

Conference Reports

6. Asientag “Asia First” – Populism, Authoritarianism, Civil Society

COLOGNE, 21 APRIL 2018

The sixth Asientag, organised by the Stiftung Asienhaus, the Philippinenbüro and the Southeast Asia Information Centre, took place on 21 April 2018 in the Alte Feuerwache in Cologne. Director of the Stiftung Asienhaus, Monika Schlicher, gave the opening remarks, in which she introduced this year’s thematic focus. Democratic governance is experiencing a worldwide decline, while authoritarianism and populism are increasing on a global scale. It is concerning that only a fraction of all countries have a free civil society, while discrimination, repression, violence, censorship and immunity for perpetrators are becoming increasingly common. Thus, it is crucial to analyse and discuss the various aspects of populism and authoritarianism from different angles, especially with guests from the affected countries. Moreover, discussions should take into account the possibilities for civil society organisations to take action.

Due to Islamic populism and political opportunism, Indonesia’s political environment is becoming more conservative, with a clear reference to Indonesian nationalism, as described by Hendra Pasuhuk (Deutsche Welle). Although political Islam has not yet completely permeated the political system – after the “Reformasi” (Suharto’s resignation in May 1998) it gained in momentum but was unable to win any elections – it is strengthening its influence over politics by means of extra-parliamentary movements with strong political mobilisation. In this way, political Islam can exert more pressure on political parties and the government than it could through participation in elections. Mobilisation for those movements is accomplished through media appearances, the Internet and social media. Because secular political parties lack strong ideological foundations, they act opportunistically: many politicians associate with political Islam and its activists to increase their mobilisation power.

Similarly, Cambodia’s political situation has significantly worsened in recent months, according to Ali Al-Nasani (Heinrich Böll Stiftung Cambodia). Despite being a signee of various international human rights contracts, the country denies human rights to its own people. A *rule by law* governance (as opposed to *rule of law*) allows for the issuance of antidemocratic laws, which

in turn are readily implemented by the politically influenced judiciary. The so-called “elastic clause”, which condemns anyone infringing upon national security or national values, significantly constrains actions by the opposition and by civil society. Kept ambiguous on purpose, the clause can easily be used to silence all critical voices. A subsequent workshop discussed Cambodia’s avenues for post-election development: either the status quo will continue, new small spaces for an emerging civil society will be opened, or we will see additional repression and restrictions. The panellists all agreed that civil society is increasingly afraid of publicly voicing political opinions and that any post-election opposition is quite unlikely. What is certain, however, is that Germany’s solidarity towards Cambodia must be strengthened.

Myanmar and the Philippines both face challenges in developing their federalist systems away from the consolidation of power and towards social justice. Panellists Christina Grein (Burma-Initiative of the Stiftung Asienhaus) and Kaloy Manlupig (Balay Mindanaw Foundation) discussed the requirements for a strengthened and socially just federalist system. Despite the countries’ differing contexts, both are lacking in open debate and active participation by civil society, two important conditions for a functioning federalism.

According to panellists Praphakorn Wongratanawin (Stiftung Asienhaus), Nick Nostitz (freelance photojournalist and author) and Nicola Glass (freelance journalist and former Southeast-Asian correspondent), Thailand is facing increasing repression by the Junta, which came to power through a coup in 2014. The new ban on assembly and the harsh law against insulting the king particularly exemplify this development. Mass demonstrations have not yet occurred, but small protests are taking place. Further, the trauma from the army crackdown on the “red” protests in 2010 is still keeping the “Red Shirts” movement (who are mostly followers of former Prime Minister Thaksin and Yingluck Shinawatra) rather quiet. Nonetheless, even while the Junta continues to delay the originally promised elections, new parties that strive towards democratic principles, justice and national reconciliation have formed. When and how they will appeal to the electorate, however, will become visible only if the military’s promised elections are in fact implemented. As of now, Thailand remains far from democratic, considering that the new constitution serves to keep the military in power permanently.

In India, too, a substantial portion of the population is suffering under the political situation. In the workshop “Clean India” Bezwada Wilson and Michael Gottlob discussed “manual scavenging” to illustrate India’s lingering racism. Despite the practice being legally banned, around 340,000 Dalits (the unofficial figure is estimated to be 1.3 million) still dispose of human excrement and clear sewage drains with their bare hands. These degrading working conditions are able to persist because of the current Indian government, which makes no effort to close existing social and cultural gaps.

Several workshops also dealt with the conference topics on a transnational level. As described by Benedikt Frank, the situation for workers and labour unions in Cambodia is becoming challenging. Various developments, amongst others the 2016 implemented Trade Union Law, leads to repression of trade-union labour. In Indonesia, the Kendeng Campaign (against a cement project in Java by the German company HeidelbergCement) has sparked opposition and protests from the population. In both countries, solidarity and engagement are increasingly difficult, and the media plays an important role not only in local and international campaigns, but also in influencing the debate in the national context. Generally, it was agreed that safer and more stable structures needed to be created, in order to improve transnational solidarity.

Another workshop discussed how the EU could influence other countries to comply with human rights standards through its Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+), through which it binds trade deals with poorer countries to their adherence to such standards. Taking the Philippines and Sri Lanka as examples, it was controversially argued whether this GSP+ mechanism presents a useful instrument for European human rights politics. Weaknesses in the mechanism were revealed, given that the EU uses GSP+ to expand trade relations, and thus is often unwilling to demand consequences for trading partners' human rights violations, as can be witnessed in the Philippines. On the other hand, the mechanism's strength lies in its usefulness to civilians, who can use it to bring the human rights situation to the attention of the EU, which would otherwise not take notice of it.

In a workshop concerning China, participants discussed the potential effects that the new law regulating foreign NGOs in China could have on foreign civil society organisations. Anna Caspari (Ruhr University Bochum) clarified how the reassignment of foreign NGO issues from the Ministry of Civil Affairs to the Ministry of National Security has led to a clear differentiation between domestic and foreign NGOs, thus defining "civil society with Chinese characteristics". Bertram Lang emphasised that the new law affects different European countries differently. German NGOs are said to have the most cause for concern, whereas Eastern European NGOs face few problems. Relations with Eastern European countries are also more informal. On the other hand, talks by Renée Rentke (MISEREOR) and Li Lina (adelphi) revealed that the new law is not solely problematic, but also creates a clearer, more unified and more transparent workflow. Additionally, Chinese civil society is bound to become increasingly independent of foreign monetary aid, leading it to become more active globally.

Three presentations discussed "Gender Trouble" in Asia. Timo Duile (University of Bonn) discussed the current societal developments in Indonesia, particularly the attitudes towards LGBTs. In recent years, conservative religious values have come to be more and more important in the country. In 2016

politicians and clergy initiated a hate campaign against LGBTs, even though many indigenous traditional cultures recognise more than just male and female gender identities, and homosexuality thus far has not been criminalised. However, conservative groups are now strengthening their efforts to create legal groundwork to permit the prosecution of homosexuals.

Ever since Duterte became president of the Philippines, violence has become widespread, according to Marilou Hardillo (Babaylan). It starts with social media: whoever criticises the president is immediately bombarded with online attacks in the form of curses and hacking, and even physical threats such as rape or murder. These attacks and threats, also of a sexist nature, have been able to proliferate and even become trendy because government officials who publicly ridicule women earn laughs and approval, resembling a strange kind of entertainment industry. There is an urgent need for civil society forces to voice a clear “NO” against the return to despotism and tyranny in Indonesia.

Timor-Leste, Asia’s youngest nation, presents a glimmer of hope for a region where LGBT rights are often strongly questioned. Monika Schlicher (Stiftung Asienhaus) explained that although LGBTs in Timor-Leste are to date experiencing an alarmingly high level of violence in their everyday lives, they are supported by premier de Araujo. De Araujo has called upon the populace to create an integrative society that accepts people with different sexual orientations and gender identities. On the national level, the country has already won the right of self-determination, but there remains an ongoing struggle to apply this concept to the societal level. For activists, the country’s first LGBT Pride Parade in June 2017 was a milestone in their struggle for recognition.

The final session discussed the developing role of social media and the Internet in the political realm. The view that the Internet is a guarantor of democratisation has been put into perspective. Both in Europe and Asia, online hate attacks and violent threats against opponents as well as a brutalisation of language are on the rise; in authoritarian regimes, the Internet is often a sphere of national and social supervision. Against this background, Joanna Klabisch (China-Programm of Stiftung Asienhaus), Emmalyn Liwag Kotte (PhilNetz), Praphakorn Wongratanawin (Stiftung Asienhaus) and Nataly Jung-Hwa Han (Korea-Verband) examined the situation in China, the Philippines, Thailand and Korea. It became apparent that in most countries the Internet is in fact a strongly contested sphere, which plays a central role in the spread of the new authoritarianism. Still, in these countries one can also find examples of successful progressive political campaigns that have managed to successfully fight corruption, human rights violations and other grievances.

Taiwan and the International Order

BERLIN, 22 FEBRUARY 2018

Since Tsai Ing-wen's inauguration as President of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in May 2016, relations between Beijing and Taipei have deteriorated substantially. Island encirclement flights, live-fire drills and an upsurge in bellicose rhetoric have raised concerns about stability across the strait. At the international level, the conditions for political order in East Asia pose distinct challenges for Taiwan. Competing territorial claims in the Western Pacific, incidents in Sino-Taiwanese airspace or calculated provocations by paramilitary forces at sea could lead to a series of frictions with the potential to escalate the differing interpretations of Taiwan's sovereignty status. What chances and risks emerge from the international order for the self-governing island?

About 100 attendees discussed this subject at the conference "Taiwan and the International Order" on 22 February 2018, in Berlin. The event was jointly organised by the Taipei Representative Office in Germany and Martin Wagener from the Federal University of Applied Administrative Sciences of Germany. The representative of Taiwan, Jhy-Wey Shieh, received the participants on the delegation's premises. Bundestag members Anita Schäfer, Mark Hauptmann and Klaus-Peter Willsch delivered the opening remarks.

A summary of Taiwan's current situation and the first months of Tsai's presidency was provided by Jhy-Wey Shieh. Since Tsai's inauguration, contact with mainland China has been fraught with Beijing's rising leverage. China's position toward Taiwan, diplomatically and otherwise, is increasingly coercive, and Beijing has been ratcheting up the pressure on Taipei. Its continuing efforts to isolate the island nation are the most intense in decades. The easing of bilateral tensions from 2008 to 2016 during the tenure of then-president Ma Ying-jeou, whose conciliatory approach led to unequivocal reassurances across the strait and the suspension of competition for diplomatic allies, has been reversed. China is sceptical about the newly elected leadership in Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a renegade province. Shieh remarked that Taipei prefers solid democracy over reunification. Security provisions by the United States remain essential for Taiwan's survival. The common democratic values Taiwan shares with several Western countries need to be transformed into diplomatic backing.

Martin Wagener addressed Taiwan's position in East Asia's security architecture. Taipei's military expenditure is too low to contain China and is incapable of countering the rising power asymmetry. Taiwan's security depends on risk-coverage by Washington. Tsai might indirectly "tame" China by emphasising Taiwan's similarity with liberal states, using democratic values rather

than military force as a counterweight to Beijing. Western governments will be more willing to support Taipei once they perceive Taiwan as a consolidated democracy, Wagener presumes. If solidarity measures against China are easy to legitimate domestically, they will become more likely.

An introduction to Taiwan's role in international security was provided by Enrico Fels from the University of Bonn. The security dilemma in East Asia has not been overcome, and the promotion of confidence-building measures is necessary to strengthen the rules-based international order. Taiwan is seldom integrated into international institutions and barely benefits from the established multilateral consultations on regional security. Despite Taipei's long-standing pursuit of participation, the island state is continuously confronted with minimisation in terms of security policy.

Michael Zickerick, former director general of the German Institute Taipei, commented on both talks concerning Taiwan's security environment. Germany has long refused to be tougher with China over the principle of Taiwan's national sovereignty, Zickerick emphasised. Berlin could afford gradual emancipation from its "One China" principle.

The discussion that followed was moderated by Manfred Bohr from the Federal Academy for Security Policy in Berlin. There was a strong consensus among the attendees on Taiwan's insufficient defence spending. It is within the responsibility of Western allies to substantially unburden the US military to strengthen Washington's power projection in East Asia. The European Union should not quietly endure Chinese naval manoeuvres in the Mediterranean or Baltic Sea. Brussels should react robustly and show a willingness to discipline China's practice of encroaching into Europe.

Dirk Schmidt from the University of Trier reported on Taiwan's economic vulnerabilities. The Republic of China is to a large extent dependent on integration into transnational value chains and contract manufacturing on the mainland. Taipei is threatened by potential US–China trade tensions and the massive industrial programs of the People's Republic designed to climb the value chain.

A further perspective on economics was provided by Gunter Schubert from the University of Tübingen, who presented new approaches to economic policy for Taiwan. Comparatively low real wages and decreasing competitiveness in key industrial sectors, together with budgetary limitations due to the high public debt, have led to the large-scale emigration of Taiwanese employees. Governmental programs for the stimulation of industrial production networks, socio-political reforms and bilateral free-trade agreements are appropriate measures to reduce Taiwan's economic vulnerability, Schubert declared. Foreign economic emancipation from China would mean consciously accepting a range of disadvantages at short notice, however.

Markus Taube from the University of Duisburg-Essen commented on both contributions on Taiwan's economic relationships and outlined Taipei's extensive dependence on value chains controlled by foreign agents. The inner rationality of Beijing's urge for economic expansion aims to crowd out foreign competitors. Taube expressed scepticism about Taipei's New Southbound Policy, which serves the development of geoeconomic spaces south of Taiwan. If Taipei were to view itself instead as a technology incubator concentrating on national economic strengths, the available resources could be invested with more impact on domestic industries.

The German ambassador to Luxembourg, Heinrich Kreft, moderated the subsequent debate. Most participants supported a more structural Taiwanese innovation policy. Although Taiwan benefits from substantial process innovations, large national markets are essential for the scaling of network effects. The Republic of China lacks the innovative impulses to compensate for the insufficient domestic demand and can thus scarcely maintain sustainable competitiveness in the global market.

Hanns W. Maull from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs gave his thoughts on turbulence as a structural characteristic of international politics. Processes of globalisation systematically overwhelm political decision-makers, he stated. The legitimacy, efficacy and authority in the international order are in precarious condition. Their cohesion is eroding. Taiwan lies in between the competing poles of liberal democracies and authoritarian systems. The future of the international order depends on the build-up of effective multilateral coalitions and the cooperation of international partners along shared values.

Another participant from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Gudrun Wacker, outlined future perspectives on the state of security in the Taiwan Strait. The "diplomatic ceasefire" brokered during Ma Ying-jeou's presidency seems to have been abolished. Beijing's campaign to fulfil its "Chinese Dream" by 2049 indirectly sets a deadline to finally settle the dispute over Taiwan's sovereignty status. Wacker considers it unlikely that Beijing and Washington will embark on a cooperative strategy to edge closer to an accord on clearly defined zones of influence in the Western Pacific. China will not likely make concessions on US President Donald Trump's priorities on Taiwan.

Reinhard Wolf from Goethe University Frankfurt commented on both presentations on Taiwan's future role in the international order. The stabilising effects of the liberal world order on the international system are paramount, Wolf insisted.

The discussion that followed was led by Siegfried Schieder (Heidelberg University). The participants outlined an urgent need for innovations to the

state order and asserted that emerging powers should be given equal opportunity to introduce demands into multilateral cooperation formats.

The event's outcomes illustrate how the security architecture in East Asia limits Taiwan's strategic options to ensure its national security. The attendees agreed on the preservation of the status quo as the most favourable option for Taiwan to ensure stability in cross-strait relations.

Kevin Kälker

8th Annual Meeting of the South Asia Working Group of the German Society of Geography

COLOGNE, 19 – 20 JANUARY 2018

The eighth annual meeting of the South Asia Working Group of the German Society of Geography (Arbeitskreis Südasiens in der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geographie [DGfG]) took place from 19 to 20 January 2018 at the Institute of Geography, University of Cologne. The meeting, which included thirty participants, was organised by Carsten Butsch and Alexander Follmann. The presentation of the “Geographies of South Asia” research prize for the best geographic thesis on South Asia was the highlight of the event. Raphael Pinheiro Machado Rehm received the award for his master's thesis presented at the University of Augsburg entitled “Small Scale Variability in Soil Hydraulic Properties in Headwater Catchment of the Indian Western Ghats”. This is the first time that a work on physical geography was awarded the prize, which was initiated by the working group in 2015. The selection was made by a jury consisting of Martin Franz (Osnabrück), Markus Nüsser (Heidelberg) and Matthias Schmidt (Augsburg).

The conference began on Friday afternoon with a presentation by Tatiana López Ayala (Cologne) titled “Workers in Global Production Networks: Local Labour Control Regime and Trade Union Organisation in the Bangalore Export Clothing Cluster”. She outlined how the control regime in the clothing production network at the local level is shaped by the complex interaction of strategies between actors at different levels. Three presentations from the field of high mountain research followed: first, Juliane Dame (Heidelberg), Julia Poerting (Bonn) and Stefanie Raschke (Heidelberg) talked about perspectives and challenges in introducing standardised cultivation systems in the high mountain regions of South Asia. In particular, they addressed power issues in (inter)national standardised food chains and the relationship between chang-

ing livelihoods and new markets. Corinna Wallrapp (Göttingen) then presented her research results on the commodification of the Yarshagumba mushroom. Under the title “Institutional Issues, Power Struggles and Local Solutions – Governance Systems of Yarshagumba Collection in India and Nepal in the Kailash Landscape” she showed which local and regional changes are triggered by the increased demand for the mushroom, which is used as a medicine. Miriam Wenner (Göttingen) completed the section. Focusing on a social movement advocating regional autonomy in Darjeeling, India, she analysed how ideal concepts of politics and anti-politics become effective in action and space and contribute to the legitimisation of political actors. Nicolas Schlitz (Osnabrück) was the last speaker of the day. He presented his findings on the social embedding of value production in informal recycling networks in Kolkata.

The paper sessions were followed by a discussion on research ethics and the special conditions of geographical research by European scientists in the Global South and was moderated by Katharina Molitor (Cologne). She presented some insights from a survey conducted among the members of the South Asia Working Group on the research methods used.

The first session on Saturday morning dealt with the Indian diaspora. Pierre Gottschlich (Rostock) gave the first presentation on “The Indian Diaspora in the USA as a Transnational Political Actor”. He showed that the Indian community is well integrated and economically successful in the USA. Furthermore, he made clear that the diaspora is/was of particular relevance for the development of Hindu nationalism in India. Hindu communities in the USA have been shaped or infiltrated by nationalist organisations since the 1970s and have had a great influence on the identity of the second generation. Carsten Butsch (Cologne) presented his research results on remittances of Indian migrants in Germany. He revealed different motivations for remittances being paid to family members and friends or for charitable purposes and how these practices and motives change over time.

In the second session, on agriculture and land use change, Paul D. Wagner (Kiel) presented a model for assessing future landscape change in the Western Ghats. He showed that, in the past, a decline in near-natural areas and an increase in settlement areas were accompanied by an increase in arable land in the Western Ghats. However, for the future, his model forecasts urban growth at the expense of arable land. Luisa Knobloch’s (Göttingen) paper presentation on “Genetic Engineering in India’s Agriculture – A Policy of Knowledge and Ignorance” resulted in strong discussions among the participants. In particular, she outlined the mechanisms behind politicised technological transformations in India in the recent past. Katharina Molitor (Cologne) discussed the role of food price fluctuations in food security for small farmers and their inclusion in (local) markets, using Bangladesh as an example.

In the concluding session on economic developments in South Asia, Raquib Ahmed (Cologne) spoke about “Economic Integration in South Asia and the Regionalisation Process”. He presented various approaches to economic cooperation within South Asia and analysed the opportunities for deeper economic integration in the region. Satyendra Singh (Cologne) presented the results of his project “Informality as Instrument of Formal Sector Competitiveness – A Case Study of Women Homeworkers in Delhi, India”, examining the connections between female homeworkers and the formal sector in Delhi. He showed how women workers become competitive even though they are in a precarious situation without any form of social security.

During the general meeting of the working group on Friday evening, the speakers provided information about the activities of the past year. In addition to the annual meeting, joint sessions were organised at various conferences and two volumes were published in the working group’s publication series. Carsten Butsch, Alexander Follmann (both Cologne), Martin Franz (Osnabrück) and Markus Keck (Göttingen) were confirmed as speakers in the annual elections of the group of speakers. After a transitional period, Judith Müller (Heidelberg) will replace Julia Poerting (Bonn) as the coordinator of the working group’s publication series. The next annual conference will take place in Heidelberg on 25 and 26 January 2019. Further information about the working group and planned events can be found at www.geographien-suedasiens.de.

Alexander Follmann / Martin Franz