



Southeast Asian Studies at the
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Conference Report

Dynamic Alignments and Dealignments in Global Southeast Asia (24-26 June 2015)

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Introduction

Southeast Asia is a world region known for its vibrant economies, cultural diversity, and volatile politics. It is a region characterized by multiple forms of alignments and dealignments that influence its societies. The analysis of alignments, meaning cooperation and coalition-building, and dealignments, which include processes of fragmentation, disintegration and conflict, is therefore of great significance to understanding past, present, and future developments in the region.

On 24-26 June 2015, the interdisciplinary research group “Dynamic Alignments and Dealignment in Global Southeast Asia” from the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS) organized a conference which studied Southeast Asia’s cooperation cultures. The conference presented the work in progress of the institute’s fellows, which centered on (1) the changing nature of political cooperation; (2) the repositioning of alterity and identity; (3) the politico-economic consequences of alignment and dealignment in the local settings of Indonesia and the Philippines; and (4) transcultural historical interactions in Southeast Asia. Around twenty presenters examined these questions from the disciplinary perspectives of political science, cultural anthropology, economics, and history.

Keynote Lecture

The conference opened with a keynote lecture on “The (economic) Rise of Southeast Asia” by Hal Hill (Australian National University, Canberra). Hill argued that the Southeast Asian economy is currently on the rise, as evidenced by economic growth rates, rising incomes and living standards, the increase in average school attendance, and Southeast Asia’s rising share of global trade.

Hill highlighted the diversity of political systems and the region’s economic disparities, but also noted that against all odds there are policy areas in which Southeast Asia has performed well. Cases in point are export-oriented industrialization, resilience in coping with economic crises, successful transition to democracy in Indonesia and the Philippines, the quality of globally integrated infrastructure, and progress in regional integration. However, there are still issues of concern, such as educational reforms, demographic transition, rising inequalities, and environmental sustainability. Beyond the region, it is still contested among Southeast Asians how a working system of global governance should be shaped in order to successfully address the profound changes in the international economy. Hill also asked whether Asia is ready for global leadership and if there will be a cohesive group of nations able to exert such leadership. For the rest of the world this coincides with the question of whether the rise of Asia will be a zero sum game, something Hill denied.

The Changing Nature of Political Cooperation in Southeast Asia

The first session, convened by Jürgen Rüländ (University of Freiburg) and chaired by Mikko Huotari (MERICS, Berlin), concentrated on the changing of patterns of political cooperation in the region from a political science perspective. Addressing what turned out to be one of the central concerns of the conference, namely, Southeast Asia’s relations with China, Mark Beeson (University of Western Australia, Perth) asked whether ASEAN’s diplomatic culture will be able to cope with a rapidly rising China. He concluded that the key problem that ASEAN needs to overcome in order to respond to China’s growing importance is the ineffectiveness of its institutions, such as, for example, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). For Beeson, the most crucial obstacle to more effective regional cooperation lies in ASEAN’s recalcitrant retention of sovereignty norms.

Stefan Rother (University of Freiburg) approached ASEAN from the perspective of civil society organizations (CSOs). In his presentation, he highlighted a major dealignment between the discourse of an elite-driven ASEAN and people's concerns as voiced by CSOs. However, he identified dynamic alignments among these organizations potentially able to rectify ASEAN's democratic deficits. Building on current debates on the democratization of global governance, Rother presented his "alternative regionalism" approach. Transferring Benedict Anderson's concept of nations as "imagined communities" onto the regional level, Rother argued that regions are social constructs. "Alternative regionalism" implies visions of regionalism which do not serve as building blocks for a neo-liberal globalization and the objective of "carving out" of democratic spaces "from below." Yet his case study on the ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC) and the ASEAN Youth Forum demonstrated the limited political space available for civil society in democratizing ASEAN. Rother thus raised the crucial question of whether and how a region can become democratic if its member states are not.

In the second panel, chaired by Muhadi Sugiono (Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta), Pavin Chachavalpongpun (University of Kyoto) examined Thailand's foreign policy against the background of Sino-US rivalry and its effects on ASEAN. Reflecting on the latest coup in Thailand on 22 May 2014, Pavin argued that this particular domestic crisis had led to an intensified rivalry between China and the US in Thailand and the wider region. According to him, the responses of the two competitors may be categorized as interventionism versus pragmatism. The Chinese pragmatic approach could lead to shifting power relations in China's favor and could markedly affect ASEAN's cohesion. However, Pavin suggested that competition between China and the US could also have positive effects for Southeast Asia, such as encouraging other powerful actors such as Japan, India, or Australia to seek further engagement in the region.

Jürgen Rüländ also addressed the interplay between domestic and foreign policy and its consequences for the regional level. Applying a role theoretical model, he focused on the question of whether Indonesian democratization has changed the country's foreign policy role conceptions and thereby influenced policymaking on the regional level. Role theory captures the cognitive variables of the foreign policy process: the world views, values, commitments and objectives underlying foreign policymaking. Role concepts reflect enduring patterns with changes mainly occurring at critical junctures. Still, the steady negotiation and renegotiation of role concepts, the sometimes apparent inconsistency when considering multiple and context-specific roles of a state, and the diverging role concepts of individuals compared to collective identities (which may cause inter- and intra-role conflicts) are considered in the approach. Focusing on speeches by Indonesian political leaders in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) between 1960 and 2015, Rüländ demonstrated the diversification of Indonesia's role concept and the growing significance of democracy. Concerning the complex yet important question of the effects of Indonesia's foreign policy role on ASEAN, Rüländ pointed to various democracy-enhancing developments in ASEAN prominently promoted by the Indonesian government. Among these are the ASEAN Charter, the ASEAN Security Community, the Bali Concord II, and the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Still, the meaning of democracy in Indonesian role concepts appears to be ambiguous, as it is a localized vision of democracy which owes its specific form to the deeply socially entrenched influence of anti-liberal organicist concepts of state and society.

Salvador Santino Regilme (Northern Illinois University, De Kalb) took the opposite perspective when discussing the impact of foreign policy on domestic policy. He queried whether foreign aid could undermine human rights and examined this question in the context of the cooperation between the United States and the Philippines on counter-terrorism measures. Regilme argued that

the convergence of political interests and the policy preferences of donor and recipient governments, as well as the strength of the recipient government's domestic authority, crucially influence human rights outcomes.

Repositioning Alterity and Identity: Anthropological Perspectives

Convened by Judith Schlehe (University of Freiburg), the second session took an anthropological perspective. It focused on the intersubjective level of transcultural encounters reflected in social imaginaries. In a panel chaired by Anna Maria Wattie (Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta), Martin Slama (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna) studied the multiple positioning of Hadramis in Indonesia. The representation of Hadramis as a social group with roots in the Arabian peninsula is reflected by various terms applied to them, such as the term "*kampong arab*" referring to urban Hadrami settlements and the self-designation of a Hadrami-founded party that engaged in the national struggles of the early twentieth century called "Partai Arab Indonesia." In colonial times, Hadramis were categorized as "foreign orientals," which implied a social position "in between society" as opposed to "in the middle of society." In post-Suharto times, new tensions arose among different strands of Hadramis, who were partly attracted by Saudi Wahhabism while others sympathized with Shiism. After 9/11, they became increasingly associated with terrorist attacks and were represented as "extremists in the land of moderate Islam," as Slama put it, in reference to Sumit Mandal's analysis. Slama's case study on the Indonesian Hadrami community illustrates how alignments and dealignments with the Middle East inform their situation in Indonesia.

Olivia Killias (University of Zurich) started her presentation on migrants in Malaysia and Indonesia with a reference to the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370. Conspiracy theories surfaced in public debates on the reasons for this tragedy. One of them focused on two Iranian men who travelled without passports and were therefore suspected of being involved in the disappearance of the plane. These stories connected well with established anti-Shia stereotypes in Malaysia. Examining the situation for Iranian students in Malaysia, Killias reflected on their feelings of belonging with respect to their Muslim identity. What she found was a distinction between different strands of Islam which has major repercussions on the identity of Iranian students. "I cannot call myself Muslim in Malaysia; if I do, I get in trouble," one of her respondents stated. But it is also a myth that exclusion from Malaysian Sunni mainstream Islam facilitates intra-ethnic solidarity. In fact, Killias encountered wide-ranging suspicion among Iranian students. She explained this with reference to their prior experiences in Iran where they learned to have "two faces," implying that other Iranians also have "two faces." This is one of the main reasons why they seek relationships outside their community.

In the panel chaired by Ariel Heryanto (Australian National University, Canberra), Eva F. Nisa (Universitas Negeri, Jakarta) and Judith Schlehe (University of Freiburg) asked what imaginaries of alterity and identity Indonesian students of Al-Azhar University in Cairo derived from encounters with the Middle East. Combining Nisa's insider view of Al-Azhar students and Schlehe's outsider perspective on religious orientations and identifications connected with the Azharites, the presenters showed how far the students' understanding of Islam has been influenced by their religious studies in Cairo and how Indonesian students organize their everyday life in Cairo. By emphasizing the role of Azharites in promoting moderate Islam in Indonesia, which she juxtaposed with religious radicalism and secular liberalism, Nisa focused on the students' impact on religious thought in Indonesia. By contrast, Schlehe stressed the limits of religious education, which she explained with reference to lackluster class attendance and the segregated everyday life of

Indonesian students in Cairo: they spend most of their time in Indonesian organizations. Thus, transcultural encounters do not automatically create boundary transgressions and transnational alignment. Schlehe and Nisa suggested that the cultural and religious orientations mediated by Indonesian Azharites should be understood as related to a new positioning of the religious in the context of middle class spiritual economy and new subjectivities.

Evi Eliyanah (Australian National University, Canberra) and Mirjam Lücking (University of Freiburg) also addressed processes of othering concomitant to the representation of the “Arabic world” in Indonesia. They combined off- and on-screen perspectives on common narratives in order to elaborate the relationship between the representation of “Arabs” and identity building within Indonesia with regard to gendered moral visions. Lücking explored how pilgrims and labor migrants who have visited the Middle East classify their experiences. They distinguish themselves from Arab men, who are commonly projected as being harsh, racist, and feeling superior, and Arab women, who are portrayed as wearing full body veils or having no feeling of shame. The localization of an “Arab style” can also be observed among pilgrims, who mainly belong to the Indonesian middle class. In addition, Eliyanah illustrated how gendered representations of the “Arab World” are displayed in a range of Indonesian movies. The main narratives presented in the films refer to the question of what is considered appropriate for Muslims. Generally, Arab men are presented as violent and abusive towards women, while females are commonly portrayed either as victims of male violence or as immoral characters. The combination of both perspectives shows how the Arab “other” is contrasted against the Indonesian “self,” working as a reference point for the identification of good and evil and as evidence of the moral superiority of Indonesians. In addition, the presenters pointed out that the gender ideals are also related to class, as suggested by the challenging of hegemonic discourses by the labor migrants. Therefore, the poor are constructed as another “other” from which middle-class Indonesians sympathizing with “Pop Islam” differentiate themselves.

Political-Economic Consequences of Alignment and Dealignment in Localized Indonesia and the Philippines

The second day of the conference began with a session on the economics of alignment and dealignment. Convened by Günther G. Schulze (University of Freiburg) and chaired by Hal Hill, the main objective of this section was to identify the consequences of political alignment and its antipode, political rivalry, on political and economic outcomes in Indonesia and the Philippines.

A paper presented by Joseph Capuno (University of the Philippines, Quezon City) studied the effects of political competition on fiscal and economic outcomes in subnational Philippine jurisdictions. In the 1990s, the Philippines and Indonesia adopted political and economic reforms to deepen democratization and decentralization. The concomitant inclusion of new stakeholders in the political process was expected to lead to improved local policies and effective checks and balances among local government officials, potentially facilitating economic growth. However, past studies on the Philippines found an ambiguous relationship between political dynasties (a proxy for political competition) and local development. Using a panel dataset comprising province-level indicators of development, fiscal performance and political competition, Capuno showed that provinces with higher numbers of officials belonging to the same political clan receive higher per capita transfers for health, education and infrastructure services.

However, higher per capita transfers do not have a significant effect on provincial development. Whether this is due to a lack in the quality of spending, or transfers needing time to have an effect on provincial development indicators is subject to further investigation.

The paper by Gerrit Gonschorek (University of Freiburg) and Günther G. Schulze analyzed how political (non-)alignment of districts with the president and his party affect the distribution of financial transfers from the center to local jurisdictions. Indonesian districts differ substantially in socio-economic conditions, are highly dependent on central transfers and tales abound about the misuse of these on-budget transfers for electoral campaign financing. Gonschorek and Schulze analyzed whether these transfers are based on the need of local governments or on political alignment with the president. The empirical evidence suggests that time and district-specific effects have a significant influence on the amount of central-discretionary transfers to districts. By contrast, the needs of districts, such as the amount and quality of public service delivery and a district's economic development, only play a minor role in the distribution of central funds. Higher voter support for the presidential party only influences the transfers to districts within a certain range of vote-support and at low significance levels. However, first preliminary results show that districts with a mayor nominated from the same party as the president receive significantly more central discretionary transfers for infrastructure. A positive significant influence of geographical alignment with the president's home district could be indicative of ethnic or regional favoritism.

In a panel chaired by Krisztina Kis-Katos (University of Freiburg), Antonio Farfán-Vallespín (University of Freiburg) focused on the determinants of the re-election of mayors, vice mayors and councillors in Philippine municipalities. In his paper, Farfán-Vallespín paid particular attention to membership of a political dynasty and incumbency. The results suggest that both factors are significant but that incumbency is far more important for re-election than being a member of a political dynasty. This has important implications for political reformers. Usually, political dynasties are considered an obstacle to good governance and reform efforts are oriented towards curbing the power of these dynasties, albeit with little success so far. However, if the high incumbency rate is responsible for the perpetuation of dynasties, according to Farfán-Vallespín, reforms should focus on incumbency advantages.

In another paper, Joseph Capuno, Antonio Farfán-Vallespín and Günther G. Schulze examined the killings of journalists in the Philippines. Although the Philippines is a democratic country, it has the highest incidence of murder of journalists in Southeast Asia. Capuno et al. indicated that the probability of the murder of journalists can be predicted by institutional and economic factors. Particularly interesting is the correlation between the probability of the murder of journalists and the level of local corruption, the quality of local institutions and characteristics of the media in the province.

The final paper by Joseph Capuno and Christian von Lübke (Arnold-Bergstraesser Institute Freiburg) showed that good governance may be facilitated by elite competition. By comparing two Philippine cities (Danao and Lapu-Lapu, Cebu Province) with similar cultural, historical, and demographic backgrounds, yet with, at the same time, distinctly different elite constellations, Capuno and von Lübke demonstrated that more intense elite contests are accompanied by better governance outcomes. Although the country was a forerunner of democracy in Asia and has implemented far-reaching decentralization reforms, service and corruption levels have hardly improved. Scholars seeking explanations for these problems have often pointed to the tenacity of "cacique clientelism" – the highly uneven distribution of political power in national and subnational policy arenas.

The findings of Capuno and von Lübke confirm that, in the absence of credible judicial and societal controls, public performance remains contingent on the extent to which established elites keep each other in check.

Historical Perspectives on Transcultural Interactions in Southeast Asia

Convened by Sabine Dabringhaus (University of Freiburg), the last panels concentrated on transcultural processes of alignment and dealignment in Southeast Asia from a historical perspective. In a panel chaired by Nurul Ilmi Idrus (Hassanuddin University, Makassar), Agus Suwignyo (Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta) discussed *gotong royong* as a social, non-state institution of welfare and citizenship and its changing role in the process of Indonesian state formation. Using archival material and secondary literature as data sources, Agus suggested that although social institutions still work relatively effectively in providing welfare and citizenship, today their integrating nature has changed, with factors such as gender and social class shaping underlying practices. While these social institutions have already existed for a long time, the introduction of the *gotong royong* term by the Javanese changed the nature of communal service cooperation in Indonesia from an externally imposed mechanism for lower class people to a unifying point of identification and discourse about collective identity for the whole nation. Agus' preliminary evidence suggests that the institutionalization of *gotong royong* strengthens communal service cooperation, but stimulates consciousness of the individual's position vis-à-vis the state, potentially leading to a dealignment of society.

Katja Rangsviek (University of Copenhagen) examined why King Prajadhipok's ashes were returned to Thailand at the time they were. Her evidence suggests that the return of the ashes was intertwined with politics and the contemporary state of the Thai monarchy. When in 1932 a bloodless coup changed the governmental system in Thailand from absolute to constitutional monarchy, it was only a matter of time before King Prajadhipok and the new government clashed. Unsurprisingly, in 1935 the King abdicated the throne, becoming the first king in Thai history to have done so. He spent the remainder of his life in exile in England, where he passed away in May 1941. Simple funerary rituals were performed for his cremation. His ashes, however, remained in exile. It was to be another eight years before the king's remains could return to Thailand. By the time the ashes returned to Bangkok, the monarchy had regained some of its stature in Thai politics. Simultaneously, the return of a former king strengthened the institution. According to Rangsviek, this should be seen as one step in the process of reinventing the Thai monarchy and establishing its present omnipotence in Thai politics.

The last panel, chaired by Kiyoshi Fujikawa (University of Nagoya), focused on "Chineseness" in Southeast Asia. A presentation by Sai Siew Min (National University of Singapore) looked at a Chinese association in today's Indonesia, known locally as the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan (THHK). The THHK was first established in Batavia in 1900 and tried to establish modern schools teaching Chinese children Tjia-Im, or Mandarin. The idea of establishing the THHK was subsequently embraced by Chinese communities elsewhere in Java, as well as in other parts of the Dutch East Indies. At the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese communities in Java used the Malay-Hokkien (Fujian) term 'Tjia-Im' or 'Tjeng-Im' — literally meaning the "correct tone or pronunciation" — to refer to Mandarin. Notwithstanding existing research on the THHK movement, its language reforms remain poorly understood. Leaning on recent research findings, Sai argued that the THHK's language and educational reforms can be better comprehended by situating its development within what China historian Rebecca Karl has described as the "global moment" of Chinese nationalism, as

opposed to the archaic model of “overseas Chinese nationalism.” The THHK reinterpreted novel ideas circulating among Chinese nationalists, actively translating and disseminating them using the local Malay-Hokkien dialect. In addition, Sai argued that the THHK offers a significant example of how diasporic Chinese nationalism developed in a fully colonized setting and responded to events and dynamics different from those unfolding in semi-colonial China. Shut out collectively from the European community, piqued by Japanese attainment of European status, attacked by the Dutch *Ethical Discourse* and yet desirous of achieving parity with the Europeans in the colony, THHK leaders turned to value-laden discourses on cultural milieu, cultural competence, civilized behavior, upbringing, and education to search for a modernity distinct to their community. In this regard, Sai suggested that the THHK’s cultural nationalism is similar to nationalisms that developed in the colonial contexts of India and other parts of Southeast Asia, and therefore cannot simply be regarded as a species of nationalism originating from China.

Han Xiaorong (Lingnan University, Hong Kong) argued that state and non-state agents played significant roles in the cultural exchange between China and Vietnam in the pre-modern period. Whereas the actions of Chinese state agents in Vietnam in the pre-modern period were similar to the civilizing missions of modern colonialists, today the Chinese and Vietnamese states have become much more powerful than their pre-modern predecessors in regulating cultural interaction between the two countries. Chinese state agents played a more important role in spreading Chinese culture in Vietnam than in Japan and Korea. Although Sino-Vietnamese cultural interaction was bi-directional, it was asymmetric: Chinese influence on Vietnam was much stronger than Vietnamese influence on China. As a result, Vietnam today is still often described as the most Sinicized country among China’s neighbors.

Concluding Remarks

The conference contributions portrayed a region whose institutions and social fabric are in a state of accelerated flux. Established cultures of cooperation came under strain from increasingly tense contestation between a largely Western form of modernization and a strong backlash by forces seeking alternative responses to globalization. Each of these approaches to modernity results in divergent alignments of social forces, different forms of cooperation and inevitable dealignments with erstwhile coalition and cooperation partners. The result is a deep insecurity about the direction cultural change should take in order to cope with the largely external challenges facing the region. This holds true for the institutional setting at the regional level, where ASEAN navigates between a more EU-inspired model of regional cooperation and the informality norms propagated by the ASEAN Way, the region’s long established extant repository of cooperation norms. The same holds true for the local level where economic growth seems to be impeded by clientelist networks which in many cases still prevail over more legalistic approaches to the allotment of central state resources. Alongside this contest over cultural orientations and alignments lies increased interest in the Middle East, the Arab world and Middle Eastern Islam, even though – as the anthropological contributions suggest – when directly exposed to these cultures during the *hajj* or tertiary education, such new alignments are often seen in a critical light. In a region characterized by a high degree of structural diversity from the outset, this obvious lack of cohesion may also impede attempts to keep external forces at bay and to strengthen its global position.

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