

Research on South-East Asia in Austria: The Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Vienna

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The Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Vienna was established on January 1, 2000 by merging the Institutes of Sinology and Japanese Studies. Initially comprising the pillars Sinology, Japanese, and Korean Studies, the fourth pillar, the Chair of East Asian Economy and Society (EcoS), was established in 2007. The first Head of Department was Erich Pilz (2000–2001), followed by Sepp Linhart (2001–2012), both leading researchers on Japanese history, society, and culture. The current head is Rüdiger Frank (since 2012), specialized in East Asian politics and economics, in general and North Korea, in particular. In addition to six professors, the Department of East Asian Studies currently has a staff of about 50 permanent and temporary researchers and lecturers (Institut für Ostasienwissenschaften der Universität Wien, 2001–2013).

In addition to language courses, the disciplines Sinology, Japanology, and Koreanology offer strong social and cultural science studies. EcoS focuses on current political, security, and economic relations in East Asia and the respective national political and economic systems. The Department of East Asian Studies applies a broad area definition of East Asia by incorporating North-East and South-East Asia. In this context, South-East Asia, in particular the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in promoting East Asian regionalism, has always figured prominently in the respective EcoS courses. Yet, in order to demonstrate the growing international relevance of this region, it has been a strategic aim of Rüdiger Frank to institutionalize South-East Asian Studies at the EcoS Department to complement its range. In October 2013, the position of a university assistant at the postdoc level was created. Two

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university assistants (praedoc) and one study assistant, concentrating on North-East Asia, complete the EcoS team. Overall, the teaching and research program at EcoS reflect the interconnectedness of North-East and South-East Asia. For instance, two key areas of research are state socialist systems (notably China, North Korea, and Vietnam) and climate change, the environment, and energy.

Since October 2008, EcoS offers a four-semester Master of Arts (MA) as well as a PhD course on East Asian Economy and Society. Since an adaption of the curriculum in 2011, the MA is offered exclusively in English, and South-East Asia features explicitly as an area of research in addition to the North-East Asian countries China, Japan, and the two Koreas. The Master course promotes the inter- and transdisciplinary comparative analysis of international relations and of domestic politics and economics in the region in the twentieth and twenty-first century. In their Master thesis, students have to compare specific topics in at least two countries, either in North- or South-East Asia. The program provides students with a broad range of possibilities to specialize in topics of their choice. In addition, students have to acquire basic language skills in an East Asian language, particularly in Chinese, Japanese, or Korean. An admission requirement is a Bachelor or an equivalent college or university degree; eligible majors are, for instance, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese Studies, (International) Business Studies, or Political Science. The five core modules are Contemporary East Asian Language, East Asian Economy, East Asian Politics, East Asian Society and Research, and Master's Colloquium.

Due to the popularity of the program in other European but also East Asian countries, student numbers have far exceeded the initial planning for 25 students per study year (217 Master students in the summer term 2013). Due to the shortage in staff, room, and teaching resources, the rectorate decided to introduce admission requirements, starting with winter term 2013/2014. Since then, students have to apply for admission to EcoS; inter alia, they have to submit a demanding letter of motivation, detailing their research interests and goals after graduation. Each study year, 25 students from all over the world are admitted to the Masters program, guaranteeing an optimum staff-student ratio.

The Department's South-East Asia Focus

Research on South-East Asia at the chair of East Asian Economy and Society concentrates on three main areas. The aim is to implement these research fields on multiple levels, notably promoting Master and PhD theses and research projects. The first field is ASEAN's centrality in shaping East Asian regionalism through trans-regional institutions such as ASEAN plus three, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the East Asia Summit, applying neorealist, neoliberal as well as constructivist approaches. Both the Association's internal integration process, notably the ASEAN Community (to be established in 2015), and ASEAN's relations with the neighboring North-East Asian countries are analyzed. Thereby, the role of institutions as well as of formal and informal norms and values are examined with regard to their potential to promote collaboration in the region.

A second area of research are the territorial disputes in the South China Sea which is, due to its vast oil and gas resources and global importance as a shipping lane, a regional flashpoint. Directly involved in this highly complex judicial, political, and economic conflict are China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei, indirectly the United States, Japan, Russia, and India. In addition to the arguments and concrete policies of the claimant states, a special interest rests on the reasons for ASEAN's low profile in this conflict.

The third focus is the gradually changing notion of security in South-East Asia from a traditional state-centric towards a human security perspective. Previous research was conducted by EcoS staff on the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and climate change and counter-terrorism policies. It has shown that despite a human security rhetoric with reference to the endangered security of individual citizens – and a more prominent role of national and transnational human rights NGOs – the South-East Asian governments still prioritize state and regime security (Gerstl, 2010; Gerstl, 2012; Gerstl & Helmke, 2012).

Out of the 20 Master theses submitted in 2011/2012, five explicitly dealt with South-East Asian topics in a comparative or transnational perspective: democracy in South-East Asia; social and welfare states in Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan; foreign corporate entrepreneurship in China and Vietnam; tourism management strategies in China and Thailand; Vietnam, the Philippines, and China in the

South China Sea conflict. As North- and South-East Asia's economic importance for Europe is steadily growing, graduates who have obtained strong analytical and methodological skills during the program find jobs in private business or banks, others pursue an academic career.

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