SOUTHEAST ASIA STUDIES

Southeast Asia consists of the ten countries that lie between the Indian subcontinent and China. On the mainland of Southeast Asia are Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Insular Southeast Asia includes Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Singapore. While most of Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia) lies on the mainland, that country usually is considered part of insular Southeast Asia because the Malay population (the majority ethnic population) shares a common language and religion with much of the Indonesian population. The city-state of Singapore (on an island connected by a mile-long causeway to Peninsular Malaysia) was historically part of Malaysia, but because of its unique ethnic composition (three-quarters of the population is of Chinese origin), it is more similar to East Asia than to Southeast Asia.

While there are some common geographic and cultural features, diversity is the hallmark of the region. Incredible indigenous cultural variation has been overlaid by centuries of contact, trade, migration, and cultural exchange from within the region, from other parts of Asia, and for the past five hundred years from Europe (for general overviews of the region, see Osborne 1985; WethLEAN 1968). The common characteristic of mainland Southeast Asia is Buddhism, although there are very significant variations across and within countries: Islam is the majority religion in Indonesia, Brunei, and Malaysia, while Christianity is the major religion in the Philippines. The lowlands of both mainland and insular Southeast Asia tend to be densely settled, and wet (irrigated) rice agriculture is the predominant feature of the countryside. Rural areas are knitted together with small- and medium-sized market towns. The major metropolitan areas of the region (Jakarta, Bangkok, Singapore, Manila, Rangoon, Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City) are typically port cities or are located along major rivers. Many of these towns and cities have significant Chinese minorities (often intermarried with the local population) that play an important role in commerce. Every country has remote highland and mountainous regions that often are populated by ethnic minorities.

In terms of land area, population size, and cultural and linguistic diversity, Southeast Asia is comparable to Europe (excluding the former Soviet Union). By the year 2000, the population of Southeast Asia will exceed 500 million, about 8 percent of the world's total. Indonesia is the fifth most populous country in the world, while the oil-rich sultanate of Brunei (on the island of Borneo) is one of the smallest. The other large countries of the region—Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines—are more populous than all European countries except for the former Soviet Union and Germany. The sea (South China Sea and Indian and Pacific Oceans) surrounds much of the region, especially the immense Indonesian and Filipino archipelagoes. While the sea can be a barrier, the ocean and the rivers of the region are avenues that have fostered local and long-distance trade throughout history. Moreover, the ease of movement throughout the region seems to have shaped cultures that easily absorbed new ideas and immigrants and have been tolerant of diversity.

HISTORY

The contemporary political divisions of the region are largely a product of European imperialism, especially of the nineteenth century. Before European intervention, there were great regional civilizations, both agrarian states and maritime empires that waxed and waned over the millennium. The remains of the temple complexes of Angkor (Cambodia) and Pagan (Burma) rival the architectural achievements of any premodern world civilization. Early Western observers of the city of Melaka (a fifteenth-century maritime empire centered on the west coast of the Malayan peninsula) described it as more magnificent than any contemporary European city. These early polities were founded on intensive rice cultivation with complex irrigation systems, the dominance of regional and long-distance trade, or both. The region also has been deeply influenced by contacts with the great civilizations of India and China. The cultural influences from outside have invariably been transformed into distinctive local forms in different Southeast Asian contexts. Because relatively few written records have survived the tropical environment of Southeast Asia, historical research relies heavily on archeological investigations, epigraphs, and records from other world regions, especially Chinese sources.

European influence began in the sixteenth century with the appearance of Portuguese and Spanish naval forces, followed by the arrival of the
Dutch in the seventeenth century and then by that of the British and French. In the early centuries of contact, European powers were able to dominate the seas and thus limit the expansion of Southeast Asian polities, but they rarely penetrated very far inland from their coastal trading cities. All Southeast Asia was transformed, however, in the nineteenth century as the Industrial Revolution in the West stimulated demand for mineral and agricultural products around the globe. New economic organizations of plantations, mines, and markets led to large-scale migration of people and capital to frontier areas and to the cities of Southeast Asia. There was an accompanying flurry of imperialist wars to grab land, people, and potential resources. In a series of expansions, the British conquered the area of present-day Myanmar (Burma) and Malaysia, the Dutch completed their conquest of the East Indies (now Indonesia), and the French took the areas that formed their Indochina empire (present-day Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos). At the turn of the twentieth century, the United States defeated nationalist forces to take control of the Philippines just as the Spanish Empire was crumbling. Siam (Thailand) was the only indigenous Southeast Asian state to escape the grip of colonialism.

The political history of the region has not been stable. As Western countries moved toward more democratic social and political institutions over the first decades of the twentieth century, the colonists (British, Dutch, American, and French) constructed authoritarian dependencies in the tropics that were based on export economies and racial ideologies. Although there were stirrings of nationalist sentiment in the first half of the twentieth century, it was only after World War II that the nationalist forces were strong enough and the international environment favorable enough to bring political independence to the region. The critical turning point was the Japanese conquest and occupation of Southeast Asia from 1942 to 1945, which permanently shattered the myth of European superiority. The colonial powers returned after World War II, but they encountered popular nationalist movements that demanded the end of colonialism.

Independence was negotiated peacefully by the Americans in the Philippines and the British in Burma and Malaya, but nationalist forces had to wage wars of independence against the Dutch in Indonesia (1945–1950) and the French in Vietnam (1945–1954). The interplay of nationalist struggles, class conflicts, and East-West cold war rivalry had a marked influence on political developments in the region. In almost every country there were radical and communist movements that held the allegiance of significant sectors of the population. In several cases, communist parties were part of the nationalist movement but left (or were driven out of) the political arena as domestic and international tensions escalated. Vietnam was unique in that the nationalist movement was led by Communists. After the French were defeated in 1954 and agreed to grant independence to Vietnam, the United States intervened to set up a non-Communist Vietnamese state in the southern region of the country. After another twenty years of war and a million casualties, Vietnam was finally united as an independent state in 1975. Since 1975, however, political tension between the socialist states of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos and the other countries in the region has been the dominant feature of international relations there.

Domestic political developments within individual countries in the region have been no less dramatic. Governments have oscillated between authoritarian and democratic forms, with no linear trend. Behind the headlines of military coups, regional wars for autonomy, and “managed” elections have been complex political struggles among various contending groups defined by class, region, ethnicity, and kinship. These struggles have ranged from civil war to fairly open elections. Large-scale violence is not the norm, but massacres in Indonesia, Cambodia, and East Timor have been among the worst of such episodes in modern times. Popular civil protests against ruling elites in the Philippines and Burma had significant domestic and international reverberations. Neither academic scholarship nor political reporting has offered generalizations about or convincing interpretations of the postwar political change in Southeast Asia.

Many of the countries in Southeast Asia have experienced remarkable socioeconomic modernization in the postindependence era. This is most evident for the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Brunei. All indicators of socioeconomic development (gross national product, educational levels, occupational
structure, infant mortality) suggest that Southeast Asia has successfully narrowed the gap with the first world, while other regions of the third world have fallen farther behind. The reasons for the success of some countries and the economic stagnation in other countries are a matter of dispute. The East Asian model of state-sponsored export industrialization is widely discussed in policy and academic circles, but the parallels between East Asian and Southeast Asian economic development strategies are still a matter of considerable uncertainty. Few scholarly studies have examined the causes and consequences of the economic modernization of Southeast Asia.

THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Several theoretical concepts and empirical generalizations have arisen from studies of Southeast Asian societies that have relevance far beyond the region. Empirically, the most common cultural characteristic across the region is the relatively high status of women in Southeast Asian societies, especially compared with East Asia and South Asia. While women still face many social and cultural obstacles in Southeast Asia, the situation appears much different from that in the patriarchal societies of other Asian societies and the traditional female domesticity of many Western societies. While there are a few matrilineal societies in the region, Southeast Asian kinship systems are typically bilateral, with equal importance attached to the husband's and wife's families. The patrilocal custom of an obligatory residence of a newly married couple with or near the groom's family is largely absent in Southeast Asia. The residence of young couples after marriage seems to be largely a matter of choice or is dependent on relative economic opportunities. There is no strong sex preference for children in Southeast Asia, with both girl and boy children seen as desirable.

The relatively positive status of women was evident in earlier times. Reid (1988, pp. 146–172) reports that early European observers were struck by the active role of women in economic and political affairs in Southeast Asia. Traditional folklore also suggests that women play an active role in courtship and that female sexual expectations were as important as men's. Perhaps most unusual was the custom (reported in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) of inserting spurs or balls in male genitals to enhance the sexual pleasure of women (Reid 1988, pp. 148–151).

At present, women seem to be well represented in schools, universities, and employment in all modern sectors of the economy in almost every country in Southeast Asia. There is only a modest scholarly literature on the higher status of women in Southeast Asia (Van Esterik 1982), and few efforts have been made to explain the links between the traditional roles of women as productive workers in the rural rice economy and their relative ease of entry into the modern sector. Demographic research has revealed very rapid declines in fertility in several Southeast Asian countries, particularly Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. If the current pace of decline continues, replacement-level fertility (two children per woman) should be reached in the near future (Hirschman and Guest 1990).

AGRICULTURAL INVOLUTION

Scholarship on Southeast Asia often has reached beyond the boundaries of the region to influence debates over social science concepts, theory, and models. Perhaps most influential have been the books and articles on Indonesia by the anthropologist Geertz. His evocative concepts of the "theatre state," "thick description," and "agricultural involution" have stimulated debate and research in several social science disciplines, including sociology. His model of agricultural involution (Geertz 1968) has been one of the most provocative developments in scholarship on Indonesia over the last generation.

A strikingly bold thesis, agricultural involution is an attempt to explain how Java became one of the most densely settled populations in the world within a traditional agricultural economy. To address this question, Geertz presents an ecological interpretation of the evolution (involution) of Javanese social structure in the face of rapid population growth and Dutch colonialism within the constraints (and possibilities) of a wet rice economy. The colonial system prevented industrialization and the development of an indigenous entrepreneurial class. The traditional rice economy, however, could absorb a larger population because additional labor inputs in the maintenance of irrigation facilities, water control, weeding, and harvesting yielded marginal increments in
rice production. Over the decades, this refinement of traditional production technology (involution) led to an increasing rigidification of traditional Javanese culture, thus discouraging innovation and any efforts at social change and reinforcing the structural limits of the colonial system. Even after independence, when structural limits were lifted, the legacy of the past, as reflected in Javanese culture, remained.

Geertz's thesis remains highly controversial, and many of its components have been confronted with negative evidence (for a review of the debate, see White 1983; and Geertz 1984). For example, Geertz deemphasized social class divisions with his interpretation of "shared poverty" as the traditional social strategy. Most research has shown significant inequality of landholding and other socioeconomic dimensions in Javanese villages, although it is not clear if inequality is permanently perpetuated between families across generations. Even accepting many of the criticisms, agricultural involution is a seminal sociological model that should generate empirical research on the historical development of Asian societies.

THE MORAL ECONOMY

A classic question in social science involves the causes of revolution or rebellion. Neither Marxist theory, which emphasizes exploitation, nor relative deprivation theory seems to be a satisfactory model to explain the occurrence of revolutions or rebellions. The most sophisticated sociological theory of peasant rebellion is based on historical materials from Burma and Vietnam by the political scientist J Scott (1976) in *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Subsistence and Rebellion in Southeast Asia*. Scott argues that peasants rebel only when their normative expectations of a minimum subsistence level are not met. These conditions are more likely to occur when capitalist market relations and colonial states erode traditional societies and the reciprocal obligations of peasants and their patrons.

Scott's thesis has been criticized and hotly debated (Popkin 1979; Keyes 1983). One criticism is that Scott believes that peasants prefer traditional societies and are not responsive to economic opportunity. Scott acknowledges that peasants can be quite innovative and individualistic as long as their minimum subsistence is not at risk. This debate, however, does not really address the central theoretical contribution of Scott's thesis about the specification of the causes of peasant rebellion.

In a more recent study based on fieldwork in a rural Malaysian village, Scott (1985) examines how class antagonisms are displayed in everyday life. Given that rebellion is a very rare event in most societies, Scott calls attention to political, social, and linguistic behaviors that reveal the depth of descensus and potential social conflict but do not risk violent reaction from the state and powerful elites. In these two books and related publications, Scott has provided original interpretations of peasant political behavior in Southeast Asia and set a research agenda for scholars of other world regions and, more generally, the development of social theory.

CONCLUSION

Scholarship on Southeast Asia, whether in sociology or in other disciplines, has tended to focus on individual countries rather than on the region. Different languages (colonial and indigenous) as well as variations in religious traditions and political and economic systems have reinforced the image of a heterogenous collection of countries that is labeled a region largely by default. There is tremendous political, economic, and sociocultural diversity in the region; many of these differences, however, are a product of the colonial era and its legacy. The similarity of family systems and the status of women throughout Southeast Asia suggest some common historical and cultural roots for the region. There may well be other social and cultural parallels across Southeast Asia that will be revealed as more comparative research is undertaken (Wolters 1982).

Many indicators of development in Southeast Asia, including very low levels of mortality and almost universal secondary schooling, are approaching the prevailing standards of developed countries. Assuming that current socioeconomic trends continue, several countries in the region probably will follow Japan, Korea, and Taiwan along the path of development in the early decades of the twenty-first century. The study of these processes of modernization and the accompanying changes in politics, family structure, ethnic relations, and
other social spheres should make Southeast Asia an extraordinarily interesting sociological laboratory. Evolutionary—and sometimes revolutionary—social change continued throughout much of Southeast Asia in the 1990s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the socialist countries in the region, including Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, moved rapidly toward more market-driven economies. Several political regimes that appeared to be stable for long periods have been transformed. The “people power” popular protests that ended the Marcos regime in the Philippines in the 1980s was echoed by the peaceful transition of power from a military regime in Thailand in the early 1990s and by the ending of the Suharto regime in Indonesia in 1998.

For much of the 1990s, most of Southeast Asia experienced rapid economic growth and the major question was the emerging role of the new middle class (McVey 1992; GIRLING 1996). This trend was halted in late 1997 by the “Asian economic crisis” that hit the region and affected Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia in particular. Both the causes of this crisis and its consequences are currently the subject of much debate. The change of regime in Indonesia and political protests in Malaysia may be the most visible long-term impact may be more profound.

Scholarship inevitably lags behind current events. Several important publications, including the second volume of Reid’s (1990, 1995) Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450–1680 and a much expanded version of Wolters’s classic History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives 1999, offer a new understanding of the history of the premodern era. Although the definition of Southeast Asia as a region sometimes has been considered arbitrary, historical studies show common cultural, political, and social forms in many places throughout the region.

One of the defining features of the region has been the relatively easy absorption of peoples, ideas, and cultural practices from elsewhere. In the twentieth century, assimilation into Southeast Asian societies became more difficult with the creation of political and social barriers. These issues are illuminated with considerable insight in Chirot and Reid’s (1997) edited collection that compares the experience of the Chinese in Southeast Asia with that of the Jews in central Europe.

Research on Southeast Asia over the last decade also has been influenced by Anderson’s (1991) Imagined Communities, a book originally published in the 1980s. Although Anderson is a specialist on Southeast Asia, his book on the development of nationalism provides comparisons from across the world.

REFERENCES
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SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET SOCIOLOGY

In prerevolutionary Russia, sociology occupied a marginal position. The state universities offered no instruction in the field, but there was a solid intellectual tradition of historical and theoretical sociology (Maxim Kovalievsky, Nikolai Mikhailovsky, Evgeny de Robert), the sociology of law (Leon Petrajzsky, Pitirim Sorokin), and the sociology of social problems (living conditions of industrial workers and peasants, public health, crime and prostitution in the cities). Beginning in the 1860s, the provincial intelligentsia initiated a kind of social movement, Zemskaja statistika (Statistics for Local Administration). Since official governmental statistics were unreliable, local statisticians made systematic surveys of households, daily life and public health conditions, and the reading preferences of the population (N. A. Rubakin). A modern system of sampling was elaborated by the statistician A. A. Chuprov for those surveys; K. M. Takhtarev introduced the concept of statistical sociological methods in social research.

In 1916, the Russian Sociological Society was founded, along with the “Sociological Institute,” where M. M. Kovalievsky, K. M. Takhtarev, N. I. Kareev, and P. A. Sorokin gave lectures. Western sociological classics by Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Gabriel Tarde, Gustave Le Bon, Georg Simmel, Lester Ward, and others were available in Russian translations. Most important European sociological papers were immediately translated in the series New Ideas in Sociology. There was also a well-developed ethnography and a literary genre of sociological journalism.

The Bolshevik Revolution provided strong stimulus to sociological reflection and empirical social research. In the Soviet government decree “About the Socialist Academy of the Social Sciences,” drafted in May 1918, Lenin (1962, p. 372) stressed the need “to organize a series of social researches” and called it “one of the most urgent tasks of the day.” However, the Bolsheviks tolerated research only from Marxist and procommunist positions. In the early postrevolutionary years, censorship was relatively weak or inefficient. For example, Sorokin not only established the first sociological laboratory in Fertogod University but also succeeded in publishing (illegally) his two-volume System of Sociology (Sorokin 1920), for which he was awarded a doctorate in April 1922. He also conducted important empirical investigations on mass starvation in the districts of Samara and Saratov and examined its influence on various aspects of social life and human behavior.

However, this liberalism or negligence on the part of the authorities was short-lived. In autumn 1922, a group of leading Russian intellectuals, including Sorokin and other prominent social philosophers, was expelled from the county, ending non-Marxist sociology in Soviet Russia.

The tightening ideological control proved detrimental to socialist and Marxist social research as well. Nevertheless, the 1920s was a fruitful period both in empirical research and in theoretical-methodological work. The most important theoretical contributions were in the field of economic sociology (A. V. Chajnov, N. D. Kondratjev). There were also interesting studies on the social organization of labor, the budgeting of time in work and leisure activities (S. G. Strumilin), population dynamics, rural and urban ways of life (A. I. Todorsky, V. E. Kabo), marriage and sexual behavior, social psychology (V. M. Bekhterov), social medicine, and other topics. All this research was finished by the early 1930s.

The Stalinist totalitarian system was incompatible with any kind of social criticism, problem-oriented thinking, or empirical research. Most creative original thinkers were liquidated, and their