the state of the art. However, a paper committed to identify new research trends can not do justice to the diverging research agendas in the region's different countries. It must search for common themes which are relevant for understanding the political dynamics of the region and at the same time enrich the general discourses of the discipline.

While this amounts to the squaring of the circle, the following sections nevertheless try to pinpoint where political scientists have made innovative contributions and where lacunae exist. It starts with a few general observations on recent trends in the study of Southeast Asian politics and then proceeds to international relations and comparative politics, two major sub-disciplines of political science. It focuses, albeit not exclusively, on regionalism and democratization as the dominant themes in the post-Cold War period. The paper concludes with a few proposals to improve the institutional context of (German) political scientists working on Southeast Asia.

General Trends in Political Science on Southeast Asia

In the last decade, the integration of regional studies into the mother disciplines (such as political science, sociology, history, economics, law, anthropology, geography etc.) has been increasingly replacing the erstwhile area approach. This process is also observable in political science, especially in the United States. The situation is different in Germany, where political science departments are small in terms of professorial positions (usually three to five chairs), though not in terms of students, and thus feel obligated to secure at least a competent coverage of what mainstream scholars define as the core of the discipline. However, the universities of Freiburg, Heidelberg and Münster have moved into the new direction and appointed in recent years Southeast Asia specialists to professorial positions in their political science departments.

It would however be wrong to attribute this change only to new fads in university administration. More than this it mirrors *epistemological* change. It represents a new twist in the old conflict between exceptionalists and generalists. Exceptionalists highlight the cultural peculiarities of the society they study. They explain societal phenomena as resulting from path dependencies and historical legacies. Their epistemology is geared towards "Verstehen" and hermeneutic approaches which they believe capture the uniqueness of "their" societies. Exceptionalists deeply distrust general theories of social science, which in their view are overly ethno-centric and thus unable to explain social and cultural difference. They view political scientists approaching Southeast Asian themes from the mother discipline as scratching only the surface and lacking cultural empathy to understand the political dynamics in the region. Exceptionalists preferably approximate their research object inductively and often operate with research techniques categorized as "thick description."[1] If they build theories at all, their reach is limited, usually only applying to the society studied or to a few neighbouring societies (for instance, the model of bureaucratic polity[2]).

Generalists criticize exceptionalists as essentially descriptive and narrative. They are firmly embedded in their discipline and often have no genuine interest in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia is for them only relevant as a case that allows them to test theories and analytical frameworks derived from the mother discipline or other fields of social science. Comparativists tend to operate in this manner

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[1] The term "thick description" has been coined by Clifford Geertz. See Geertz (1973).
[2] For the bureaucratic polity model, see Riggs (1966).

which, however, should not be prematurely dismissed as this research – often inadvertently – exposed the limits of Western theoretical concepts in an Southeast Asian context. Where they take empirical findings contradicting their theories serious, generalists facilitate theory-building that is sufficiently broad and general as to be valid and relevant for developed as well as developing societies.

More recent research has sought to reconcile these two conflicting approaches. There is now a growing sentiment especially among the younger generation of scholars that research on the region must be firmly embedded in the theoretical and methodological discourses of the mother discipline, but that it is equally important to acquire the language proficiency and the cultural competence that is needed to understand Southeast Asian societies. This combination of two on first sight conflicting epistemological strands is a promising trend that should be further encouraged as it entails great potentials for sharpening analytical tools and theoretical concepts and thus makes research on the region more palatable and acceptable for the discipline's mainstream.

Geographically, political scientists have concentrated on the largest country of the region. Indonesia dominates this research not only due to the fact that for a long time it has been the *primus inter pares* in the ASEAN grouping, but also due to the turbulences, insurgencies, separatist movements, endemic outbreaks of violence and other upheavals that have been a persistent concomitant of the country's post-independence history. Moreover, the country is home to the largest Muslim population of the world. It also helps that *Bahasa Indonesia* is easier to learn than other Southeast Asian languages which facilitates access to written sources and facilitates communication with locals. There is considerably less research interest on mainland Southeast Asia where Thailand and Vietnam are the countries attracting most interest. Yet, with Thai and Vietnamese studies represented in only a few (German) universities, and Burmese, Khmer and Lao studies disappearing (or already disappeared) from the academic landscape, German political scientists find it increasingly difficult to acquire the necessary language skills and cultural competence needed to study politics in these countries.

Topical interest of a wider academic public in Southeast Asia went through cyclical changes. With the end of the Cold War Southeast Asia ceased to be a major theatre of super power rivalry. Consequently, interest in the security issues of the region waned. In the 1990s it was Southeast Asia's unprecedented economic growth that generated interest in the region and attracted political scientists. Unfortunately, however, this attention was short-lived. The Asian financial crisis

markedly downsized the economically-driven interest in the region. After an inconclusive debate over whether international or domestic factors were the main causes for the crisis (which was in the first place a debate among economists but one in which political scientists prominently participated),[3] interest in the political economies of Southeast Asia declined and shifted to China and – more recently – India as Asia's fast rising economic power houses. Another turning point was September 11, 2001 which all of a sudden brought Southeast Asia back into the spotlight of security experts. Especially after the Bali bombing in October 2002, Southeast Asia became regarded as an area particularly exposed to the risks of terrorism and religious extremism. Subsequently, Islamization, ethnic conflicts, economies of violence, separatism and piracy became themes dominating the security discourse and, as will be argued later, undeservedly also the image of the region (McKenna 1998; Colombijn/Lindblad 2002; Kreuzer 2002; 2005; Bolte/Möller/Rzyttka 2003; Young/Valencia 2003; Bertrand 2004; Schulze 2004; Wessel/Wimhöfer 2001; Croissant/Martin/Kneip 2006).[4]

Nevertheless, despite these cyclical changes, research on the politics of Southeast Asia has seen a remarkable diversification of themes, often related to the ramification of the discourses in the mother discipline, as well as greater theoretical and methodological sophistication and diversity. The next two sections will further elaborate on this observation.

International Relations

International relations research is perhaps the greatest success story in political science on Southeast Asia. Much of this success must be attributed to the fact that the study of the region's international relations is now a field increasingly guided by a theoretical discourse. Particularly inspiring for the International Relations (IR) community has been the region's vibrant regionalism spearheaded by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

This was not always the case. Until the 1990s, Southeast Asia has not been the object of theorizing. Much of the international relations research on the region was largely descriptive, chronological and implicitly, much rarely explicitly,

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[3] See, inter alia, Rosenberger (1997); Dieter (1998); Henderson (1998); Weggel (1998); Garnaut (1998); Rüland (1999, 2000); Stiglitz (2002).

[4] On these topics, see also the numerous studies of the International Crisis Group (www.crisis.group.org).

couched in terms of a realist worldview (Huxley 1996). Regionalism was then only a marginal theme; much of the writing depicted Southeast Asia as a gravitational zone for external powers. Southeast Asia's foreign policies at the time were thus mainly analyzed as a dependent variable in the triangular relations between the U.S., the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

Three developments in the discourse markedly changed the picture in the 1990s. First, the so-called new regionalism, which also in Asia – like elsewhere on the globe – spurred a strengthening of existing and a proliferation of new regional organizations, gave rise to the questioning of the hitherto dominant realist paradigm. Realism was challenged by neo-functionalist integration theories like Deutsch's transaction theory[5] and institutionalist approaches.[6] These approaches, though by no means new, at least stimulated theoretical reflection and a theoretical discourse. Moreover, unlike realist approaches, they could show that cooperation became indeed a major objective of the states in the region, with the ultimate effect that the likelihood of armed inter-state conflicts markedly declined. But they were less able to explain why institutionalization of regional cooperation remained shallow and slow, and thinking in terms of power, relative gains, balancing and national sovereignty preoccupied foreign policy-makers. Inspired by the spill over dynamics of the European integration process, some observers failed to understand that Southeast Asian cooperation was less a process of sovereignty pooling, but more one of resource pooling for the sake of strengthening the capacities of the region's nation states and their ability to balance by institutional (not military) means perceived power disequilibria inside and outside the region. The Asian crisis seemed to vindicate their realist critics, as it turned out that cooperation was at its lowest ebb when it was needed most (Acharya 1998; Rüland 2000; Möller 2002; David 2003). In fact, ASEAN in particular contributed little in terms of crisis management (which was laid into the hands by Western-dominated global multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) and most states of the region receded into protectionist and power-driven beggar-thy-neighbour policies (Wesley 1999; Rüland 2000).

The second trend is that, interestingly, the Asian financial crisis did not lead to a revitalization of realism. One reason for this may be that the period of open dissent within ASEAN was relatively short and that the ensuing efforts

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[5] Deutsch's concept of a "security community" is still widely used in research on Southeast Asian regionalism. See Acharya (1991).
[6] See, inter alia, Crone (1993); Wallraf (1996); Dosch (1995, 1997).

towards damage control could be portrayed as a resurgence of Asian regionalism (Robles 2002; Yoshimatsu 2005). The years following the Asian financial crisis thus invigorated a trend that had begun already in the mid-1990s: The "cultural turn in social sciences" (Reckwitz 2000) had reached studies of Southeast Asian regionalism. ("Weak") cognitivist approaches subsequently became the theoretical vanguard in explaining Southeast Asian regionalism (Busse 1999, 2000; Acharya 2001; Haacke 2003a; Hund 2003; Rother 2004; Cabellero-Anthony 2005).[7] Social constructivism questioned the rationalist epistemological foundations of realist and institutionalist approaches and rejected the latters' notion that there are given national interests that, if at all, change little over time and space. Cognitivist approaches insisted that state interests are socially constructed and hence prone to change and that, accordingly, the observed processes of norm building in the region shape a common regional identity. This regional identity was seen as strengthening regional cohesion by promoting "regionness" (Hettne 1999) and "actorness" (Doidge 2004). Cognitivists thus further posit that common interests are not derived from shared material interests but the conscious fostering of shared values and norms.

Cognitivism has facilitated interesting and innovative research on "cultures of cooperation" (Rüland 2002; Loewen 2005) The latter are seen as being formed in a process of interaction with other regions ("regionalism through interregionalism"), which sharpens differences between self and other and, as a corollary, drives the resuscitation of indigenous cooperative traditions (Gilson 2002; Hänggi 2003). Studies along these lines are only at their beginning. They are a promising field of research for two reasons: First, as constructivism claims to be a meta-theory it is also open to realist interpretations and may thus help to overcome the cooperative bias in constructivist theorizing on Southeast Asian regionalism (Rother 2004), and second, by unravelling the cultural connotations of concepts such as power, hierarchy and cooperation it may explain why Southeast Asian regionalism so doggedly defies deepening and remains mired in power politics (Rüland 2006). The challenge of this research however is to sidestep the pitfalls of essentialism.

Third, research findings on Southeast Asian regionalism have become increasingly integrated into mainstream theorizing. David Kang's plea to incorporate Asia into mainstream theory-building of international relations has – his controversial bandwagoning model notwithstanding – stricken a positive chord among

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[7] For early contributions, see Higgott (1994); Acharya (1997); Busse (1999).

regional experts and IR scholars (Kang 2003).[8] The (earlier) edited volumes of Haftendorn/Keohane/Wallander (1999) and Ikenberry/Mastundano (2003) as well as the latest issue of *Pacific Review*[9] also pave the way towards this end.

The process of integrating research on Southeast Asian regionalism into mainstream theorizing can be accelerated by comparative regionalism studies. Yet, comparative regionalism studies hardly exist. Southeast Asian regionalism (as regionalism elsewhere on the world) is still very much treated as a unique phenomenon.[10] Although area specialists habitually (and for good reasons) reject comparisons between ASEAN and the EU, it would make sense to compare ASEAN (despite the fact that it was founded as early as 1967) with other regional organizations subsumed under the label of "new regionalism." Theoretically, methodologically and empirically this is a research area where still much is to be done and where moves beyond anthologies studying new regional organizations on a case-wise basis can markedly enhance our understanding of processes of regional cooperation.

Another desideratum are multivariate theories of Southeast Asian regionalism which would reflect the empirical observation that power-driven policies and cooperation are closely intertwined in Southeast Asia. While institutionalist and constructivist theorizing has underrated power as a driving force of international relations in Southeast Asia, realist approaches have belittled the level and intensity of cooperation. What is needed therefore are theoretical approaches marrying the power paradigm with the paradigm of cooperation in their cultural and discursive context. However, even then future research will almost inevitably see a swinging back of the pendulum towards the power paradigm. The reasons for such a development are overly evident: The Bush administration's security unilateralism and conscious belittling and by-passing of international organizations has seriously eroded civilian power-type multilateralism. The perhaps most decisive blow to international institution-building have been America's inconsistent nuclear policies: On the one hand its pre-emptive strike against Iraq without evidence of a nuclear weapons program, on the other, its policy of accommodation towards

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[8] For a critique and a rejoinder, see Acharya (2003/2004) and Kang 2003/2004).

[9] See the *Pacific Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2006.

[10] Exceptions are the studies of Hettne/Inotai/Sunkel (2001) and a project currently conducted by the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies at the Nanyang University of Technology in Singapore in cooperation with the Asia Center and Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. www.ntu.edu.sg/IDSS/publications/ Perspective/IDSS402005.pdf (accessed 4 June 2006).

North Korea and recognition towards India.[11] Given the neighbourhood of these de facto nuclear powers, balancing policies in Southeast Asia may move beyond the institutional arena and increasingly also adopt a military dimension. As the world is tilting from a broad-based multilateralism towards loose and short-term coalitions of the willing, a process that can be observed in many policy fields (including trade with the rise of free trade bilateralism and minilateralism in the Pacific Rim), theory building can not ignore these trends and will have to give more emphasis to the power paradigm.

The involvement of Asia in the emerging system of global governance has also spurred a new research theme in the last ten years which has become known as interregionalism. Interregionalism denotes the interaction of regional organizations in international relations. Recent research has mainly concentrated on the forms, the functions and theoretical explanations of interregionalism (Hänggi/Roloff/Rüland 2006). A number of empirically rich and theory-guided doctoral dissertations and numerous articles on interregionalism have been authored in recent years (Yeo 2003; Bersick 2003; Pareira 2003; Loewen 2003; Doidge 2004; Robles 2004). While this means on the one hand, that the topic is increasingly exhausted and further progress is only incremental, it will not disappear from the research agenda as there will be an increasing need to explain why despite the obvious stagnation and functional poverty of interregionalism these novel forums of international interaction will not disappear from the scene.

Security policies have always been a mainstay of international relations research on Southeast Asia. During the Cold War the region was strategic and theatre of the rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, later extended to a triangular game including the PR China. Much of this research was couched in realist terms, with national security as the key paradigm. A more recent extension of this research are studies on the impact of China's rise to a global power on Southeast Asia (Umbach 2002; Lee Lai To 2004). In the meantime, under the impact of globalization and a growing economization of international relations, the security outlook has broadened. From the 1980s onward, national security was increasingly replaced by "comprehensive security," a concept acknowledging the increasing importance of non-conventional security threats such as economic crises, irregular migration, environmental degradation, organized crime, terrorism etc.. By contrast, "cooperative security," a concept originating in Europe and

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[11] For a recent assessment of U.S. Third World policies, including Southeast Asia, see Rüland/ Hanf/Manske (2006).

treating security as a public good, did not flourish in Southeast Asia. As "cooperative security" by promoting democracy and human rights implied a strong normative connotation, it was hardly palatable for Southeast Asia's authoritarian regimes. Consequently, studies propagating "cooperative security" failed to make major inroads into the Southeast Asian security dialogue (Hoadley 2006). What found its way into practical politics, however, were the technical aspects of "cooperative security" such as confidence building measures. Southeast Asian notions of security policy may thus be best described as the OSCE's tool kit minus the normative substance (Rüland 2002). More recent security studies, assisted by activist transnational NGO-networks and under the impact of environmental disasters such as the haze and the devastating tsunami of December 2004, push decision-makers towards "human security," a broader and even more normatively charged security concept (Cotton 1999; Emmers 2003). As security studies are usually applied research, developing and advocating a doctrine of human security acceptable to Southeast Asian security elites is an important task ahead.

Expectedly, September 11, 2001 has been a watershed in security studies. By bringing the transnational links of religious extremists and terrorism into focus, it changed security perceptions of the region markedly. While until September 11, the security literature portrayed Southeast Asia as a region characterized by a highly diverse and essentially tolerant Islam (Ramage 1995; Wessel 1998; Hefner/Horvatich 1997), post-September 11 writings claimed that the Islamic revival of the last decades has reached a turning point. Purist Wahabite and Salafist versions of Islam are seen as gaining increasingly ground among Southeast Asian Muslims and with them the propensity to join aggressive extremist organizations. Southeast Asia's Islamic societies were now suspected as sheltering terrorist elements and becoming staging areas for international terrorism (Gunaratna 2002; Abuza 2003; Rabasa 2003). The "second front" thesis subsequently reverberated through many writings (Wagener 2002; Kurlantzick 2002; Gershman 2002; Haacke 2003b).

The attention paid to religious extremism in the region led to a conflation of studies on Islam and terrorism research. Unfortunately, however, some of the writings of these terrorism experts rest on murky sources (from intelligence quarters) and tend to operate with alarmist claims.[12] Although the subject is extremely difficult given its secretive nature, a more sober analysis of the diverse

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[12] For some moderating and differentiating views, see Cruz de Castro (2004); Wright-Neville (2004); Fealy (2004); Rüland (2003, 2005).

Islamist groupings and their relationship with terrorism is direly needed. Closer cooperation between security analysts, Islamic studies and sociologists of religion could help to place terrorism research into a more proper perspective.

As issues related to human security and research on terrorism illustrate, security studies have also highlighted the increasingly close interrelationship between international and domestic policy arenas. This trend will certainly be strengthened in the future. For international relations research this requires as a prerequisite an improved understanding of the dynamics and discourses of domestic politics and their cultural framing. Not only Western, but also Southeast Asian scholars of international relations and security often focus too much on the diplomatic exchanges, while dissociating them from their societal and domestic discourses.

Comparative Politics

The second overarching theme of the post-Cold War era in the study of Southeast Asian politics is democratization. While in the 1970s and early 1980s political economists explained the authoritarian nature of the state in Southeast Asia with its reproductive functions for dependent capitalism, with the "Third Wave" of democratization (Huntington 1991) reaching Asian shores in the mid-1980s, the research agenda changed and political scientists began to study the conditions enabling political transition and the process of transition itself. Yet, Southeast Asia was a latecomer in this research. Contributions on Southeast Asia initially largely ignored the research paradigms developed by theorists drawing mainly from Southern European and Latin American experiences.[13] The debate between adherents of actor-oriented and structuralist approaches was not at all reflected in research on democratization in Southeast Asia. The majority of contributions was largely descriptive and as far as they used culturalist approaches had even an essentialist flavour. Needless to stress that they added little to theory-building and a better understanding of the phenomenon.

Theory-guided research on democratization in Southeast Asia only came with the second generation of democratization research when the focus shifted from the conditions and processes of regime change to consolidation. German political scientists fruitfully contributed to this research by evading the actor-structure debate and instead proposing Fritz Scharpf's and Renate Mayntz' actor-oriented

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[13] An excpetion ist the volume edited by Laothamathas (1997).

institutionalism as a middle way (Scharpf/Mayntz 1995; Scharpf 2000). Croissant applied the concept of "defective democracy" to Southeast Asia's new democracies and further fine-tuned the concept by developing a typology of defective democracies (Croissant 2002).

However, more recent research questioned the normative underpinnings of consolidation research. Levitsky/Way (2002) and Carothers (2002) argued that the development of most new democracies into full-fledged liberal democracies is doomed to failure. Although moving closer towards the democratic end of a continuum ranging from outright authoritarian regimes to Western-style liberal democracies, they retain many traits of authoritarianism. Rather than graduating to liberal democracies, these polities are predicted to become political systems *sui generis*, which may be best categorized as "competitive authoritarianism" (Levitsky/Way 2002). In the wake of the shaky state of democracy the Philippines and Thailand, two countries not long ago believed to be firmly on the road towards democratic consolidation, non-teleological versions of democratization research will certainly gain ground. Hand in hand with this shift of emphasis goes the need to examine the semantics of democratization discourses in the respective societies. A study on Thailand, for instance, revealed how Western concepts such as "good governance" have been localized and appropriated by indigenous political discourses not necessarily highlighting democratic values (Orlandini 2003). Only careful discourse analysis paired with profound knowledge of the historical trajectory of meanings can unveil such reinterpretations of seemingly universal concepts.

Although with the end of the Third Wave and the slow consolidation of new democracies, some scholars have promulgated the end of transition research,[14] a third generation of democratization research is well underway in Southeast Asia. It is characterized by an increasing differentiation of the research agenda. Much of this research is still in its initial stage and needs further elaboration.

One is research on parliaments. The latter have long been ignored as agents of democratic change in transition research. While studies on Western legislatures fill libraries, they were virtually non-existent in Southeast Asia until very recently.[15] Often discounted as rubber stamp bodies, recent research has shown that their

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[14] Such as Philippe Schmitter during a conference on 30 years of democratization in Berlin in December 2004.
[15] Among the few exceptions are Morell/Chai-Anan (1981); Foth (1991); Hassall/Sauders (1996) and Norton/Nizam (1999).

role in transition processes is greater than assumed by the transition literature (Rüland/Jürgenmeyer/Nelson/Ziegenhain 2005; Ziegenhain 2005). There are indications that in the next years more studies on Southeast Asian parliaments will come out and that research on legislatures will move from introductory to more specialized studies.[16] An example for such a trend are studies on parliamentary control of the security sector. The latter is often retaining reserved domains even after the process of political transition and hence removed from civilian control. Anti-terrorism laws and separatist challenges have further shielded the military from civilian control. Parliaments as the incarnates of people's sovereignty are key players in the struggle to establish civilian supremacy in new democracies. In order to sharpen their teeth to control the security sector, more knowledge is vital on the patterns of interaction between the two actors (Born/Fluri/Johnson 2003).

A more established, albeit non-exhausted theme is the relationship between democracy and political parties. In Southeast Asia studies political parties were often treated as clientelist phenomena and thus submerged under sociological research preoccupied with social structure. The unabatedly fluid nature of political parties and the amorphous structure of party systems has kept research on political parties going and encouraged experimentations with Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) cleavage theory.[17]

Electoral studies are as old as elections in the region, but are characterized by a strong descriptive bias (Taylor 1996). Most of these studies intuitively rehearse the "guns, gold and goons" mantra and are used to explain why the region's democracies are defective (Murray 1996). Transition research with its much more firm rooting in comparative politics methodology has provided major stimuli to overcome this antiquated state of the art. A volume edited by Croissant, Bruns and John a few years ago has paved the way to more sophisticated election studies which hopefully encourage more work along these lines (Croissant/Bruns/John 2002).[18]

Studies linking democracy and social class flourished in the 1990s. The issue at stake was the old claim of modernization theorists that the middle class is

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[16] A doctoral dissertation on the Thai parliament was recently submitted by Aaron Stern (2006) and Australian researchers have also discovered the topic.

[17] A study on political cleavages and parties supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft is currently conducted by the Institute of Asian Affairs, Hamburg. For preliminary findings, see Ufen (2005).

[18] For a study of the elections in 2004, see Croissant/Martin (2006).

the most reliable bearer of democracy. Extensive empirical studies conducted under the tutelage of the Taiwanese Academia Sinica and by Australian scholars have however persuasively shown that the link between democracy and middle classes is precarious and that middle classes have also often been supporters of authoritarianism (Robison/Goodman 1996; Rodan 1996; Becker/Rüland/Werz 1999).

Studies on decentralization abound in Southeast Asia. Yet, few studies established a link between transition theory and decentralization.[19] Democratization is thus usually treated as a macro-process and an independent variable. Such a top-down perspective ignores local obstacles of democratization and fails to consider democratization as a dependent variable influenced by the peculiarities of local political culture and local power concentration.

Many studies follow a broad concept of decentralization such as proposed by Rondinelli and Cheema (1983) and thereby obscure the fact that many reforms sold as decentralization are in reality little else than deconcentration. However, deconcentration is a measure to improve the effectiveness of the central state, a move designed to strengthen the latter's "output legitimacy." Most studies are also conducted in the tradition of the "old institutionalism," viewing decentralization as an issue primarily concerned with the redistribution of administrative functions and state revenues. Local autonomy which is regarded as a prerequisite for a more participatory society and socioeconomic development thus implies that local governments are self-reliant or autarkic entities. However, such a view is untenable under conditions of globalization and rapid modernization. Given the increasing complexity of development, local governments can only contribute meaningfully to national development, if they are embedded in tight policy networks consisting of governmental and non-governmental actors. Only if they make use of the expertise inherent in such linkages they will be able to serve as agents of modernization and development.

Existing decentralization studies have shown the ambiguities of decentralization reforms in the region. The "big bang" approaches in the Philippines and Indonesia have in fact strengthened the position of local authorities vis-à-vis the central government, but also highlighted the risks inherent in such reforms. Apart from providing greater scope for political participation at the grassroots and adding new administrative functions to local governments, they have also

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[19] An exception is the study of Bünte (2003) on Indonesia' decentralization reforms.

contributed to a decentralization of corruption, the emergence (or consolidation) of local political empires, a proliferation of charges, fees and local taxes, the deterioration of services due to lack of competent personnel, the thwarting of national economic policies, environmental degradation and – in some Indonesian provinces – even to Islamization (Damuri/Amri 2003).

A more innovative theme is the relationship between democracy and international migration. Although migration studies proliferated in the last two decades and theoretical approaches diversified markedly, political science had only a minor role in this research compared to sociology, economics and anthropology. Contributions of political science to international migration for much of the time confined themselves to security issues. More recent research, though still in an incipient stage, has gone beyond these limitations. It also took into account that most research on international migration focused on the receiving countries – or more recently – so-called trans-social spaces. Leaving aside economic issues such as the impact of remittances of labour migrants, the reverse relationship, i.e. the impact of returnees on their home societies, including their political impact, is largely underresearched. A current research project on the Philippines thus seeks to identify the impact of the host countries on the political attitudes and behaviour of labour migrants after returning home.[20] The project compares returnees from authoritarian and democratic migratory destinations. By raising the question whether there is democratization through migration the project also adds an external dimension to democratization research which so far has not been studied extensively.

Democracy and religion is another topic deserving more in-depth study. Much of the research on the relationship between these two variables concentrated on the Islamic revival and the question as to what extent modernist versions of Islam constitute an obstacle to democratization (Ramage 1995; Hefner/Horvatich 1997). Interestingly, however, and corroborating what has been said earlier about Southeast Asian Islam, the main fault line of Indonesian society between secular nationalism and political Islam has remained virtually unchanged over the last 50 years, irrespective of the strong Islamization in the last two decades, although it is today less accurately reflected by political parties. Much more uncertainty however exists as regards the political impact of renewal movements in other

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[20] "Democratization through Migration?", sponsored by the Foundation Population, Migration, Environment, Switzerland. The study is conducted by Christl Keßler and Stefan Rother of the Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institute Freiburg.

religions. The unprecedented rise of charismatic and evangelical churches in the Philippines with their extremely conservative moral attitudes and their populist style of mobilization raises questions as to how this "populist religion" impacts on Philippine democracy (Keßler/Rüland 2006a,b). A just concluded research project based on an extensive quantitative survey and intensive qualitative work presented ambivalent evidence which calls for further studies along these lines.[21]

The last years have also seen the flourishing of studies focusing on the rise of a civil society in market-oriented socialist societies and their impact on political pluralization and – with a longer perspective – democratization. Until recently most observers were certain that there is no civil society in Vietnam or Laos. More recent research on Vietnam has however shown that such an assumption is untenable (Wischermann 2003). Departing from earlier research on the emergence of a civil society in once authoritarian states in the region, two conditions seem to favour the emergence of a non-governmental sector in former communist countries. The first is that under the impact of modernization, the authoritarian state is unable to manage increasing social and technical complexity, the second is that the state is in need of resources to provide public services. This may induce authorities to enter into a consultative relationship with non-state actors. The result may be a conditional opening of society, but there is no evidence that at the end of the road nominally still socialist systems will be transformed into democracies. A useful concept to study these processes of change is "governance," a concept transcending the narrower concept of "government" (Rosenau 1992; Benz 2004; Schuppert 2005). Apart from a hierarchical vertical dimension and authoritative action, governance stresses the need to coordinate and cooperate between public and private sector and to rely to a much greater extent than previously on "soft law" (Abbott/Snidal 2000) and informal action. In how far informality in policy-making is a cultural "given" of Southeast Asian societies or whether it only reflects certain stages of institutionalization in the process of modernization is an interesting question awaiting further clarification.

Hardly covered in the Southeast Asian context is the question in how far border-crossing issues (such as migration, haze, crime, terrorism) erode the conventional congruence of social and political space and thus call for new forms of democracy. Although – as has been argued above – Southeast Asian states are

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[21] The project was entitled "Religious Change in the Philippines." It was part of a series of cross-cultural studies supported by the Working Group on Global Church Affairs of the German Catholic Bishop's Conference and carried out by the Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institute Freiburg.

extremely hesitant to outsource authority to the international level, civil society representatives and political scientists increasingly criticize the state-centric nature of regional cooperation in the region. While political science has not yet been able to propose convincing concepts of democracy transcending the nation state, the question nevertheless arises how ASEAN decisions can be made more participatory and how regional cooperation in the region can be democratized.[22]

Concluding remarks

The previous sections have only allowed for a few brushes depicting broad trends in political science on Southeast Asia. In a fast changing region, many more relevant themes await further study. It is impossible in this context to discuss them exhaustively. Yet, despite such an impressionistic overview, the contours of five major challenges confronting political scientists working on Southeast Asia became visible. The first is reconciling area specialization with the mother discipline. Only if political scientists leave their regional niche will they be able to become an accepted part of the discipline's mainstream.[23] Secondly, the convergence of mainstream generalization and area- and culture-specific aspects necessitates a sensible disaggregating and deconstructing of a the big concepts like "state", "democracy", "governance," etc. and a careful scrutiny of their culture-bound meanings in the region without falling in the exceptionalist trap. Third, the rigid separation of the sub-disciplines must cease as domestic issues have increasingly border-crossing implications and international influences erode national sovereignty and steering capacities. Fourth, more systematic comparative research is needed in virtually all fields discussed. It must be based on common analytical categories and go beyond edited volumes which, in effect, are anthologies of case studies. And, fifth, in the light of the institutional weaknesses with which political scientists working on Southeast Asia are confronted, institutional innovations are urgently needed. One of the most unimaginative proposals is the establishment of one or a few national centers. As they usually follow the logic of the New Public Management

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[22] For a partial treatment of these issues, see Caballero-Anthony (2005).

[23] See also the results of a conference on "Regional Studies" jointly organized by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the University of Freiburg in December 2005. The results are summarized in the *Freiburger Memorandum zur Zukunft der Regionalstudien in Deutschland unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Asiens, Afrikas, Lateinamerikas und des Nahen Ostens.* See DAAD-Homepage, www.daad.de/de/download/hochschulen/veranstaltungen/ kulturwissenschaften2005_memorandum.pdf).

approach and are hence designed to cut down costs, they relegate all universities without a center to Southeast Asia-free zones. Much more promising would be network solutions in which universities (political science departments) with Southeast Asia competence cooperate, including existing centers. This would create win-win situations for all. It would avoid the creation of academic oligopolies, strengthen existing research capacities through resource pooling and cooperation and at the same time stimulate competition. Political scientists have called such a complementary relationship between competition and cooperation "competitive cooperation" or "cooperative competition" (Link 1998).

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