

Scholarly Viewpoints, with Hans-Dieter Evers

ABOUT HANS-DIETER EVERS

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IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT WOULD BE THE CURRENT TREND OF YOUR DISCIPLINE; SPECIFICALLY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION?

Since Victor King's breath-taking tour de force on interdisciplinary Southeast Asian area studies in this journal (King 2013), what else is there to add to his erudite exposition? As my core discipline is sociology, I will concentrate on this niche area as far as it deals with the Asia Pacific region, or as many of us would prefer, Southeast Asia.

Since the early 1900s anthropology and history were the leading social science disciplines, with economics, political science and sociology following with a few early works later on. Though few in numbers, several of these studies had an impact beyond the confines of Asia Pacific studies, reaching out into core areas of their respective disciplines. Furnivall's studies of colonial administration in the Netherlands Indies and British Burma, Willem Wertheim's and Boeke's work on Southeast Asian colonial

society created concepts that found their way into general sociology. Concepts like "dual or plural societies" and "Eastern societies" were picked up and become part of basic concepts in the sociological study of societies. This impact has waned and sociological studies on Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific region have lost their international comparative appeal. These basic concepts that originated from early Southeast Asian sociology, have vanished from the international scene and hardly any of the many contemporary works on Southeast Asia and the Pacific are cited in works on social theory, or in sociological studies on Latin America, Africa, North America or Europe. But at least in contrast to anthropology, sociologists have been spared from accusations of "orientalism" or of being, at least in its origins a "colonial, imperialist" science. In contrast sociology, including the sociology of Southeast Asia, has been seen as rather critical of those in power.

IMPACT OF THE DISCIPLINE ON THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION; 'WHAT', 'HOW', 'WHY', ETC?

"Asia Pacific" is a very political concept, picked up by American political scientists and propagated by the U.S. State Department and Department of Defence to support American claims to the U.S. sphere of influence around the Pacific Ocean and its bordering Asian countries, first of all the Philippines as a former U.S. colony. The concept was further strengthened through the foundation of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the American-dominated forum for 21 Pacific Rim countries that seeks to promote free trade and economic cooperation throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Countries "in the U.S. Pacific Command area of responsibility" extend from Australia and Brunei to Vanuatu, Vietnam and the U.S. (Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies 2015).

The "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" (Dai-tō-a Kyōeiken), announced by the foreign minister Hachirō Arita on 29 June 1940 covered most of "Asia Pacific" and laid claim to this vast area by the Imperial Japanese government. Shortly thereafter, in 1947, the so called nine-dash-line was drawn around most of the South China Sea to signal China's claim to a sphere of influence, short of a territorial claim to the waters south of China. The social and political construction of the concept of an Asia Pacific area has gained new relevance in the current conflicts on access to the South China Sea, which is defined by the U.S. Pacific Command as an extension of the American dominated Pacific Ocean rather than a

Mediterranean sea south of China, or a ASEAN "Nusantara" (Evers 2014). The concept has also been adopted by several Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and Japanese universities, which have established Asia-Pacific Studies institutes and programmes, whereas most universities in the European Union and in ASEAN are using Southeast Asia to label their respective programmes. The political concept of "Asia Pacific" is of little relevance to empirical sociological and historical studies. As Nicholas Tarling has opined, "The concept of the Asia-Pacific region seems unlikely to spur on the writing of a history of the Asia-Pacific region" (Tarling 2012: 176).

On the other hand, Durkheimian sociology, "labeling theory" and "social constructionism" provide important sociological theories, which could be profitably used in the study of Southeast Asia, the "Asia Pacific" and their respective socio-political construction.

Political sociology, political geography and political science are still in the forefront of strengthening the concept of "Asia Pacific Studies" in contrast to the old established "Southeast Asian Studies." This point of view is, of course, not directed against the good intentions of the *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, though I admit I feel uneasy about the designation of the journal.

YOUR COMMENTS ON THE STATE OF RECENT (LAST 2-3 DECADES) SCHOLARSHIP OF THE DISCIPLINE?

The state of the sociology of Southeast Asia as of 2007 has been very well summarised by Victor King in an extremely useful text book (King 2008). Among many other aspects he shows that there are several issues that had remained unresolved so far. Sociologists were and are still debating the nature of Southeast Asian urbanism, whether ethnicity or class determines the social structures of Southeast Asian societies (Shamsul 1999), or whether modernisation or globalisation theory explains Southeast Asian development. He also points to the general lack of comparative studies on the region. The work by James Scott on peasant rebellions (Scott 1977), and my own earlier comparative studies on the bureaucratisation of Southeast Asia (Evers 1987) or on strategic group analysis (Evers 1980) have, indeed, remained the exception rather than the rule.

More specialised journal articles on Southeast Asian topics have increased rapidly, especially on the Philippines and on Indonesia. The highly respected Social Science Citation index lists 352 articles with "Indonesia" in the title for the period 2000 to 2004, 488 articles for 2005 to

2009 and 870 articles for 2010 to 2014 (accessed 16 March 2015), but only a fraction of these are classified under "sociology." More and more papers are published in the field of economics and business, replacing the earlier forerunner Anthropology. An even more remarkable trend shows the increase of publications, originating from Southeast Asian universities and research institutes. Established centres, like the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) and the Asian Research Institute (ARI) in Singapore; Institut Kajian Malaysia dan Antarabangsa (IKMAS) and Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA) of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM); the Chulalongkorn University Institute of Asian Studies; or the recently established Institute of Asian Studies at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam have produced at least some sociological studies, though most of them now seem to originate from the growing number of academic departments of sociology in the region. Many book publications in the social sciences are former PhD theses from European, Asian and American sociology departments or from locally organised conferences. Many of the latter are of poor quality with some outstanding exceptions: A volume originating from an annual conference of the Malaysian Social Science Association, edited by Wan Zawawi (2012), now teaching at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam, has assembled many internationally-known social scientists to provide a state of the art picture of the debate on social science and knowledge in a globalising world.

YOUR OPINION ON CURRENT SCHOLARS OF THE DISCIPLINE, VIZ. INDIGENOUS OF THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION OR FROM WITHOUT, INTERESTS, CHARACTERISTICS, ETC?

Outstanding Malaysian sociologists are among many others Shamsul A. B. (UKM), Chua Beng-Huat (National University of Singapore [NUS]), Reevany Bustami (Universiti Sains Malaysia [USM]) and Farid Alatas (NUS). Together with their students they have been active in establishing a social science with local roots. Vietnamese sociologists like Cuong Bu The (Academy of Social Science) have published mainly in Vietnamese (e.g., Evers and Cuong 2014) and therefore had less impact on neighbouring countries. In Vietnam, however, the *Review of Sociology* (*T'p chÝ X· héi hác*) has been quite influential. Despite pressure on Southeast Asian academics to publish in Scopus-listed journals (most of them published in the U.S. and Europe), several journals published in the region have gained international recognition, like the *International Journal of Asia Pacific*

Studies, edited by Malaysian historian Ooi Keat Gin and *Kajian Malaysia*, both listed in Scopus and published by USM Press in Penang; *Akademika* published in Malay by UKM; *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* published by ISEAS; the *Asian Journal of Social Science*, which evolved out of a student-run journal of the Department of Sociology, University of Singapore; *Masyarakat Indonesia*, published by Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), the Indonesian Research Agency and the widely distributed journal *Prisma*, published in Jakarta by the private social research institute Lembaga Penelitian, Pendidikan dan Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial (LP3ES); several social science journals published in English in the Philippines, among others the *Philippine Sociological Review*, published by Ateneo de Manila. These locally published journals are unfortunately often overlooked by local and international scholars despite the fact that many of them contain a host of valuable empirical studies and in-depth data. They are also discriminated against by local university authorities, who under the pressure of international rating agencies do not recognise articles published in local journals, let alone working paper series.

Several academic departments of sociology stand out as producers of high quality studies on Southeast Asian societies. One of them heading all indices is the Department of Sociology of NUS with several outstanding scholars, like Chua Beng Huat, Syed Farid Alatas and Vaneeta Sinha.

FUTURE OF THE DISCIPLINE IN RELATION TO THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION, VIZ. TRENDS, DIRECTION, VISION?

With growing mega-urbanisation and industrialisation, the field is open for both detailed policy oriented survey research as well as theory driven macro-sociological analysis. Though intensive field research, combining observation and survey data analysis are definitely necessary to support policy studies, an in-depth study of long-term social processes is obligatory to understand the extremely ethnically and culturally diverse societies in Southeast Asia. We should never forget that classical social theories of Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim were inspired by the transformation from feudal to industrial society in Europe, but they never had to confront the cultural diversity so typical of Southeast Asian societies. Social theories need to be developed to be usefully applicable to study social change in Southeast Asia. Some have tried to do so, like Hussein Alatas (Malaysia and Singapore), Chua Beng Huat (Singapore), Mely Tan (Jakarta), Shamsul A. B. (Malaysia), Thirayut Boonmi (Thailand) and many others of the first generation of Southeast Asian sociologists.

SOME ADVICE AND GUIDANCE FOR UP-AND-COMING SCHOLARS FOCUSING ON THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION?

I detect a tendency towards small scale survey research, often using hypotheses put forward by an American or European supervisor of a Southeast Asian PhD candidate. Needless to say that this will not lead to success, as I could witness as external examiner in various Southeast Asian universities. Local knowledge gathered through intensive free interviewing, using life histories as data and using local concepts for theory building or at least for developing hypotheses could yield innovative results.

If a solid theoretical framework is developed, it does do no harm to gather data from the resources of the internet. Big data mining needs good concepts, otherwise researchers will drown in data and will not be able to struggle to see the bright sun of intellectual enlightenment again!

ANY OTHER OPINIONS, VIEWPOINTS TO EXPRESS, SHARE, ETC?

That's all I need to say. Thank you for your attention, if you have read that far.

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