

## Netzwerk Südostasienforschung / Network South-East Asia Research

### **Research on South-East Asia in Austria: Department of Development Studies, University of Vienna**

PETRA DANNECKER<sup>1</sup> & WOLFRAM SCHAFFAR<sup>2</sup>

University of Vienna, Austria

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The Department of Development Studies at the University of Vienna was founded in 2010. It originated out of the Project International Development, which was initiated in 2002 by a group of lecturers and professors interested in establishing a study program focusing on 'development'. Within a short period of time, International Development became highly popular and today about 3,000 students from more than 50 countries are enrolled in the programme.

The aim of the department, which is supported by various faculties at the University, is the establishment of International Development Studies in teaching as well as in research. The premise that 'development' is a phenomenon which can only be taught and analysed transdisciplinarily is the basis for the department's approach and distinguishes it from other institutions in Europe and around the world, where development studies are mainly based on economics or social sciences only.

Transdisciplinarity as a methodological concept means that our study programs

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1 Petra Dannecker is professor for international development studies and head of the Department of Development Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria. She was trained as sociologist and is working on development politics, globalisation, and migration processes, as well as Islamisation processes in South and South-East Asia. Other focuses of her research are gender studies, international gender politics, and gender and migration, as well as the science-policy nexus. Contact: [petra.dannecker@univie.ac.at](mailto:petra.dannecker@univie.ac.at)

2 Wolfram Schaffar is professor for international development studies at the University of Vienna, Austria. He was trained in political science, South-East Asian studies, and Japanese studies. He is working on social movements, democratisation, and state theory, with a regional focus on South-East Asia, especially Thailand and Myanmar/Burma. He is also doing research on social security systems, the welfare state, and globalisation, as well as on questions of new media and democratisation. Contact: [wolfram.schaffar@univie.ac.at](mailto:wolfram.schaffar@univie.ac.at)



and research activities combine social, political, historical, cultural, and economic approaches to development and to global and local inequalities. Such an approach requires a multidisciplinary team. Our staff members as well as our lecturers, therefore, have different disciplinary backgrounds and experience in doing research on different regions of the world.

We are glad to introduce our department to the readership of ASEAS as Prof. Petra Dannecker and Prof. Wolfram Schaffar, two full time staff members at the department, have specialised in South-East Asian Studies at earlier stages of their career and feed in their experience to the development of the new department. Although we do not pursue an area studies approach – as much as we insist on the combination of different disciplinary approaches, we focus on a global perspective rather than on specific regions – South-East Asia is now strongly represented in the teaching as well as in the research programme.

This used to be different before the establishment of the department. Back then, it was rather Latin America and Africa that featured prominently in the programme – Latin America because of its dynamic political development and the traditionally close links to concerned scholars, and Africa, since the project International Development was born out of the institute for African Studies. Still, it has always been possible for students to specialise in South-East Asian issues since a number of lecturers (for example Dr Silvia Michal-Misak, Ms Yuki Seidler, and Mr Valentin Seidler) as well as the cooperation with other departments (Prof. Rüdiger Frank from the Department of East Asian Studies, Prof. Karl Husa and Prof. Helmut Wohlschlägl from the Department of Geography) made it possible to visit seminars focusing on South-East Asia and even choose aspects of South-East Asian development as topics for diploma theses.

With Petra Dannecker and Wolfram Schaffar, however, two permanent staff members are now representing South-East Asian issues in teaching and research. Petra Dannecker received her PhD from the Department of Sociology at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, where South-East Asia was one of the focal regions of study. Wolfram Schaffar previously worked as a lecturer at the Department of South-East Asian Studies at the University of Bonn, Germany, and at the Faculty of Political Science at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand.

In her research, Petra Dannecker focuses on migration – in particular on Bangla-

deshi migrant workers in South-East Asia and the economical, political, social, and cultural transformation and development in the countries of origin and destination which are triggered and influenced by migration processes. The theoretical framework draws on concepts of transnational migration as well as on new approaches which deal with temporary and circular migration. Central issues which are pursued in a transdisciplinary research group are the construction of masculinity and femininity as well as the negotiation of local cultures and Islamic identities through transnational activities and networks.

Another research focus with reference to South-East Asia is the negotiation of 'global' concepts of development, first and foremost in Malaysia. The focus is on the construction of new social spaces by 'global' concepts of development and the embeddedness of these construction processes in translocal networks like transnational women's organisations. This research aims at revealing the complexity of social relations between regions in order to question usual dichotomies like local versus global and Islamic versus Western.

Wolfram Schaffar is working on democratisation processes, social movements, and constitutionalism in South-East Asia with a focus on Thailand and Burma/Myanmar. A research project on social movements' perspective on the process of democratisation and constitution drafting in Thailand is currently under review by a research funding agency. This study focuses on the tension between the movements' quest for the protection of fundamental rights on the one hand and the rejection of a judicialisation of politics on the other. As such, the project aims at an investigation of contested democratisation processes which are relevant not only for Thailand but also for the most recent developments in the Arab world.

Wolfram Schaffar is also member of a research group on statehood and concepts of the state in countries of the Global South. The group is currently drafting a research project in which aspects of so-called 'failed states' will be analysed and interpreted from different perspectives – the fragmentation of the state in Myanmar/Burma, with its numerous ethnic insurgency groups, state formation in Palestine, or situations of so-called 'weak' or 'failed states' in West and East Africa.

Not only for these research projects, but also in order to provide new opportunities for our students, our department is preparing exchange programmes with universities and research institutions in South-East Asia. Negotiations for a joint study

programme with Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, where Wolfram Schaffar used to teach in the MA in International Development Studies programme are under way. We are optimistic that more contacts will follow as soon as the process of consolidation of our department's BA and MA programmes is completed.

In the end, what makes the Department of Development Studies a dynamic place for studying South-East Asian issues are our students and their commitment. We are currently supervising diploma theses on issues such as coffee plantations in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, which go back to a development cooperation project between the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the role of the internet in the democratisation process in Malaysia, the concept of 'Sufficiency Economy' in Thailand, or the situation of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand. The successful consolidation process of our department during the past couple of months gives us every reason to be optimistic that our department will soon be another important institution for the study of South-East Asian issues in Austria.

### ***Selected Publications of the Department Staff***

Dannecker, P. (2009). Rationalities and Images: Temporary Labour Migration from Bangladesh to Malaysia. *International Migration*, 49, 1-20.

Dannecker, P. (2011). Transnationale Räume und die Konstitution von lokalen Räumen zur Aushandlung von Entwicklung und Geschlechterverhältnissen. *Gender. Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft*, 1, 47-64.

Dannecker, P., & Spiegel, A. (2007). Let's not rock the boat": Frauenorganisationen und Demokratisierung in Malaysia. *Internationales Asienforum*, 37(3-4), 297-319.

Pye, O., & Schaffar, W. (2008). The 2006 Anti-Thaksin Movement in Thailand: An Analysis. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 38(1), 38-61.

Schaffar, W. (2009a). HIV-Positive in Thailand: Der lange Kampf um Zugang zu Medikamenten. In U. Hoering, O. Pye, W. Schaffar & C. Wichterich (Eds.), *Globalisierung bringt Bewegung: Lokale Kämpfe und transnationale Vernetzungen in Asien* (pp. 86-103). Münster, Germany: Westfälisches Dampfboot.

Schaffar, W. (2009b). Demokratiebewegung in Myanmar: Bewegungsveterane, Mönche und Farbrevolutionäre. In U. Hoering, O. Pye, W. Schaffar & C. Wichterich (Eds.), *Globalisierung bringt Bewegung: Lokale Kämpfe und transnationale Vernetzungen in Asien* (pp. 152-169). Münster, Germany: Westfälisches Dampfboot.

Schaffar, W. (2011). Organisierung und soziale Bewegungen: Die Kunst, nicht regiert zu werden. In M. Bruch, W. Schaffar & P. Scheiffele (Eds.), *Organisation und Kritik* (pp. 137-169). Münster, Germany: Westfälisches Dampfboot.