

Editorial

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► Duile, T., & Lengauer, D. (2021). Editorial. *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 14(1), 1-3.

Uncertainty has become a popular term to describe current conditions and ongoing processes across the world, including Southeast Asia. The prevailing Coronavirus pandemic challenges societies and governments, and states in the region have dealt with this challenge to different degrees of success. Whereas some countries in mainland Southeast Asia, such as Thailand or Vietnam, have been portrayed as exemplary in dealing with ensuing states of emergency, others, particularly in insular Southeast Asia (such as the Philippines and Indonesia), have faced severe repercussions. Besides uncertainties with regard to health, the pandemic appears to lead to new state-centrism among the ASEAN states (Rüland, 2021) – a phenomenon that coincides with another factor of uncertainty in the region, namely, authoritarian tendencies, and the large-scale protests in response to these political shifts. Most notably, in Thailand, and recently in Myanmar, hundreds of thousands of young people went on the streets to express their disaffection pertaining to contemporary political crises. Military coups, however, are only one facet of authoritarian tendencies in the region (Einzenberger & Schaffar, 2018; Morgenbesser, 2020); and Thailand and Myanmar are not the only two countries to face massive protests. In Indonesia, for instance, a broad coalition of laborers, environmental and indigenous activists, among others, denounced the so-called Omnibus Law on Job Creation that was eventually passed on 5 October 2020 by President Joko Widodo. Demonstrations carried out throughout the year 2020 criticized the law for lowering standards with regard to working conditions and environmental impact (Mahy, 2021; Sembiring et al., 2020). In all cases, social media played an unprecedented role in shaping public discontent.

Southeast Asia is among the regions with the fastest growth in social media users, and a number of contributions to this issue recognize the urgency of analyzing ongoing developments by taking a closer look at the dynamics evolving in and beyond social media. In a Current Research article, Wolfram Schaffar investigates the transnational online movement evolving under the hashtag #MilkTeaAlliance in the wake of China's striving for hegemony in the region. His meticulous analysis outlines how a new generation of politically active young people connect to respond to the authoritarian tendencies in Thailand and beyond. In an interview with scholar-activist Pavin Chachavalpongpun, who runs the satirical Facebook group *Royalist Marketplace*, Schaffar further illuminates the shift towards a new form of political communication involving elements of transnational pop culture and fandom. Self-ironic TikTok videos and

sarcastic memes inform the new satirical style in which young activists in the region challenge authoritarian practices in their countries.

Social media are also in the focus of the Current Research article by Huang Linh Dang who provides a regional overview of how governments in Southeast Asia have used and restricted social media in terms of their measures against the pandemic. This contribution exemplifies the challenge of compounding regional dynamics directly linked to social media and related legislations, particularly in times where popular concepts such as information and disinformation require a critical approach. Also in the context of social media use during the Coronavirus pandemic, Gerhard Berka's Network Southeast Asia contribution investigates the rise of an Austria-based Facebook group in the wake of Malaysia's pandemic management. Berka interprets the activities in this group as a heightened interest in information that can be characterized as trustworthy. Just as the majority of Southeast Asians draw on social media for news and information, also marginalized minorities employ social media in their efforts to build and sustain marginalized socialities. Timo Duile's Research Workshop contribution sheds light on how social media depict an entry point in research on atheist life in Indonesia. In his contemplations of how social media has served – but also directed – his ongoing research, Duile raises important ethical questions with regard to dealing with virtually any information deriving from online-only encounters, and makes a valuable contribution to social media-based research among marginalized groups.

Uncertainty has different faces, and despite the rapid growth characterizing regional economies, or the speed with which new technologies are adopted in everyday practices, inequality runs deep throughout the region (The ASEAN Post, 2018). Migrant workers are among the groups who substantially contribute to the region's economic growth but who seldomly benefit from it. Choo Chin Low's Current Research article analyses ongoing legal reforms in Malaysia and their impact on migrant laborers' welfare. His detailed investigation presents an example of how legal amendments have been enforced in reaction to timely hazards, but have not managed to address some of the most vulnerable labor groups – undocumented migrant workers. Malaysian Indians form another minority group in Malaysia who originally came to the country as migrant laborers. In her Current Research article, Sue Ann Teo presents rich ethnographic material deriving from her dissertation research among Malaysian Indians, illuminating their social and political situation and agential responses through the case of temple demolition in Penang. Women are another group facing economic marginalization in the region, especially due to their unpaid domestic labor, and gender-based discrimination on job markets. In her Current Research article, Thi Kim Phung Dang investigates poor women's livelihoods in Ca Mau province in Vietnam, highlighting interlinkages with broader socio-economic contexts – among others, the failure of rural development policies and poverty reduction programs to create employment for women. Finally, in her Book Review of the edited volume *Appropriating Kartini* (Bijl & Chin, 2020), Vissia Ita Yulianto emphasizes how the figure of Kartini – a Javanese woman and a national heroine – has been appropriated in various Western contexts in ways that often obscured and reproduced structural inequalities.



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