

Southeast Asian Studies Passau: Research Report 2013

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1. Introduction

Research in Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Passau is directed towards analyzing processes of post-colonial societal transformation. Based on theoretically informed comparative empirical studies of Southeast Asia, we aim to identify similarities and differences between and within the countries and sub-regions. To maintain a close connection between teaching and research, the research areas correspond with the "advanced research modules" of the M.A. Southeast Asian Studies programme:

- Conflicts and State Formation
- Dynamics of Urbanism
- Development Policies and Processes
- Culture, Religion and Gender

Outline of the research clusters

The common basis for the research activities is an interest in the conflicts and dynamics of modernization processes in Southeast Asia. This includes the emergence of new institutions, the rise and decline of groups and actors, the competition for resources, and the global-local dialectics which underlie these processes. Two research clusters are currently working on specific facets of these dynamics of modernization:

Cluster 1: Organizational studies of media

Media are part and parcel of a public sphere. This is crucial for the maintenance of civil society as a means of self-organisation outside the administration or the economy, and for the emergence of a collectively defined and thus accepted as legitimate consensus and common good. These three, public sphere, civil society and consensus/common good are closely interdependent to provide stability and continuity to a society and legitimacy to the state.

This does not mean that there are no conflicts! On the contrary! Stability is usually closely connected to conflicts, as is a common good and consensus. Stability means that procedures to cope with conflicts in a non-violent and non-exclusive way are established. This is the field of law and legal principles as rules of the game. In addition, the public sphere is an integral part of these procedures, as a forum or arena in which different views are articulated, made public and negotiated. Civil society, which is itself not at all homogenous but consists of highly diverse groups

like religious, political parties, NGO, people's organisations to open associations is a counter to the usually well-organized state administration and economic agents. Due to their high level of organization and professionalism they can dominate discourses. Civil society is therefore a necessary counter to such forms of dominance of the public sphere.

Understanding the public sphere as pluralistic, multi-faceted and endowed with multiple conflicting interests, defines already the role of media for the public sphere. Media are the means to articulate the manifold perspectives. They should therefore represent all opinions and views and should not be censored. The pluralism and heterogeneity of the public sphere has to find its pendant in the pluralism of media.

Cluster 2: Urban studies in Southeast Asia

In urban space, struggles for the access and control of resources and space are constantly perpetuated. The urban struggle manifests itself in processes of social and spatial organization, which are in turn linked to processes of inclusion and exclusion. The research cluster places a special emphasis on the study of the under-researched urban periphery, i.e. provincial cities.

The size and degree of international integration of a city must be seen in connection with an increasing internal fragmentation into individual urban communities. Scarcity of resources, spatial proximity and the limited number of actors in small towns, on the other hand, can facilitate the interaction and cooperation among the inhabitants. Thus, smaller towns as a whole have the potential to make better use of urban heterogeneity.

2. On-going research projects (as of 2013)

BioDiva: Transformation-Knowledge Towards a Gender-Equitable and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity

Project leader: Martina Padmanabhan

Funding: German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)

Duration: 2010-2014

Under the guidance of project leader PD Dr. Martina Padmanabhan, BioDIVA focuses on developing instruments for a sustainable use of agrobiodiversity while strengthening women's key position and capabilities in agrobiodiversity management. Taking the case of rice-biodiversity in the Western Ghats of Kerala, South India, the interactions between social, economic, ecological and institutional processes are at the centre of this research endeavor.

BioDIVA is a direct response to the rapid loss of biodiversity and local species in agricultural systems. The state of Kerala has a high variety of local rice landraces in the uplands. However, recent and ongoing changes in land use are accompanied by a degradation of argoecosystems and the transformation of gender relations. The

research project builds on interdisciplinary research in rural sociology, ecology, land use change, gender studies as well as institutional and resource economy. Moreover, BioDIVA integrates non-academic knowledge in order to foster the understanding of real-life problems. The overall aim is to develop strategies towards the generation of transformation knowledge for sustainable futures.

Fact Finding Mission Myanmar – Social science exchange with Myanmar

Coordinators: Rüdiger Korff, Sascha Helbardt, Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam

Funding: German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

Duration: Since 2012

Since 1964 universities are directly integrated into the Ministry of Education or selected other ministries. They resemble the form of a bureau under the ministry rather than that of an autonomous education body. Such a formal structure requires that an MoU and any cooperative relations even with individual professors needs to be channeled through superior positions within the ministry. Although the formalities are numerous and complex, contacts to departments are possible. Even foreign students can enroll at Yangon University. The problems of formalized academic cooperation are certainly not insurmountable and it is expected that the situation will improve significantly, since sector reforms are on their way. However, to solve the current problems requires following up a long term perspective. Especially still active retired professors are an important factor and asset in the current processes.

Digitalization of Laotian and Northern Thai scripts (DLLM)

With the participation of the National Library of Laos, the University of Passau and the National Library Berlin

Coordinator: Harald Hundius

Funding: German Research Council (DFG) and Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) until 2011; on-going activities 2011-2016 supported by the University of Passau

Duration: 2007-2011; 2011-2016

The project aims to facilitate research and dissemination of Lao literature and culture (and related research in Southeast Asian and Buddhist Studies as well as in local wisdom and indigenous knowledge) through the digitalization of approximately 9,600 microfilmed manuscripts (1,006 rolls à 30 m, 35 mm) held at the National Library of Laos and the production of an English-language inventory. These manuscripts were selected for microfilming from over 84,000 surveyed in Laos during the Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme (1992-2002/04), a cultural cooperation project funded by the German Foreign Office, and represent more than five centuries of the country's literary heritage.

Cluster 1: Organizational studies of media

Local media and violence in Southern Thailand

Researcher: Sascha Helbardt

Funding: National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) of Thailand

Duration: 07/2012 - 04/2013

Media and content regulation in Germany

Coordinators: Rüdiger Korff, Oliver Hahn, Sascha Helbardt

Funding: National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) of Thailand

Duration: 07/2012 - 04/2013

Comparative Study of Broadcasting Media Organisation and Contents Regulation in Southeast Asia

Coordinators: Rüdiger Korff, Sascha Helbardt,

Funding: National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) of Thailand

Duration: Since 2013

The degree of integration and legal convergence with regards to media in Southeast Asia is rather low. However, cross-border media consumption either through satellite TV, internet and regular programmes in border areas has strongly increased. Thus, we find a discrepancy between access to media from the audiences and coordination between media organisations and policy of the respective countries. The question is whether and in how far this leads to forms of isomorphism between broadcasters, those working within broadcasting organisations, media policy and legal regulations of media.

The analysis of isomorphism focuses on media organisations, and thereby covers parts of the organisational frame/context in which information is broadcasted. Another but related question dealing with contents is whether programmes from public and private broadcasters leads to better information about ASEAN and those countries and cultures forming ASEAN. In short, can media play a role for enhanced cultural integration and empathy among the states of Southeast Asia? The organisational, context issue is closely connected to the issue of content, not the least because content regulation is enforced by organisations. A related question is in how far organisational isomorphism could be a base for convergence or harmonization of programmes, policies and regulations.

Cluster 2: Urban studies in Southeast Asia

UrbanSelf - A North-South-Network on Urban Self-Organisation and Public Life in Europe, India and China

Coordinators: Rüdiger Korff, Eberhard Rothfuss

Funding: International Research Staff Exchange Scheme in the Seventh European Framework Programme Marie Curie/ IRSES

Duration: 07/2011-06/2014

UrbanSelf integrates new partners into an existing network of cooperative research and knowledge exchange on urban solutions to establish a comprehensive community. The basic assumption is that, as an effect of the emergence of a global urban system, urban problems as well as solutions have to be understood in both a global and national context. Even though urban problems are inherently global problems, we cannot design universally valid solutions for all cities. Cities maintain their specificities that have to be taken into account when identifying solutions to problems – one size does not fit all. It is vital to build on specific experiences and analyze whether these can be translated and transformed to be applicable to other cities.

3. On-going PhD projects (as of 2013)

An actor-oriented approach to the Indonesian art market: Art and networks

Researcher: Irina Vogelsang

Funding: Foundation of German Business (SDW)

Main supervisor: Prof. Dr. Tilman Schiel

Since the 1970s, Indonesia is increasingly integrated into the global economy. With the Asian Crises and the end of Suharto's 'New Order', Indonesia entered a period of democratization. Both dynamics, globalization and democratization, are complex and stipulate processes of social change. In order to understand how global dynamics are transformed into local and regional forms, the research will analyze a field which is dominated by important agents of change in Indonesia. The art market can be considered such a field, as it is sphere where the political and economic elite get involved. Accordingly, art is attached with different meanings and functions. Thus, art markets become a place where different networks intersect and negotiations take place. Different groups of actors dominate certain spheres, such as politics or the economy. At the same time these groups of actors play a crucial role in the Indonesian art market. Ethnic Chinese, for instance, dominate parts of the economic sphere and are also involved in art trade and/or art collection. By following an actor oriented approach, the research aims to understand the processes of social, cultural and economic change that are reflected in the Indonesian art market.

Literature of the Tai Nuea group in Northern Laos

Researcher: David Wharton

Funding: This doctoral dissertation is embedded in the “Digitalization of Laotian and Northern Thai scripts”-project.

Main supervisor: Prof. Dr. Harald Hundius

The prospects of religious tolerance in the next generation leadership in Jakarta

Researcher: Marcel Hizkia Susanto

Main supervisor: Prof. Dr. Tilman Schiel

The research project looks into the question of religious tolerance among Indonesian students in the capital Jakarta. Students, aside from having a more critical world view, are the future leaders in business, government, NGOs, etc. The research will focus on how the students perceive the role of government in formulating and enforcing laws related to religious practices. In Jose Casanova's terms, the question is how the students define and perceive „public“ vs. „private“ religion.

The research will also find out how internet media shape that perception. Internet media was chosen because it offers new opportunities and challenges in starting, forming, and breaking public discourses like the debate about religion tolerance among students. Students use the internet intensively and interactively since it offers the opportunity to comment and to respond to other people's comments.

The study will focus on 3 cases: the Indonesian blasphemy law, the persecution of the Jemaah Ahmadiyah in Indonesia and the controversy of GKI Jasmine of Bogor. The first one is an example of Indonesian law that regulates religion, the second one is a conflict between Islam and a sect who claimed to be Muslim too, and the last one is a controversy between Muslims and Christians.

Energy Concepts in Uttarakhand, India, from an Ecofeminist Perspective

Researcher: Julia Rometsch

Funding: Heinrich-Böll-Foundation

Main supervisor: Prof Dr. Martina Padmanabhan

India, a quickly growing economy, faces a lack of energy on the one hand and great ecological risks that come with climate change on the other. The growing demand for energy of the industry needs to be satisfied as well as the basic energy needs of the poor. In Uttarakhand, a Northern Indian state in the Himalaya region, today most families still use firewood as fuel for cooking. Considering the deforestation and erosion in the Himalaya, this energy use is ecologically unsafe. Collecting of firewood is the task of women and girls, adding to their daily workload. Additionally, fire smoke is a major cause for lung and eye diseases of women in India.

While this is generally known, there exists no gender disaggregated data below the household level on the use of different energy sources, the energy needs of men and women and on the power structures within a family that lead to decisions on energy use.

In my thesis I will collect and analyze data on these questions as well as conduct qualitative interviews on the knowledge on energy use of women, trying to analyze the potential for political participation in the transformation of the energy sector in Uttarakhand.

Cluster 1: Organizational studies of media

Political Facebook: Everyday life public sphere of the urban middle-class

Researcher: Wimon Siri Hemtanon

Main supervisor: Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Korff

The violent crackdown on Thailand's pro-democracy movement in 2010 established Facebook as a crucial channel for information and communication among the Thai middle-class in a situation of political uncertainty. It was not only used as a hub to self-broadcast a collage of news media snippets mixed with accusations and tales documented by citizen journalists and sourced from a variety of social media platforms as the events unfolded.

Today, Facebook has become of increasing importance as a vehicle for the casual commentator to air political opinions and a tool to channel support for political campaigns and related activities in the struggle for meaning of political causes on people's minds.

The current color-coded struggle between Red and Yellow Shirts is being fought out in virtual and multi-directional flows of interactive mass self-communication on social media sites. This raises the question whether Facebook established an arena of free political articulation and engagement or a battleground of narrow ideologies.

This paper aims at the investigation of Bangkok's urban middle class' perspective on political issues related to various events since 2010 and their expression of ideological affiliation during a period of political uncertainty within a new social media environment.

An organizational analysis: Local community radio in Northeastern Thailand from a sociological perspective

Researcher: Punnaporn Archawaranon

Main supervisor: Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Korff

After the declaration of the 1997 Constitution of Thailand, local community radios newly emerged and played an important role as one of the new media in Thailand. These became the voice of the community as well as political tools during the transitional period. Exploring structures and interactions within and among organizations could explain their concrete functions. The study examines both external and internal functions of local community radio organizations in Northeastern Thailand. The case study will focus mainly on Udon Thani province, in which more than hundred local community radios have been operated since the media

reformation after 1997. Applying an organizational analysis approach, the project will observe organizational activities and behavior patterns in and among the selected radio stations. The objective is to identify linkages and forms of isomorphism among these organizations.

Cluster 2: Urban studies in Southeast Asia

Processes of interaction and negotiation in small urban centres in Vietnam - The example of regional business networks

Researcher: Hannah von Bloh

Funding: Bavarian Research Fund

Main supervisor: Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Korff

In ever growing body of literature on urbanization in Vietnam, very few studies look beyond the country's largest cities. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are often taken to represent the whole breadth of urban life. In fact, more than two thirds of Vietnam's urban population lives in cities with less than 800,000 inhabitants. Studying the dynamics of and in these smaller settlements is thus crucial for understanding the factors which determine everyday life in a large part of the country.

Assuming that small urban centres play a unique role within the urban system, the research project aims to identify central attributes of small towns and typical local patterns of organization. Focus of the research project is the analysis of social structures and processes of interaction within and around small towns. The study regards small urban centres as a social interface at which actors from various life-worlds with different interests, values and resources meet. The interface analysis thus includes both actors within and outside the selected towns and aims at exposing the complex social and institutional networks through which a settlement is embedded in a wider region.

The PhD thesis is based on data collected during field studies in the provincial capitals Cao Bang and Dong Hoi. The study pays special attention to the local SME sector as it is – among other things - a central site of interaction for various local actors and a crucial source of off-farm income.

Dynamic actors and shifting modernity in Vinh City, Vietnam

Researcher: Tim Kaiser

Funding: Bavarian Research Fund

Main supervisor: Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Korff

The ambitions of many Vietnamese cities are expressed in the slogan “Modern and civilized city” used on banners and posters. These aspirations are, however, not new. Although termed differently, the Vietnamese leadership has carried out a program of modernization since its ascent to power. The development of Vinh City reflects much of the latest history of the country, the versions of modernity that are promoted by different actors, and even of the worldwide expansion of ideas of a “good life”.

This project considers the interplay of actors and institutions as the driving force behind urban modernity. It thus takes the local conditions of Vinh City as starting points to identify dynamic actors and the institutions that play a role in the production of Vinh's urban landscape.

In Vinh, numerous actors from the local, national and international level come together, trying to define what a "modern" city is. However, the ideas of modernity inspiring their agendas do not only differ from actor to actor, but also over time. Going back to the cities reconstruction with the help of the German Democratic Republic after the American War, the study compares the actor-institution interplay of contemporary Vinh to the situation during the Cold War. By analyzing differences and similarities, the study aims at providing a differentiated view on "shifting urban modernities".

Urbanization and the changing way of life of the K'ho minority in Dalat City

Researcher: Vo Van Dung

Funding: Socialist Republic of Vietnam (Programme 322)

Main supervisor: Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Korff

The process of urbanization in Dalat city has its own unique characteristics. The relocation program, the resettlement of ethnic minorities and the urban expansion policy led to the incorporation of the villages and hamlets of the local ethnic groups into the city's administration. This process has an impact on the community of ethnic minorities in many different areas of their life. The ownership of land, the architecture and the increasing immigration have changed habitats and modified their lifestyle and habits. Urbanization is causing a loss of inherent traditional values of these local residents. This is alarming and needs to be researched in depth to identify measures to reconcile the development of urban areas with the sustainable development of ethnic minority communities.

Water conflicts between commodification, urbanization and environmental change: Processes of socioeconomic transformation at the peri-urban interface in Vietnam

Researcher: Mirjam Le

Main supervisor: Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Korff

Relations between human decision-making as well as practice and the surrounding environment are influenced by complex networks of interests, meanings and power relations. In the context of peri-urban areas which constitute an interface interlinking rural and urban processes, flows of goods and ideas, as well as actors of urban and rural space, these relations between human and environment are subjected to multiple social transformations processes like modernization, urbanization and industrialization.

Using the example of water usage, environmental degradation, urbanization and industrialization as well as the gradual integration into urban legalization, partly

introduced by state actors, affects not only the water quality and the access to water resources but also the individual perspective on water. New resources become available, partly due to commodification of resources, and need to be integrated into existing supply structures and strategies. New actors like private water sellers, big corporations and social actors emerge and shift existing power relations. The inflow of interest, images and meanings related to water resources and the environment changes perspectives on health and hygiene. Thus different social actors need to re-negotiate their relation to each other as well as to their environment to adapt to those new conditions. In the course of this, the state plays a central role in translating political processes of modernization into the peri-urban context. The consequences are changing pattern of decision-making concerning water usage.

The PhD thesis examines these relations between local transformation processes in peri-urban areas in Vietnam due to modernization, industrialization and urbanization and transformation processes in pattern of water usage by local actors and meaning of water resources. This includes negotiations and networks between different levels from local to state and global actors like NGOs, corporations and development agencies. The aim is to reconstruct the shifting local discourse on water usage between different actors in a transforming interface between urban and rural spaces.