Project Southeast Asia

"Contemporary Issues in Southeast Asia"
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Panel:
State Power

1. **Deficiency By Design: The Coalitional Origin of Thailand's Inefficient Bureaucracy**

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This article examines causes and configurations of Thailand's state formation in the late nineteenth century. Dominant explanations attribute the origin of inefficient bureaucracy in Thailand (known at the time as Siam) either to the lack of external threats (e.g. colonisation that would have generated radical change) or the nature of social norms (e.g. Theravada Buddhism, social hierarchy). Nonetheless, we argue that Siam should be regarded not as an independent, non-colonised state, but as a semi-colonial state functioning as both prey (to western colonisers) and predator (against local territories). It was the struggle between three competing coalitions within the elite circles (Old Siam, Conservative Siam and Young Siam) subject to the semi-colonial contexts that shaped institutional and policy outcomes, among which were the bureaucratic structure. When the Siamese state was dissected into institutional configurations, the "inefficient" components of the bureaucracy (i.e. too centralised, bloated, overlapping departments, corrupt practices and ambiguous law enforcement) were an outcome of calculated political moves and compromises by King Chulalongkorn, the architect of the country's modern bureaucracy. These "inefficient" structures were actually very functional for the King in creating the absolutist state in the 1890s. Our findings carry the implications for the debates over state formation and the theory of institutional change.

2. **Sociological Analysis of State Policy Behaviour in the making of Regional Policy in Migrant Workers Protection: the case of Indonesia and the Philippines in ASEAN**

Anisa Santoso
(PhD Candidate, Institute for Asia Pacific Studies, University of Nottingham)

ASEAN has been moving progressively in pushing forward integrative policies in different areas of free market and economy. In contrast policy integration in areas of social protection, especially the protection of migrant workers has had little progress since member countries confirmed their commitment for it in 1994. This

development is contradictory to the fact that ASEAN member countries has around 13.5 million of their nationals working as migrant workers all over the world, with 5 million of them working in other countries within region. Indonesia and the Philippines are the major sending countries for these workers with 5.9 million of their workers sent to countries around the world. More than fifteen years after the commitment to regulate migrant workers protection was established member countries of this regional association still have not reached an agreement on how to frame the policy. Major workers sending countries Indonesia and the Philippines took the role of initiator for most policy proposals concerning this matter, with Indonesia especially playing the historical role of founder and "facilitator."

From the initiatives of the two major sending countries in 2007 ASEAN members expressed further commitment to the cause by agreeing on the Declaration for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. Despite high hopes the Declaration remain piece meal and preoccupied with side issues of terminology. Despite their historically strong stance in the association, both of Indonesia and the Philippines' role to push forward the policy agreement have also become unclear in the three years after the Declaration. These facts build the basis for the puzzle in this paper and lead the author to the question; Why have Indonesia and the Philippines not been able to push forward a coherent working regional policy to protect migrant workers?

This paper looks into dynamics within the domestic politics of both Indonesia and the Philippines from 1994 to 2009 to seek for elements within their domestic politics that affected the progress for a regional protection policy for migrant workers. Informed by recent fieldwork in Indonesia and the Philippines, the author revealed how societal influences inform government priorities in foreign policy concerns. Using sociological approaches, in particular sociological institutionalism, this paper seeks to examine the roles of institutions within a state in affecting foreign policy. By investigating this aspect the enquiry looks to reveal the extent of which dominating social forces within the two countries' support the idea of establishing a regional policy to protect migrant workers and how this corresponds to policy dynamics on the regional level.

3. Imagining Language: The Shifting Position of Prestige Chinese Dialects Occupy in Singapore

Deborah Cheong
(Postgraduate/University of Oxford)

Singapore, at once a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-lingual society, has always concerned herself with language planning. Besides promoting English as a neutral *lingua franca* to unite the different races, the Singaporean government has advocated the reduction of Chinese dialect usage to coalesce the various Chinese dialect groups. The oft-made argument for this was that a divided Chinese community would be detrimental not only to the survival of the Singaporean-Chinese population, but would also endanger the viability of a sovereign Singapore nation. Efforts to eradicate the use of Chinese dialects, helped by the stigma associated with their use and reinforced by social stratification, have thus far been successful in achieving this goal. Since

these methods have been couched within the framework of the larger goal of achieving a united and harmonious Singapore, language is repeatedly made a repository of culture but yet has never been divorced from the nation-state. In this paper, I consider the imaginary of language as culture and identity by examining the process of language shift away from Chinese dialects in Singapore. Using case-studies and socio-linguistic surveys, I ask what the dominant causes behind variation in Chinese dialect use are and discuss the policy implications of such language shift patterns. I argue that the changing attitudes toward Chinese dialects, whether at the global or local level, affect the individual's and the government's linguistic choice patterns, influencing the imaginary of language and thus informing and participating in the process, together or otherwise, of imagining culture and identity in Singapore.