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The Unfolding Multifold Development of Contemporary Southeast Asia

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The eleven countries of modern Southeast Asia, home to 620 million people, are remarkable in their economic, social, political, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. It is no understatement that the region's development path has been dynamic, often tumultuous, and driven by powerful local, national and global forces. During the period of colonialism, in the subsequent nation building era played out in the lengthening shadow of the cold war, as well as now during the most recent wave of neoliberal globalization, Southeast Asia has been buffeted by powerful external forces that have interacted with diverse and oftentimes divisive national politics and regional dynamics, creating tensions that are well-documented (e.g. Beeson 2004). At first in response to traditional security threats, and more recently to ally non-traditional security concerns, the governments of the region have increasingly sought cooperation within the Association for Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) that was inaugurated in 1967 with five member states and now has a membership of ten Southeast Asian states, with only East Timor yet to join. Southeast Asia's economic regionalization is set to deepen with the conclusion of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 that is heralded by the governments as an important milestone. Yet social and cultural regionalism and the emergence of a common regional identity still appears a long way off, and the region's civil society name a long list of social, environmental and political issues arising from the region's present development path.

In this special edition of Thammasat Review, nine papers first presented at the International Conference on International Relations and Development held at Thammasat University in May 2011 offer a snap shot of the range of meanings, actors and processes of development in Southeast Asia, together with neighboring Southwest China. They examine a range of themes including: sources of economic growth, for

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example industry, tourism and remittances from migration; the environmental and social consequences of development; the role of government, civil society and regional organizations such as ASEAN within new processes of democratization and accountability; as well as critical consideration of the wide-ranging and often contradictory meaning of the notion of development itself. In this introductory article, we seek to situate the papers within the broader trends of Southeast Asia's contemporary development.

The 1960s witnessed the rapid industrialization and economic growth of the Asian Tigers, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea. This first wave of industrialization was followed by the so-called late developmental states of Southeast Asia, namely Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia (Rasiah and Schmidt, 2010). Starting with policies seeking to build up and protect domestic industries and attract foreign direct investment (FDI), the late developmental states became increasingly export orientated and liberalized as the Southeast Asia region was integrated into regional and global production networks. The automotive industry has been a key sector for most of the late developmental states, attractive for its backward linkages and high-technology and high-premium products. Wan-Ping Tai and Po-Chih Hung in their article on the internationalization of Thailand's automotive industry, offer a political economic analysis of the sector's growth from the 1960s to present. By contrasting the role of the strong states of the Asian Tigers with the comparatively weaker states of the late developmental states, which lacked autonomy from business interests, Tai and Hung offer insight into the policies and politics of Thailand's state towards the automotive business and its engagement with overseas investors and the global economy. Tai and Hung conclude that Thailand has been able to lever a benefit from its "later entrants" status into the global automotive industry, such that whilst it has not created its own automotive brands or become a global leader capable of changing the world's production system, nonetheless, as Asia's third largest car exporter and the largest in ASEAN, the automotive sector has contributed significantly to Thailand's industrialization. With an ambitious vision of being the "Detroit of Asia", it remains to be seen whether and how the Thai auto-industry will achieve that goal considering the on-going political divisiveness engulfing Thailand over the past 5 years, needless to say external factors of drastic changes in the region and the global economic situation.

Accompanying the region's rapid industrialization and economic growth has been growing pressure on the region's natural resources. Industrial development and its infrastructure, such as roads, dams, power stations and mines, are fragmenting and polluting ecosystems (Hirsch and Warren, 1998). Increasing forest and wetland loss, soil degradation, and fish stock depletion threaten to undermine the ecological foundations upon which the region's sustainable development depends. There have been counter-movements seeking to protect environmental quality and community

health; for example, in Thailand, in 2009, proposed FDI with an economic value of US$9 billion into Thailand's heavily polluted Ma Tha Phut industrial estate was blocked by the Administrative Court following a complaint by local communities until a number of precautionary measures were completed, including Health Impact Assessment studies (Fuller, 2009). Yet, as highlighted in the article by Wu Yunmei, Anna Lora-Wainwright, and Zhang Yiyun, the extent to which local communities are willing to suffer industrial pollution is complex and place-specific. In their anthropological study of Baocun village in the Southwest of China where a major fertilizer factory was built three decades ago, Wu, Lora-Wainwright and Zhang examine the logic of villagers' action in experiencing continuous and at times serious pollution from the factory. Their study reveals how economic growth in the village due to the factory, which is valued by the villagers, articulates with a discourse of development that makes the accompanying pollution appear inevitable. Whilst health problems persist in the village that are very likely linked to the presence of the factory, local politics combine with the villagers' lack of resources to 'scientifically' demonstrate these health impacts, and result in the villagers' strategy to maximize their economic benefit from the factory through pollution fees and compensation arrangements for serious pollution incidents and to localize the industrial pollution problem to within certain acceptable bounds through carefully measured protests, rather than call for the factory's closure.

Whilst much of the environmental consequences of China's drive for development have been located within China itself, some environmental impacts have spilled over into neighboring Southeast Asia. The Mekong River, called the Lancang (turbulent) River within China, is one of four major international rivers shared between China and Southeast Asia. It traces its 4,900 kilometer path southwards from its source in the Himalayan Tibetan plateau through Yunnan Province of China, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, before emptying into the South China Sea. China has plans to build a cascade of up to eight hydropower dams in Yunnan Province; to date three dams have been completed, with two more under construction. These dams have essentially been built without consultation with downstream countries; China holds observer status rather than full membership to the intergovernmental Mekong River Commission (MRC), formed in 1995 between Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam to cooperate on sharing the Mekong River. Together with a navigation project that blasted rapids in the upper stretch of the river, the dams have created transborder hydrological and ecological impacts that have affected the livelihoods of downstream riparian communities. In her article, Pichamon Yeophantong examines China's role in the transnational water governance of the Lancang-Mekong River, viewed through the lens of interests, power and responsibility. Reflecting on China's modernization drive, Yeophantong explains how domestically China has prioritized economic growth and its associated infrastructure, including large hydropower dams, that had serious environmental consequences and impacts on China's riparian communities livelihoods.

China's modernization has been informed by a viewpoint that nature is to be controlled, and this has in turn has influenced how China understands its roles and responsibilities towards the Lancang-Mekong River, in particular how it claims legitimacy to develop the dam cascade for the country's development. Recognizing China as the "upstream power" as well as the region's "paramount power" ,Yeophantong focuses in particular on the notion of "responsibility" and considers how the state has a responsibility to its own population as well as to other states. Yeophantong explores this notion through juxtaposing the dual-imperatives of China's right to develop versus neighboring countries expectations that China will share the regional commons. In examining the discourses of both China and the downstream states, together with that of "Mekong civil society" and local communities, Yeophantong suggests that China's development-led discourse has not yet been fundamentally challenged both because the downstream states themselves are pursuing a similar development paradigm to China and due to the lack of a strong multi-stakeholder institutional framework for governing the Lancang-Mekong that weakens the ability of downstream civil society to hold their own respective governments or the Chinese government to account. In conclusion, Yeophantong suggests that this is a case of responsibility "derogation" rather than responsibility failure on the part of China, which does not deny ecological responsibility but privileges national development above it - as a strategic move to escape its obligations to the Mekong community – and that greater *institutionalized* shared responsibility is required by all governments for the river's protection.

Another major environmental - and social - challenge faced by Southeast Asia is climate change. Economic growth, accelerating urbanization, a growing population, and changing life styles have all contributed towards the region's growing green-house gas emissions. At the same time, the region is also vulnerable to the impacts of rising sea levels, changing climatic patterns and extreme weather events (Lebel et al, 2009). Whilst the ASEAN is a regional organization of growing importance to the region's governments, as discussed in the article by Emmy Anne B. Yanga, in the global climate change negotiations to date the member governments of ASEAN have not negotiated with a common position. Using Securitization Theory, Yanga assesses the extent to which climate change has been collectively securitized through the 'speak-acts' of ASEAN's official statements and 'emergency measures' in the form of ASEAN's structural responses and the creation of on-the-ground programs. Yanga finds that despite a growing number of speech-acts since 2007, it has only been since September 2009 that an ASEAN Working Group on Climate Change was created, whilst adequately funded on-the-ground programs are sporadic and inadequate. Yanga concludes that the ASEAN government's view point and approach towards climate change remains state-centrist and follow the normative principle of the ASEAN Way, which act as barriers to the coordinated response required given the magnitude of the threat that climate change represents. In fact, the most immediate challenge of environmental security in the region is the increasing threat of haze caused by forest

clearing, which is now becoming a critical transborder issue. Climate change meanwhile has already started to be tackled by global institutional mechanisms.

Alongside growth in domestic economic activities, migrant workers' remittances are another vital and growing source of income for many countries in Southeast Asia (ADB, 2006). Whilst the push and pull factors of migration itself are multiple and intertwined, economic factors are often an important consideration. Southeast Asian migrant workers migrate both to relatively wealthier neighbors, for example from Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia to Thailand's fishing, construction and manufacturing industries, and also to wealthier countries outside the region including to Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and the Gulf States. For countries such as the Philippines the economic remittances generated constitute over 10% of the country's GDP, and are nowadays seen as an important national development strategy for economic growth and skill transfer. Less researched, however, are the social changes that occur when migrant workers return home to their communities due to "social remittances", namely ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital. In a study on Javanese migrant workers returning from South Korea to their village in Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY) province, Indonesia, Ratih Pratiwi Anwar examines the impacts of both economic and social remittances. Anwar finds that an average monthly wage in South Korea eighteen times the provincial minimum wage level in DIY province allowed for Javanese migrant workers to accumulate significant savings that were subsequently invested in production, consumption, and education on their return, as well as contributed to village development programs. Social remittances that migrant workers identified to Anwar to have been acquired during their stay in South Korea included work practices such as stronger discipline, diligence, and commitment to hard work, which although also present in Javanese society are stronger in South Korea. Anwar concludes that as a result of their migration and the economic and social remittances accrued, the migrant workers have seen long-term improvements in their household incomes and also benefit from an improved social standing within their village.

Tourism is another important source of revenue in Southeast Asia that is often portrayed as an opportunity for broader development. The region's tourism industry caters for a wide range of tourists, from mass-tourism beach holidays, to specialist niches of ecotourism and community tourism. Themes that inspire the tourist's imagination of the region include nature, community, culture and ancient civilizations. Thailand presently earns the largest revenues from tourism in Southeast Asia, in 2005 worth US$9,591 million that is equivalent to 5.4% of Thailand's GDP, but it is Cambodia with revenues of US$832 million that earns the largest proportion of its GDP from tourism, equivalent to 15.1%, and that has the largest annual growth rate of international tourists (PATA, 2006). Whilst many tourists to Cambodia seek to explore the incredible Angkor Wat complex or visit the beaches of Sihanoukville, Jane Reas in her article examines the less well-known orphanage tourism industry. Locating her

research within the growth of holidays that offer well-intentioned Westerners volunteer experiences in exotic settings, Reas explores the problematic relationship that emerges between the orphanage tourism industry and the needs of Cambodia's poor children. By first developing a conceptual perspective on contemporary tourism from notions of the ideal vacation and tourist identity, Reas identifies how an expanding and professionalized volunteer tourism industry has produced an orphanage experience that commodifies Cambodia's orphans, who become objectified as the "adorable innocents" of the tourist's rescue fantasies. Reas suggests that whilst the orphanage tourists themselves seek to distance themselves from the mainstream tourist, in the end the motivations and pursuits of the orphanage tourist and the mainstream holidaymaker share much in common. This leads Reas to conclude that "Until the complicity of the tourist in the fundamental inequalities between the needy and the benevolent are confronted, the issues faced by Cambodia's poor and orphaned children will lack the attention it really deserves."

As the articles above demonstrate, there are many facets to development, such that the very definition of development often remains contested. Differing interpretations include development as a normative vision, a historical process of societal change, a deliberate intervention by government or non-government organizations, or as empowerment from the bottom up. That development implies change to society and culture also implies disruption and loss of traditional values, most likely with winners and losers. Often times, development is equated to modernization, or to quantifiable socio-economic development metrics. Chambers (1997) offers the definition that development is "good change," although this mischievously but purposely leaves the question open to how "good" is to be defined, and, critically, who defines good, with Chambers arguing that it should be those who are to be developed through their own participation in the development process itself. In a novel and subtle approach to interrogating the principle and practice of development, Valerie Dzubur offers the concept of solicitude - the mutual exchange of self-esteem and self-respect among human beings that "brings together the elements of personal and collaborative identity, relationship, and a commercial market in the practical expression of a just livelihood." In viewing the history, politics, and socioeconomic development of Lao PDR through an ontological lens, Dzubur asks questions of meaning, community relationships, and identity to explore the concept of solicitude through the life-journey of Mrs. Kommaly Chanthavong, the visionary and driving force behind a silk farm and weaving enterprise in Ziengkhouang province on Lao PDR's Phongsavan plane. Mrs. Chanthavong offers to villagers from a variety of ethnic groups hands-on teaching to help them set up their own silk weaving business, the products of which are sold by not-for-profit companies in Luang Prabang and Vientiane, and beyond. Dzubur suggests, however, that the real success of the enterprise is the creation and support of a community engaged in a 'just livelihood' where, at the same time, socio-economic development is also achieved. Reflecting on the notion of solicitude, Dzubur concludes

that development practitioners need to move from "a relationship of advocacy, which reflects power, to a relationship of solicitude which reflects love of another worthy human being that is capable of acting on their own behalf."

Of all the countries in Southeast Asia, no other country is presently undergoing such profound and rapid change as Myanmar. The first elections in 20 years were held in November 2010 that created a nominally civilian parliament dominated by the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party. Whilst these elections were correctly widely criticized by election observers, the elections were immediately followed by the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest. Since then, milestones abound including the suspension of the Myitsone dam in September 2011, the release of hundreds of political prisoners since October 2011, a ceasefire agreement with the Karen National Union in January 2012, and the National League for Democracy's re-entry into parliamentary politics in April 2012. The catalysts and consequences of this apparent transition from military rule to civilian parliamentary democracy are debated amongst scholars, journalists and many other commentators alike. In her article, Maaike Matelski examines the relationship between Myanmar's civil society and their international donors seeking to achieve "democratization from below." Critically discussing the nature of civil society in Myanmar, Matelski draws a contrast between Western conceptions of civil society that are typically understood to be non-political and voluntary organizations, with the many civil society organizations in Myanmar that are often affiliated to a specific ethnic or religious group, may endorse political parties and candidates, and whose staff may even leave the organization subsequently to take up political positions. Matelski argues that a division between politics and civil society in Myanmar is artificial, which is important for civil societies' international donors to acknowledge and work with. During and since the 2010 election, Matelski suggests that more space has been created for civil society to engage citizens on discussion about politics and democratic values through their civic education activities, often stimulating "subtle forms of empowerment and awareness raising" .Ongoing challenges faced by Myanmar's civil society include external conditions, for example the overarching governance environment and a continued lack of trust, and challenges internal to civil society for example rivalries, contradicting strategies and perceptions of civil society elitism. Despite these challenges, Matelski concludes that democratization from below might foster democratization from above.

Whilst change is most dynamic and visible at present in Myanmar, all countries in the region have experienced important political changes in their recent past. Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia and Singapore have stumbled through processes of democratization, whilst Lao PDR and Vietnam became and remain socialist autocracies yet with their economies increasingly market-orientated. Countries such as Thailand and the Philippines also face ongoing internal conflicts and popularist politics, and in both countries democratically elected leaders have recently been

displaced; in Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006, and in the Philippines Joseph Estrada in 2001. In his paper, Aries Arugay, examines the phenomena of "civil society coups," in which elements of a country's civil society act in alliance with the military - either formally or implicitly due to political alignment - to institute a change of elected leadership through non-democratic or extra-constitutional means. Arugay takes the well-known cases of Thaksin in Thailand and Estrada in the Philippines, together with Chavez in Venezuela in 2002. Arugay suggests that there are three necessary conditions for a "civil society coups": an anti-systemic executive in power, which tends to reduce existing rights and liberties, implemented on a popularist agenda that is politically polarizing; weak democratic institutions, for example, legislative assemblies or the judiciary, which leaves civil society actors as the remaining actor to counter the power of the incumbent government; and, finally, a military that has a past history of intervention in politics, often claiming legitimacy as "guardians of the nation state." In his comparative analysis, Arugay highlights how Estrada, Chavez, and Thaksin came to power through challenging elite-orientation weak democratic regimes with popularist policies that appealed to a disenchanted wider electorate. In each case, declines in popular performance ratings or loss of legitimacy, due to corruption or abuse of power scandals, and the failure of democratic accountability mechanisms precipitated a series of events that involved civil society. These ultimately resulted in a form of military intervention, ranging from a withdrawal of allegiance in the Philippines to a military rebellion in Venezuela and a military takeover of the government in Thailand. Arugay's paper carefully explores the nuances in the complexity and contradictions of civil society that claims their legitimacy as a "defender of democracy" that includes the need for political accountability, good governance and rule of law, and yet can also act to stoke political crisis and create political impasses leading to non-democratic means of removing elected leaders, even those with a strong electoral mandate and popular support.

The articles in this special edition of Thammasat Review capture the unfolding of the multi-fold dimensions of contemporary development in Southeast Asia. The region has entered into a period of comparative peace and stability, although cross-border skirmishes occasionally occur and domestically a range of tensions persist. Located at the center of a "Rising Asia," there are many reasons for the people of the region to be optimistic – although, if lessons are learned from the recent past, this optimism should be tempered by due caution. Overall, whilst economies continue to grow and indicators of human development are improving for many people, development remains uneven and the looming challenges of widening economic and political inequality and ensuring environmental sustainability are yet to be seriously tackled. Simmering and on occasion explosive discontent of the past status quo has led to recent growing political polarization in a number of Southeast Asia's wealthier and more democratic countries, demonstrating the need for economic growth to be shared

fairly and broader development goals envisioned and enacted through politically inclusive means if long lasting prosperity and peace is to be achieved.

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