1 | *Understanding political change in Southeast Asia*

Southeast Asia is a vast region, comprised of eleven countries and incredible diversity. From one country to the next, dominant languages vary, religious groups are different and histories are all dissimilar from one another. In comparison to Latin America or Africa – other large regions of the world – the study of politics in Southeast Asia can be particularly challenging.

Latin America and Africa are also very diverse regions but their respective countries share some similarities that make comparisons somewhat more common. The Spanish language, for instance, binds countries of Latin America where it is dominant in all countries except Brazil. Countries of the region were all colonized, and Spain was the dominant power for several centuries. Latin American countries inherited societies in which descendants of Spanish colonizers and *mestizo* (mixed) classes are now dominant. These common characteristics often tainted their style of politics, with some very interesting parallels among several countries. To a lesser extent, the African experience also generated similarities that have been compared analytically. In Africa, the division of the continent between mostly French and British colonial rule[1] created some homogenizing experiences as well. French and English became common languages of communication throughout West and East/Southern Africa respectively. Colonization by these powers, which imposed bureaucratic structures over societies mostly organized in small political units, created some similar dysfunctionalities that have persisted in the modern independent states (Mamdani, 1996; Young, 1994). Comparisons have often been made between clusters of African countries, where the continued legacies of colonial rule have been blamed for the inability of states to overcome poverty and other major challenges in the continent.

---

[1] While most of the continent was divided up between Britain and France, a few other European countries gained some colonial presence, such as Portugal, Belgium and Germany.

1

By contrast, Southeast Asia's diversity makes comparison and large generalizations about the region less frequent. Although interactions among peoples stretch back hundreds of years, and cross-cultural influences have left their trace in every country, the region never developed a common language or a common cultural heritage (Lieberman, 2003; Reid, 1988). Several major religions took root. Hindu beliefs spread from India to the archipelagic Southeast Asia, and became widespread among the Javanese and other peoples. Hinduism left its trace in such temples as Prambanan in Java. Theravada Buddhism became a dominant religion in vast areas of continental Southeast Asia, comprising today's Thailand, Cambodia and Laos in particular. Islam, which again came from South Asia, spread through merchants and scholars who travelled to coastal areas. Conversions and the establishment of sultanates displaced Hinduism and Buddhism across the Southeast Asian archipelago, leaving only traces of believers in such places as Bali and the Tengger highlands of Java. Today's Indonesia and Malaysia are predominantly Muslim.

The region was also divided up between several colonial powers, with consequently different effects on the subregions under their respective control. The extent of penetration of colonial rule varied considerably, thereby affecting local political structures in varying ways. Local languages remained dominant, while colonial languages only briefly became the lingua franca. Although some languages eventually superseded others to bind several peoples together and be later elevated as "national" languages, no one language established itself as a regional medium of communication. This prevented the kind of similarity of experience and common trajectories found in some parts of Latin America and Africa.

European colonialism and its influence

When Europeans first reached the archipelago in the sixteenth century, they found well-established societies, solid trading networks and strong kingdoms. For the most part, Europeans came to the region in search of commodities. Markets for exotic spices were rapidly expanding in Europe and entrepreneurial merchants sought new means of profiting from the spice trade. Portuguese merchants created a first trading post at Malacca, which was strategically positioned on the coast that overlooked one of the busiest sea trading routes. They competed with local

merchants to seize control over trade in some of the more profitable spices. They set up more trading posts along coastal areas but often clashed with local traders.

Asia was a very dynamic place with advanced civilizations, complex cultures and societies, as well as sophisticated bureaucratic systems, that had been established well before there was much contact with Europe. Yet, it was not isolated. Traders, adventurers and conquerors criss-crossed Asia from the Indian subcontinent to the eastern tip of today's China. With human flows also came the transmission of ideas, such as new religious beliefs. Links also stretched to the Roman Empire and different parts of today's Europe.

Political organization was vastly different from one location to the next. Most prominently, successive Han and Mongul dynasties controlled vast areas of Eastern Asia, spreading their political and cultural influences over neighbouring areas of today's Southeast Asia. After Qin Shi Huangdi created the Chinese empire in 221–210 BC, the Chinese state became highly centralized and bureaucratized, as its influence expanded over the following centuries. Smaller surrounding kingdoms, such as the Viet or Korean kingdoms absorbed some of the Chinese cultural influences, while struggling to maintain their independence. In much of Southeast Asia, polities were a great deal smaller, and tended to change regularly. According to Lieberman, from the fourteenth century onwards, mainland Southeast Asia did see a greater consolidation over time, but archipelagic Southeast Asia remained more fluid. Some kingdoms were formed in parts of today's Java, Bali, Maluku, and Cambodia, for instance, but they were held together often by kinship and religious ties rather than bureaucratic structure or territorial control (Lieberman, 2003). The bases, scale and types of political organization were therefore different across the region, and so were the modalities of legitimacy.

Colonialism set a new course and began to transform this diverse landscape, through integrative and administrative changes that would eventually give way to the emergence of modern states. European influences deeply affected many societies, including their culture and modes of social organization. Politically, colonialism introduced modern forms of warfare, fostered a rapid and deeper integration to world markets, set new and more fixed boundaries and imposed new forms of administrative and political organization. As the historian Anthony Reid has noted, this "imperial alchemy" mixed with a varied landscape

of diverse societies and cultures to produce new political forms (Reid, 2010).

Resistance to colonial rule eventually latched onto global political trends as well. The flipside of colonialism's transformative power is the history of popular discontent, resistance and rebellion against European intrusion. Where European powers encountered well-established kingdoms, sometimes military force was the only means by which to subjugate local populations. Muslims in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago (in today's Southern Philippines), for instance, militarily resisted Spanish conquest. So did the Acehnese against the Dutch colonial army's attempts to gain full control over the territory representing today's Indonesia. Once consolidated, colonial regimes encountered this type of large and small-scale resistance. Millenarian movements were large-scale peasant rebellions that were mobilized by leaders who were seen almost as prophets or messiahs offering more prosperous and better futures. The Java War of 1825–30, led by Prince Diponegoro in the Dutch East Indies, as well as the Saya San Rebellion of 1930–2 in British Burma both had this character (Adas, 1979). At other times, peasants rebelled in smaller, less visible groups, in villages or more contained locations. James C. Scott wrote about peasant rebellion under colonial rule. He explains how the colonial economy threatened the norms and moral codes of conduct in peasant societies. Peasants rebelled when redistributive norms and survival strategies came under intense pressure from colonial transformation, thereby violating the "moral economy" of the peasants (Scott, 1976). While they might join larger-scale rebellious movements, they could also adopt "everyday forms of resistance", which are individual acts of resistance, often hidden, targeted at local landowners or authority figures (Scott, 1985). By the beginning of the twentieth century, new ideologies and models of political organization emerged globally. They inspired and channeled rebellions into more organized, more modern forms of resistance, such as nationalist and communist movements.

European encounters

Southeast Asian countries were colonized by several different European powers: Portuguese, Dutch, British, French and Spanish conquered different parts of the region, more or less intensively, and with a varied

set of goals. Not only did their approach to colonialism vary but, given the wide variety of political, social and cultural contexts, the outcomes of colonialism remained quite diverse as well.

At the outset, Europeans came mainly to establish trading posts, and only much later intensified their involvement. The Portuguese first established a trading post at Malacca in 1511. As with their successors, the Portuguese were lured by spices. While they displaced Arab and Indian Muslim merchants in the Strait of Malacca, they vied mainly for the spice rich Moluccan Islands (present day Maluku). They established forts and trading posts in several locations across the Moluccas, while largely ignoring mainland Southeast Asia. Several local populations and traders later came to resent the Portuguese as they imposed high tariffs and port fees on non-Portuguese merchants who used the Strait of Malacca. Furthermore, Portuguese missionization and attacks against Muslim merchants further irritated mainly Muslim local populations.

Local populations therefore welcomed the advent of the Dutch who easily replaced the Portuguese's waning influence. When the Spanish and Portuguese crowns were combined between 1580 and 1640, the Portuguese section of the empire was largely neglected, thereby allowing the Dutch to establish their supremacy. They also came for the rising profit in the spice trade; the Dutch established a strong footing in the Moluccas, where spice production had continued to rise. Initially, the Dutch were uninterested in either proselytizing or gaining territorial control. As trade was their main interest, they preferred to work with local rulers who maintained their administrative power. The Dutch East India Company, which was the principal Dutch presence in the archipelago, therefore expanded its reach over the densely populated island of Java, as well as the Moluccas and a few other areas, primarily through mutually beneficial agreements to preserve local rulers' power as long as they protected and promoted Dutch trading interests.

In the nineteenth century, Dutch control intensified as new commodities became profitable. In addition to spices, coffee, sugar and indigo also became important. In some areas, the Dutch imposed more direct political control as they established plantations. In others, such as Java, under a system known as the Cultivation System, they forced smallholders to use a portion of their land for export crops. When the Dutch East India Company faltered, the Dutch government became

more heavily involved, and some areas of the archipelago were placed under direct rule or more intense Dutch political interference.

The British entered the Malay Archipelago and challenged Dutch control of the Strait of Malacca. In 1819, they gained control of the tiny island of Singapore and proceeded in the following decades to transform it into an important trading post for the region. They also occupied Malacca and Penang, which together became known as the Straits Settlements in 1826. As with the Dutch, the British were interested in trade, so they only reluctantly became more involved in the surrounding Malay states. Nevertheless, as their interest in producing oil palm, tin and rubber expanded, they also established more formal control over Malay sultanates to protect their trading interests and maintain political stability.

Meanwhile, the British transformed Malay society by encouraging large numbers of Chinese and Indians to migrate to their colony. In the 1870s, they expanded their colonial venture into tin-mining areas where Chinese migrants constituted the largest pool of mining workers. Two decades later, they began to establish large rubber plantations, which also attracted Chinese labour as well as Indians. The scale of migration radically altered the demographic landscape of what became British Malaya, as the Chinese represented almost 40 per cent and Indians almost 10 per cent of the population by the middle of the twentieth century. This population change constituted one of the most significant effects of colonialism in the region.

Mainland Southeast Asia became the locus of increasing expansion of British and French colonial powers. For the British, who had occupied India in the eighteenth century, the expansion into Burma initially served primarily as a buffer to protect its crown jewel. Viewing the Burmese kingdom in the same way as they did the princely kingdoms of India, the British sought to impose their dominance. Several treaties failed to give the British the security they needed for their interests in India, as the French expanded their control and Burmese kings refused to recognize British power. It took three Anglo-Burmese wars before the British finally seized control over Burma in 1886.

The French had come late to the region. In the seventeenth century, some missionaries proselytized in Vietnam and, when they were persecuted, sought refuge and established relationships with the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya. Trade, however, remained minimal as the Dutch successfully contained French attempts to make inroads on the

mainland and French kings were not all equally interested in colonial expansion in the region. Nevertheless, by the mid nineteenth century French imperialism intensified. Under Napoleon III, imperial conquest was sought as a source of power and prestige. Vietnam became particularly attractive with increasing opportunities to trade with the south of China. By establishing a base in Saigon, the French intended to compete in this respect with Hong Kong and Singapore. At the same time, despite massive conversions to Catholicism from the last two hundred years of French missionization, threats against missionaries were frequently made. Although reports of persecution were exaggerated, the French state nevertheless used this reason to launch its conquest of Cochinchina in the south of Vietnam and, from there, the entire Mekong Delta.

After their success in 1862, the French continued to expand. For two centuries, Khmer monarchs had been weak. Their more powerful Thai and Vietnamese neighbours repeatedly threatened them. They fell at times under the influence of one or the other, and very briefly protected some of their autonomy by paying tribute to both. By the mid nineteenth century, the Vietnamese and Thai states had been strongly consolidated. Armed clashes occurred on Cambodian territory, leading to much suffering of the Khmer people as well as the seizure of significant portions of the previous Khmer territories. When King Ang Duong sought assistance from Napoleon III in 1853, he could not envision that the French already planned to conquer significant portions of Vietnam. After the French victory in 1862, King Norodom – Ang Duong's successor – accepted Cambodia being turned into a French protectorate. Once Cambodia was secured, the French then eventually further expanded into the Vietnamese provinces of Annam and Tonkin, thereby gaining full control by 1885.

The Spanish came to the region as early as the sixteenth century. In contrast to other European powers, the Spanish crown strongly supported missionization. In the central and northern parts of the Philippines, local inhabitants followed a variety of animist beliefs. With less hierarchical and organized religion, missionaries converted them to Christianity more successfully than elsewhere in the region. Yet, in the south, the spread of Islam across the Malay world had reached the island of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Moros (Muslims of the southern Philippines) strongly resisted missionization efforts as well as the Spanish conquest. As a result, even though the Spanish had

already established a foothold in Manila by 1571, they were only able to defeat the Moros in 1830.

There were few economic incentives for colonizing the Philippines. Having learned from their mistakes in Latin America, where vast numbers of the population died from disease and mistreatment, Spanish colonial rulers prevented Spaniards from living outside the city, and prohibited intensive exploitation of labour in mines or plantations, which had led to huge population losses in Latin America. In the first few years, they conceded a few royal grants to Spaniards, thereby allotting them administrative control over groups of villages in return for Christianizing them and providing employment for the local population. Otherwise, many others worked on friar estates that were mostly granted to Filipino *mestizos* (mixed local and Spanish). Overall, Spanish colonial rule did not significantly transform the local economy until well into the nineteenth century.

Therefore the effect of colonialism in Southeast Asia was profound but very uneven. While some regions were highly influenced by intensive colonial presence, others were barely touched. Economic, political and social transformation left the region with a strong European imprint and laid the basis for the current configuration and character of modern states.

Colonial ventures displaced and transformed local economic networks that already had a global reach. Strong trade networks existed well before colonial times. They connected India to China, and overland routes reached Europe; the appeal of spices from Asia was introduced through these networks. The Portuguese, British and Dutch essentially created competing maritime routes. Over time, their superior maritime power ensured dominance over trade routes. Some land areas, where production of coffee, sugar, rubber, tin, oil palm and other commodities became highly profitable, were transformed systematically to use local agricultural labour and integrate it into colonial priorities. In Java, landholdings remained relatively intact but productivity remained highly contained under the Cultivation System that imposed strict production quotas to the benefit of the Dutch. In British Malaya and parts of Sumatra, however, some areas were converted to plantations, which hired agricultural workers. In the Philippines, perhaps more than elsewhere, large-scale plantation agriculture emerged, later to be seized by a growing Filipino mestizo elite. These transformations created some dependency on external markets for cash crops, and determined to a large extent where small-scale, subsistence

farming remained and where agricultural labour depended more extensively on large-scale plantation farming linked to global markets.

Economic transformation under colonial rule accelerated migration that was already driven by a number of push factors in the countries of origin. Most notably, deteriorating economic and social conditions in China motivated many poor Chinese to seek better livelihoods in Southeast Asia. Migration to Siam, the Philippines, British Malaya, Singapore and the Dutch East Indies was already significant in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Most migrants tended to marry locally and mix. In the Philippines, the Chinese population rose from 6,000 in 1840 to 100,000 by 1890 but many would become *mestizos* and eventually be simply considered Filipinos (Tarling, 1992). Migration to Siam was similarly strong, and migrants tended to integrate relatively well into the local population. This was also the case for initial waves of migrants integrating into the Dutch East Indies and Malaya. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, and partly as a result of the scale of migration and colonial policies and practices, migrants tended to form their own, separate communities. By the early 1820s, the Chinese population in West Borneo already reached around 50,000. As mentioned earlier, Chinese migrants came in much larger numbers to Malaya and Singapore after the 1870s as labourers in rapidly expanding commercial ventures. Indians also came in large numbers so that their respective proportion of the population of both colonies was very high. In Singapore, Chinese settlers became the vast majority. While in colonies such as Burma or the Dutch East Indies, where the proportion of Indians or Chinese migrants remained relatively low, they nevertheless came to occupy significant niches in the colonial economy, as laborers, moneylenders and traders. These changes prompted the scholar and colonial administrator J. S. Furnivall to observe the formation of "plural societies", by which Europeans, Chinese, Indians and "natives" lived in separate communities, with their distinct religions, languages, and even occupations. This separation, which was a marked departure from earlier mixing between migrants and local populations, had lasting effects in modern Indonesia, Malaysia and Burma/Myanmar,[2] where Chinese and Indian

---

[2] The SLORC regime in 1989 changed the English reference to the country from Burma to Myanmar, as the latter was closer to its form in the Burmese language. Several sources continued to use "Burma" after 1989 as the SLORC regime was highly contested and criticized as illegitimate, particularly after its

communities were subjected to discriminatory policies and largely failed, or were prevented, from integrating even after independence (Furnivall, 1948).

Politically, European colonialism created new states, new identities, and transformed existing political structures. Most dramatically, Dutch and Spanish colonial administration over the Malay and Philippine archipelagos created administrative boundaries, centralized state control where only loose and mainly local political structures prevailed, and laid the basis for new identities to emerge. Modern states of Indonesia and the Philippines were created out of the Dutch and Spanish colonies respectively. Malaysia became its own state, again from loosely related sultanates that had fallen under British colonial control. British rule also left an important demographic transformation, as independent Malaysia inherited a large Chinese population (almost 40 per cent of the population). Ethnic politics have since dominated Malaysian politics, and certainly the strong Malay Muslim identity has grown and been nurtured in juxtaposition with the large Chinese and smaller Indian populations. Singapore was a tiny island with a very small population that only grew in importance as the British transformed it into an important regional hub. Catholic identity, which became so important in the Philippines, was a direct consequence of intense missionization under Spanish rule.

Southeast Asian countries therefore entered the twentieth century with important influences from European colonialism. Some areas remained only subtly touched by European influence, but others were clearly marked, transformed, or even created out of this experience.

Nationalism, communism and the modern state

The first half of the twentieth century radically transformed the region as modern states were crafted. Accompanying the decline of European empires, new ideologies of political organization emerged. Nationalism inspired groups to organize against colonial occupation and to claim their own states as new, modern nations. Communism was also spreading as a radically new form of political organization based on

rejection of election results in 1990. After the return to civilian rule in 2011, the latter issue has become less relevant and the use of "Myanmar" is more broadly accepted in the English-speaking world. Because of the widespread use of Burma up until recent years, I use "Myanmar" to refer to the country after 1989 but "Burma" otherwise.

the empowerment of the working classes, the elimination of wealth inequalities, and the collective ownership of property. Its revolutionary creed appealed to many groups seeking to overthrow colonial powers, displace elites who monopolized local power, and gain access to land and better living standards. Together, these two ideological forces shaped the imaginary thrust of anti-colonial movements. Their success was conditioned in part by global power shifts, including the erosion of imperial power and the Cold War (1945–89) that divided the world into communist and non-communist camps.

Nationalism is a modern ideological form. Its roots lie in the Americas and Europe when groups began to reject imperial and dynastic rulers. Instead, it claimed legitimacy of rule for populations with shared experience and common identity, based on principles of equal membership and participation in new political groupings that we call "nations". As Benedict Anderson has argued, they are "imagined communities" whereby certain populations with a common language and shared experiences on a given territory aspire to rule themselves (Anderson, 1983). It was a powerful idea that inspired populations not only to rid themselves of colonial subjugation but also of forms of rule that reinforced inequality and legitimacy based on dynastic rule.

Nationalism fed some of the early movements against dynastic and imperial rule in Asia. By 1911, nationalists guided by Sun Yat-sen's ideas challenged the long-time dominance of the Qing dynasty and rejected its legitimacy of rule. In Southeast Asia, José Rizal in the late nineteenth century advocated for self-rule by Filipinos. His ideas drove the formation of a nationalist Filipino movement that launched a revolutionary struggle against the Spanish. In Indonesia, Muslim merchants and intellectuals had begun to articulate nationalist ideas in the first decade of the twentieth century but the nationalist movement formally crystallized around the Youth Pledge and the formation of the Nationalist Party of Indonesia in 1928. Young nationalists had by then defined a new Indonesian nation built around a common language, Bahasa Indonesia (a dialect of Malay that had been used as a lingua franca). Their movement led a revolution against the Dutch. Other nationalist organizations similarly arose in other countries of the region but not necessarily with the same revolutionary fervour or outcomes. Aung San, a nationalist leader, intellectual and later general, formed a number of nationalist organizations in Burma, starting in the late 1930s. They culminated in the creation in 1944 of the Anti-Fascist People's

Freedom League, which constituted a broad alliance of nationalists, communists and socialists. While initially these groups supported the Japanese as liberators from British colonial rule, after it became clear that the Japanese intended to maintain control and imposed harsh conditions, they opposed the Japanese occupation and later the return of the British, while demanding that the Burmese control their own land. The formation of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in 1946 constituted the clearest expression of Malay nationalism. No strong movement had emerged nor had there been a revolutionary program. Although redefining Malays as a nation, UMNO for some time did not challenge British rule. This form of nationalism also differed from others in the region by claiming Malays as the nation, and reclaiming their legitimacy of rule as "sons-of-the-soil", the original inhabitants of Malaya. Formed around a Malay, Muslim identity, it adopted a much clearer ethnic form that excluded Chinese and Indians from this newly imagined nation. Such exclusion would later limit the ability of Malaysia's leaders to create a common, overarching bond.

Nationalism mixed with other ideological influences to produce various political forms. Liberalism, for instance, propagated ideas of individual freedom and equality. On the economic side, it had led to the enshrinement of property rights, as well as capitalist economies based on notions of free markets and the pursuit of individual wealth. The flourishing of liberal ideas in Europe and the pursuit of personal wealth had fuelled colonial ventures in some respect. The expansion of markets and capitalism in the region presupposed individual liberties and property rights, which among other changes would displace local forms of collective land ownership. On the political side, liberalism shared close affinities with nationalism, in the idea of equality between individuals. But a notion of individual rights, freedom and choice inspired specific forms of democratic politics. Certainly the spread of modern elections based on "one person, one vote" found its roots in liberal ideas.

Communism proposed an alternative societal project, although it could also mix with ideas of "nation" and equality based on different foundations. Rooted in the mid-nineteenth-century writings of Karl Marx, a German intellectual, communist ideas evolved through various practical experiments at societal transformation. Marx had essentially written a critique of capitalism and a theory of the evolution of world history based on an analysis of modes of production and

the development of social classes. He argued that capitalism chronologically replaced a feudal mode of production that tied labour to land, restricted the movement of peasants, gave land-owners broad rights over them but also obligations to provide for their subsistence. Capitalism had the unique characteristic of developing a social class, the bourgeoisie, which became the owners of the means of production and whose principal drive was the search for profit. Workers provided labour in exchange for remuneration, in a market transaction that departed from feudal ties, rights and obligations. Over time, Marx contended, capitalist production would maintain the working class mostly close to its costs of subsistence in order to gain maximum labour at the lowest possible cost. Such tendencies would create increasing resentment among the working class, which would rise up against the bourgeoisie and overthrow capitalism by revolution. Workers would then collectively own the means of production and secure a more equitable distribution of the fruits of production in a system that has come to be called "communism".

Revolution in theory became the vehicle for the spread of communism. The first one occurred in Russia, far from the German industrial hinterland that Marx imagined would be the locus of revolutionary potential. Marx had argued that workers in dire factory conditions and impoverished by industrialization would be the primary agents of revolution, not peasants. Yet, Russia, still largely an agriculturally based society with only a tiny industrial sector became the site of communist revolution and the first example of a communist system. Lenin, the leader of Russia's revolution, added pragmatic considerations to Marx's revolutionary theory. He defined a key role for the Communist Party, as he argued the need for leadership, education and awareness for the working class to realize its revolutionary potential. The party therefore became not only the instrument of mobilization and revolution, but also the key political structure around which communist systems were built. In theory, the party played a transitional role until communism could be fully realized. In reality, not a single communist system ever surpassed the stage at which the party occupied a dominant position. A new elite developed around party leaderships, with access to economic opportunities and state resources depending on one's position and relationship to the party.

Following the Russian revolution in 1917, communist parties were formed in several countries of the world. In Southeast Asia, they sprung

up in the French colony of Indochina (today's Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos), in the Dutch East Indies (today's Indonesia), in British Malaya (part of today's Malaysia) and in Burma. In their early stage, they promoted the communist alternative, created linkages to Moscow and to the broader communist movement, organized trade unions and fomented occasional revolts. In the Dutch East Indies, a communist revolt in 1926 was quickly repressed. Most other communist parties were formed in the 1930s: the Indochinese Communist Party (1930), the Communist Party of Malaya (1930) and the Communist Party of Burma (1939). Parties focused on organizing labour (factory workers) yet most of these countries remained primarily agrarian. Few tapped initially into their large peasantries to direct their attacks against colonial rulers.

Organized resistance increased during the 1940s. Linkages across Asia were key to developing mobilization strategies. Communists in China were gaining momentum in the late 1940s with Mao Tse-tung's emphasis on organizing peasants, creating an army and using party cadres to recruit, train and mobilize. Largely influenced by the Communist Party of China, the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) organized along such tactics. In 1948, it launched a guerrilla war against British colonial rulers, primarily by targeting rubber plantations and infrastructure. In 1941, the Indochinese Communist Party also organized a military wing, the Viet Minh, under Ho Chi Minh's leadership. It was able to mount a very strong resistance to the French during the First Indochina War (1946–54). In fact, Ho Chi Minh and the newly formed Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) were able to occupy and govern a large portion of northern Vietnam during this period. The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and Indonesian Communist Party, conversely, followed a political route. The CPB joined the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) as a united front against Japanese occupation in Burma, but the AFPFL became the dominant organization after the Second World War. Indonesian communists organized a rebellion in 1948 but, again, were swiftly crushed. Communist parties that most relied on peasant mobilization and armed resistance, along the lines of the Chinese Communist Party, gained strongest ascendency.

While communists and nationalists appeared to offer alternative societal projects, they were sometimes conflated. Where parties were organized along each ideological strand, competition arose. The Indonesian Nationalist Party won the upper hand over the

Indonesian Communist Party in the 1940s and 1950s. The United Malays National Organization (UMNO) became the Malays' most important political vehicle, and the dominant party, while the CPM gained support mainly among Chinese. After a decade of guerrilla warfare, the CPM had failed to gain the upper hand and basically dissolved at independence in 1957. At the same time, many communist parties were also nationalist as they organized primarily to resist colonial rule and aimed at obtaining an independent state for Indonesians, Vietnamese, Burmese respectively, in other words for their respective nations. The Vietnamese communist movement was perhaps most clearly conflated with a nationalist project, as communists first led the war against French colonial rule, and then fought in the Vietnam War against American occupation. Their struggle was just as much a war of liberation against foreign occupiers as it was a revolutionary movement aimed at establishing a communist regime.

The Second World War broke the dominance of European power and allowed nationalist and communist forces to establish independent states. The Japanese joined the Axis forces of Germany and Italy. Militarism had risen in Japan, which was then governed by an expansionist military regime. Its goal was to seize control of Asia and establish a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere". In fact, Japan sought to compete with the Europeans and establish its own empire. It had already seized control over Korea and parts of China when the Second World War gave it the opportunity to rapidly expand throughout Southeast Asia as European powers were occupied with the war in Europe. In 1940, Japan signed a cooperation agreement with Phibun Songkhram's government in Siam while the Vichy regime in France, created after Germany's successful invasion, allowed Japan to use ports in Indochina. From this base, Japanese forces first seized full control over Indochina in 1941. After an attack against Pearl Harbor in December 1941, which saw the United States enter the war, Japanese troops rapidly occupied the Philippines, British Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Burma and Singapore. Although very short, the period of Japanese occupation was brutal and transformative. The Japanese sought to extract as many resources and as much labour as possible for their war effort in the "Co-Prosperity Sphere". Violent methods led to large numbers of deaths, displacement, famine and widespread disease. The economies of Southeast Asia were severely disrupted and many regions rapidly declined. On the political front,

however, Japanese occupiers allowed nationalist and some religious groups to expand their influence and hoped to create some loyalty to the Japanese order, by allowing some relief from the otherwise strong imposition of Japanese culture. Nationalist leaders in Burma and the Dutch East Indies were allowed to mobilize masses with the intent of gaining support for the Japanese. In the Philippines and Indochina former colonial administrators were provided with opportunities to fill positions at higher levels of the bureaucracy. Islamic groups were supported in the Dutch East Indies and Malaya. The rise of these administrators and nationalists, combined with the misery the Japanese left behind, provided a strong block against the reimposition of European colonial power when Japan was defeated in 1945.

The Cold War, which began as the Second World War ended, created a new set of international constraints and opportunities that shaped the region. After 1949, the Cold War was in full swing, which added very significant layers of external influence. The Soviet Union and the United States divided the world into East and West spheres of influence. In several regions, they competed for power and even fought proxy wars. Southeast Asia became one of the Cold War's key terrains. The Vietnam War (1955–75) represented the most important application of the United States' containment policy, by which the US sought to prevent the spread of communism. American governments were motivated by the belief that losing in Vietnam might lead to a "domino effect" across Southeast Asia. In this respect, they were somewhat vindicated as the loss of the war in 1975 triggered not only a communist victory in Vietnam but also the downfall of authoritarian rule and replacement by communist regimes in neighbouring Cambodia and Laos. The US government was determined to prevent other communist movements from gaining power. It played a role in supporting the Indonesian military's suppression of communists in Indonesia in 1965, after a failed coup attempt allegedly launched by the Communist Party. It provided further military aid and political support to Suharto's anti-communist, authoritarian regime that began in 1965. In the Philippines, the United States provided military aid, training and strong political support to contain the influence of the New People's Army, the armed wing of the Philippine Communist Party. It gave its unwavering support for the Marcos dictatorship (1972–86), which was strongly anti-communist. It would not be an exaggeration to argue that the fate of many emerging independent states was closely tied to the competition of the United

States and the Soviet Union as well as China in the battle between communist and non-communist states.

Countries in the region therefore gained independence inspired by a variety of ideological projects and under different strategic conditions. Vietnam was perhaps the most complex as the north initially fought and gained its measure of independence from the French. While the south remained under US influence, by the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 the whole country was reunified under the communist regime. Cambodia and Laos initially sustained non-communist regimes after the French departure in 1954 but were overtaken by communist movements in the wake of the victory in Vietnam. The Philippines and Malaya (renamed Malaysia a few years later) gained gradual independence respectively in 1946 from the Americans and in 1957 from the British. In both cases new political institutions resembled the political systems of their former colonial masters. The British subsequently gave independence to Singapore in 1959. Singapore soon chose integration with Malaya and former British territories to form the Federation of Malaysia. Singapore seceded and became fully independent only two years later. In Indonesia, nationalists led a revolutionary movement after the Second World War ended in 1945 and the Dutch attempted to regain control of the archipelago as the Japanese occupying forces retreated. Although Indonesian leaders officially declared independence in 1945, they only succeeded in practice in 1949, when the Dutch finally departed.

Political change: alternative explanations

During the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, many Southeast Asian countries experienced profound and frequent political change while others remained very stable. Why is it so, and why is it important? There are many explanations that range from unique historical events to broad patterns that we can observe in clusters of countries. History matters and unique events often shape the political landscape. Most countries in the region were set on relatively different paths given varied colonial histories. Large-scale killings often left permanent scars. The Khmer Rouge massacres of the 1970s in Cambodia still have an impact today, including a traumatic relationship to the past and Hun Sen's dominance of the political regime. The 1965 massacre of 500,000 people in Indonesia provided the instability

that partially explains the ability of the military-dominated Suharto regime to sustain itself for three decades. The absence of colonial rule in Thailand allowed for the preservation of the monarchy. It has been impossible to understand Thailand's politics without referring to the role that the king has played. Unique events and circumstances therefore provide key aspects to explain political change in each Southeast Asian country.

Yet, broader patterns can be observed. As explained above, ideologies can inspire change, as nationalism and communism did in the formation of independence movements and the resistance to colonial rule. International factors offer opportunities and constraints for political players. Pressures from abroad can allow groups to oppose a repressive regime and participate in its demise. Growth, for example, can be fostered by a change of fortune by which a country might take advantage of its inexpensive labour to boost exports of manufactured goods. Such factors drove the economic boom in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia during the 1970s and 1980s. Other times, states can be vulnerable to changes in the international system. Long-term changes in economic development, for instance, provide the basis for democratization, but world economic events such as financial crises and recessions can dampen opportunities for growth and have strong impacts on political change.

International factors in two realms create constraints and opportunities: security and the global economy. Security refers primarily, but not exclusively, to states' military power in the international system. Power is conditioned by a number of sources, including military strength, country size, population, strength of the economy, and other dimensions. Yet, the ability to project military power has historically determined a country's position in the international system. Great powers have been those with strong and effective armed forces. The concentration or diffusion of military power provides a structure from which we can understand how other states position themselves in relation to the strongest ones. From 1945 to 1989, the system was bipolar, featuring two large superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. As rival competitive powers, backed by radically different ideologies and regime types, they divided up the world into spheres of influence. Not only did the United States and the Soviet Union project power towards each other, in the form of nuclear deterrence, they competed for the spread of their respective ideologies and preferred regime types, fought

proxy wars in various parts of the world, as they funded, armed, or even directly participated in violent confrontations between states and rebel movements.

The United States and the Soviet Union, joined by China in 1949, had considerable influence on the politics of Southeast Asia after the Second World War. The United States' policy of containment, as its active promotion of anti-communist regimes, played a crucial role not only in the Vietnam War but in the support for the Marcos regime in the Philippines or military aid to the Suharto regime, therefore contributing to the longevity of these authoritarian regimes. Soviet and Chinese support for communist movements helped groups, such as the Vietnamese Communist Party, to gain power. In turn, Vietnamese intervention helped to remove the Khmer Rouge from Cambodia but replaced the regime with one initially under Vietnamese control. The leader of this regime, Hun Sen, managed to create a sufficiently strong power base that he remained dominant well after the Vietnamese no longer provided support.

On the economic side, regimes have been strengthened or weakened by world economic trends. Several countries in the region grew very rapidly from the 1960s onwards: Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. Government policies and private sector strategies – such as the reform of the financial sector or the emphasis on low-cost labour sectors – were crucial but all benefited from large amounts of foreign investment in sectors that were then becoming less competitive in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea but were finding new profit opportunities in countries of Southeast Asia with lower labour costs. Lee Kuan Yew built a highly stable political system in Singapore that fed on the ability to deliver strong economic performance for decades. Suharto's Indonesia profited from this shift as economic growth explained some aspects of its 30-year stability. Conversely, by the end of the twentieth century the same countries faced new challenges. In 1997, Asia was hit with a financial crisis that began in Thailand but rapidly spread to the whole region. Several countries had deregulated their economies and allowed large companies to benefit from bank loans that were risky, in that the loans were not well secured against solid assets. Furthermore, they unintentionally created "speculative bubbles" in real estate and other sectors; the value of real estate artificially rose as a result of speculators obtaining easy loans to buy and sell property for quick profit. Large amounts of foreign investment were pulled out of

countries of the region when many of these unhealthy economic practices were exposed. As a result, they were faced with, among other consequences, banking failures and sudden withdrawal of financial capital. Economic growth rates declined as a result. The economic instability partly explained the fall in November 1997 of the Chavalit government in Thailand, the fall of the Suharto regime in Indonesia in May 1998, and the erosion of the stability and confidence of dominant party regimes in Malaysia and Singapore. We can therefore recognize some broad patterns that affect countries in the region and their politics.

Political change, however, is more often than not conditioned by domestic factors. In this book, these factors are emphasized. Countries in the region were highly influenced by the presence or absence of economic growth. How elites responded to crises also could explain moments that allowed for political change to occur. At times, societal movements have also contributed to the erosion of authoritarian rule, or the emergence of democracy. These factors can be compared to assess their degree of explanatory reach in these cases. Yet, we also need to recognize some factors that are more specific to the region or to one or two countries. The following sections present some explanatory propositions for understanding some of the broad strokes of political change in Southeast Asia.

Growth, development and political change

Economic development has long been associated with democratic politics. Seymour Martin Lipset in 1959 established a correlation between high levels of economic development and democracy (Lipset, 1959). He found that the more advanced economies, measured as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, were all stable, advanced democracies. Lipset postulated that such an association arose out of the greater wealth, education and urbanization of developed economies. Those circumstances created greater demand for openness and competition.

An offshoot of this argument emphasizes the role of the middle class. The argument is a narrower one that emphasizes how the middle class typically prefers more active participation in politics and representation of their interests. Its members tend to be educated, work as professionals or office workers, can be civil servants or teachers and students as well. They are likely to live in urban areas, create associations and

organizations to advance their interests and have more time than their poorer co-citizens to be involved in politics.

Why are advanced classes not associated with more democratic politics as well? The argument is not that they shun open and competitive politics. However, they tend to be the dominant groups that control the polity or that are the wealthiest in society. Classic literature in the social sciences postulated that the business classes were in fact the drivers of change historically and that they laid the foundations of emerging European democracies (Moore, 1966). Yet, in Latin America, Asia and Africa the business classes were quite different. The key factor is the relationship between the business classes and the state. If business groups thrived because of their links to the state, they tended to be conservative and mainly interested in preserving the status quo. Scholars such as Peter Evans and Guillermo O'Donnell also saw close cooperation between business and the state as serving the interests of the ruling class (Evans, 1979; O'Donnell, 1973). In the Southeast Asian context, scholars such as Richard Robison, Vedi Hadiz, John Sidel and Paul Hutchcroft, using different analytical frameworks, have all concluded that business groups in the region have been more inclined to be predatory and supportive of authoritarian regimes, often times because their wealth was intrinsically tied to the political regime (Hadiz, 2010; Hutchcroft, 1998; Robison, 1986; Sidel, 1999). In rare cases, such as among some business groups in Thailand or Indonesia, authoritarian controls became impediments to their interests and they therefore more strongly supported political openness, even by entering politics and seeking change from within. Business classes, per se, are therefore likely to support regimes that best serve their interests, whether democratic or authoritarian, but are unlikely to be the drivers of change. On the other hand, to the extent that a large number of small entrepreneurs are less linked to the state, and form part of the middle class, their interests might lie closer to the professionals, students, intellectuals who tend to demand more open and representative politics.

Poverty generally prevents political mobilization. Many poor live in rural areas, where they live on subsistence farming. Because they live in small villages or small towns, they are unlikely to be able to mobilize politically on a large scale. Occasional rioting might occur when they face starvation or rapid decline in their living standards. More often than not, these acts of protest remain localized. Peasants might also

engage in "everyday forms of resistance" that nibble at established patterns of local political or economic domination (Scott, 1985). On rare occasions the cumulative effect of such individualized forms of resistance has sufficiently undermined patterns of political and economic control to produce change. Benedict Kerkvliet, for example, has convincingly shown that such individualized resistance sufficiently undermined the communist system of collective farms (collectivization) that it contributed to its demise and abandonment in Vietnam (Kerkvliet, 2005).

In urban areas, the poor also rarely mobilize. They are often migrants from rural areas, work in the underground economy, sometimes in factories, or in small peddler trade. Their preoccupations with survival strategies also make them unlikely to engage in protest or large-scale political movements. Workers in factories or in large-scale industrial sites, however, are likely to be more politicized. Following workers in other parts of the world, they often seek better pay and better working conditions. The labour movement has long focused on unionization and collective bargaining to achieve these goals. Even under authoritarian conditions, union leaders often mobilize workers in strike actions or other forms of protest to voice their demands. Ever since unions appeared on a large scale in Europe and North America in the early twentieth century, labour organizations have been prevalent. Over time, certain forms of collective organizing, various tactics and strategies have been passed on to labour movements around the world. Workers, therefore, sometimes demonstrate, protest or strike at the factory or local level. Other times, as Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens have shown, they have joined the middle class in broader movements demanding democracy (Rueschemeyer, Stephens & Stephens, 1992).

Marxists offer a caveat to the role of social classes in political change. Instead of agents of democratization, Marxists consider the labour movement to be the agent of social revolution. They postulate that workers will create networks and unite for revolutionary change. Lenin in Russia, Mao Tse-tung in China and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, led social revolutions based on the mobilization of peasants. By doing so, they showed that peasants, while often powerless and unable to organize, occasionally have engaged in large-scale political action. But revolutions are rare, and we should certainly be cautious of

generalizing about the ability of either workers or peasants to generate and produce such profound change.

How do these propositions from political science theory help understand political change in Southeast Asia? We should examine the role of the middle class, the business elites, as well as the working class at moments of political change. A quick survey of the region, however, yields poor predictive value to the role of social classes. Some of the richer, more developed countries with a strong middle class (Singapore and Malaysia) remain stable soft authoritarian regimes. The argument works better in poor countries, with arguably less developed middle-classes such as Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam that have shown few signs of democratization. It does not mean that pressures for change do not emanate from these classes but that other important factors might delay, outweigh, or even thwart their effects on political change. The following chapters on individual countries examine the role of these classes to better understand the extent to which they have been significant.

Scholars of Southeast Asian politics have emphasized contingent factors. The effect that the social classes might have on political change depends on the institutional starting point. Authoritarian regimes vary enormously in terms of their strength and their style of management. They can be based primarily on personal rule – by which a single leader rules arbitrarily according to his or her will – or they can be highly institutionalized, in which case the leader, or ruling group, abides by a set of formal or informal rules, including at times some form of elections, adoption of laws and decrees and parliamentary roles. Rules of conduct dictate the exercise of power of different elements within the state and guide relations with societal groups. In Indonesia, for instance, the type of authoritarian regime led to a highly institutionalized role of the military, elements of the bureaucracy and connections between the state and the business sector that proved quite resilient to pressures for change. Opposition groups, whether workers, students or other middle class groups, could not necessarily muster sufficient strength to mobilize effectively against the regime (Slater, 2008).

So, while analyzing the role of social classes in political change, we also need to be aware how their ability to mobilize is constrained by the repressive apparatus, incentives to cooperate with the regime, or

other ways in which authoritarian rulers might prevent them from being politically effective.

Elites and democratization

Decision-makers and those who hold the strings of power often determine the political rules of the game. Political scientists have grappled with the role of dominant groups, and the extent to which they can control a polity and freely pursue their interests. Critics argue that analyses focusing on these groups sometimes overplay their role. Instead, they point to constraints that prevent individuals or groups from establishing rules or serving personal interests when they do so at the expense of the broader majority. In democracies, legal systems and institutions regulate power and interests in order to limit the power of the few and potential abuses of power in favour of personal enrichment or other forms of personal interest. In authoritarian systems, the small group that controls the regime often appears to create institutions, set rules and accumulate personal wealth with little restraint. Yet, even in those systems, power is not absolute: it is constrained by the leadership's need to obtain sufficient support to maintain stability and control. This fact often means that even authoritarian leaders are constrained by other groups in society. In each regime, there is a balance between the power of the few and the extent to which they are constrained by the majority or groups that are not directly linked to the centres of power.

Analyses focusing on "elites" are primarily concerned with the group or groups that dominate a polity. They typically seek to understand the extent of their power, their motivations, as well as the constraints that they face in the exercise of that power. C. Wright Mills provided an early definition of "elite": the "few who are in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society . . . They occupy the strategic command posts of the social structure" (Mills, 1956).

Who belongs in the elite? Major hierarchies or organizations, as Mills argues, can vary considerably from one society to another. For sure, the state's major leaders and public policy makers constitute a centre of power. Business leaders and entrepreneurs whose interests are closely tied to the government are also part of the elite, particularly where there are clear networks of interaction and influence between those business interests and the state. The top leadership and

executive of political parties are ambiguously linked to the state. Obviously where they directly participate in government or play key roles in legislatures, they are part of this elite. Yet, some parties might be marginal and represent groups that are neither well represented nor powerful. In some societies, other key organizations have lots of influence and their leadership maintains close contacts with the government. These can include religious, ethnic or professional organizations, depending on the society.

The study of political change requires that we pay attention to elites. In stable regimes power and wealth usually keep elites quiescent and sufficiently satisfied to accept the prevailing rules of the game. In their classic study, Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter argue however that elite splits always precede the collapse of authoritarian regimes and transitions to democracy. Splits are not just disagreements about usual policy areas but are fundamental differences in the way a political regime is managed or within the regime itself. O'Donnell and Schmitter emphasized such important moments when these splits occur. They can be combined with factional alliances with groups that have been excluded from the ruling circle. When democratization does occur, it often involves a group of reformists in the ruling elite who then negotiate a path with the regime's opponents to hold elections and craft a more democratic regime (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). In the Southeast Asian context, William Case has extended the argument and argued that elite cohesion or disunity often explain regime sustainability or its instability (Case, 2002).

Elite unity tends to remain stronger in regimes where a single party rather than the military dominates. Within single-party systems, cadres and officials might divide into factions around policy issues but remain committed to keeping the regime intact. Military-dominated regimes tend to be less stable as there are often important divisions over the initiation of a coup and the timeline of remaining in power. Most officers tend to prioritize the survival and efficacy of the military itself. When pressures arise against military regimes, some factions usually prefer to return to the barracks (Geddes, 1999).

When we juxtapose these insights with the role of social classes, an alternative explanation emerges. Democratization or other forms of regime change are predicated less on certain observable levels of development, size of middle class, or type of business class but instead are much more products of choices made by authoritarian leaders

at critical moments. Certainly timing of change often requires that we analyze more closely what motivates elites to trigger a process of democratization. For instance, in Burma/Myanmar, after decades of military dominance, the junta introduced in 2008 a new constitution, allowed controlled elections in 2012 and accepted that the popular opposition figure Aung San Suu Kyi could become a member of the new parliament. A focus strictly on development or the growth of Burma's middle class could not explain why the junta moved so decisively towards some measure of political liberalization.

Elite behaviour in itself is not always a good predictor of political change. It rarely indicates long-term processes that might undermine authoritarian rule or sustain democratic politics. New divisions, however, require analysis as they might be precursors to regime collapse. Conversely, when elites seem to be united and profit from the regime, it is difficult to envision cracks that can lead to its demise. In those circumstances, only external factors are likely to bring about political change.

Civil society, oppositional politics and change

Societal groups and organizations make claims on the state and seek to maximize their political space to advance their interests. We refer to civil society as a public space in which organizations and groups can pursue their activities without the state's interference. Civil society is constituted of a large number of groups and organizations with various objectives and goals. These can range from non-governmental organizations operating in a number of areas to religious organizations or even business associations. To think in terms of civil society allows us to grasp the role of seemingly disparate groups that sometimes act concurrently to attain certain political objectives.

As discussed above, there are other ways of conceptualizing politics outside of the state. Sometimes individuals come together and form class identities that become politically significant. We offered a number of propositions relating class to political change. Class analysis emphasizes the stratification of society, and linkages of some classes (the bourgeoisie, for instance) with the state. Organizations and groups can sometimes represent class interests, and therefore we would tend to emphasize that analytical category. Other times, they do not, and

their political mobilization cuts across classes. It is often more useful then to think of them as "civil society".

What impact does civil society have on political change? In political science, we often associate a dynamic and thriving civil society with democracy. Democratic politics provide a set of rules that best protect spaces that are autonomous from the state. Where civil society is strong and vibrant, it stabilizes and expands democratic life. Yet, it is not entirely clear whether it can contribute to the demise of authoritarian rule and the emergence of a new democracy. Authoritarian regimes usually allow very restricted spaces that are autonomous from the state, so it is unlikely that civil society can grow significantly under such constraints. There is however a degree of variance among authoritarian regimes and the degree to which they exert vast control over society. Occasionally, therefore, civil society can organize, and even mobilize to build some opposition to the state.

In Southeast Asia, civil society organization has often been weak since states in the region have been predominantly authoritarian. Yet, as Meredith Weiss argues, civil society has not been absent. States in Southeast Asia have often allowed some autonomous political organization in response to rising social forces and economic development. Civil society organizations might not have triggered democratization but have often pressured states successfully to liberalize, allowing more participation and freedom of political action even under sustained authoritarian or semi-authoritarian settings. Their character as well suggests a broader range than usually associated with civil society, including religious organizations and some organizations that are not likely to favour democratic politics. Broadly speaking, civil society organizations might not have the strength to lead political change but have nudged authoritarian states towards more compromise and openness (Weiss, 2008).

Southeast Asia's uniqueness

Broad explanations for political change are always confronted with the complexity and uniqueness of local conditions. While we can observe and compare patterns across cases, sometimes we can only explain political change by very distinct events or factors that are not reproduced elsewhere. At other times, certain regional patterns tend

to emerge. Are there regional characteristics that might explain trends in Southeast Asia?

Some scholars long ago emphasized the strong role of patron-client ties in Southeast Asian politics. We sometimes refer to these ties as "patrimonialism". From his deep empirical analysis of the region, James C. Scott argued that dyadic ties between a patron and several clients was a strong feature of socio-political relations from the village to the national level. Typically, a patron nurtures loyalty and commitment from followers by providing resources, sometimes protection, or a safety-net when they are faced with difficult times. In return, "clients" remain loyal and commit to supporting these "patrons". In villages, for example, a wealthy landowner might help poorer farmers needing additional money to fund a large wedding or a funeral. In exchange, the landowner will later ask them to return the favour. In politics, patron-client relations might mean that, in exchange for resources, clients will support a local patron who requires their vote or the support for a particular political party. Political leaders might nurture loyalty from individuals in the armed forces, a political party, or other influential positions by providing some benefits in exchange for their support. An authoritarian leader might help provide resources to loyal generals, politicians or businesspeople in exchange for their support of the regime (Scott, 1972). While we can observe patron-client ties in a broad number of societies, when they become widespread and almost systemic, they need to be placed much more centrally within our understanding of politics. We refer to this kind of phenomenon as patrimonialism when the web of these kinds of dyadic relationships is sufficiently widespread that it becomes part of the character of a society, a state, economic sectors or certain segments of the polity.

Patrimonialism has been a strong feature of Southeast Asian politics. Paul Hutchcroft describes the Philippines as a "patrimonial state". In Indonesia, "bapakism" (from the Indonesian word "bapak", literally "father"), was once used to describe the dense web of patron-client ties that emanated from the top to the bottom of the authoritarian regime, beginning with President Suharto who developed loyalty among key supports by allowing access to state resources, contracts and other material benefits (Jackson, 1978). Many observers of Malaysia's powerful dominant party, UMNO, have emphasized its use of patron-client ties to maintain and reproduce its political success.

Patron-client ties, or patrimonialism, best explain stability rather than political change. A web of such ties tends to create its own strength, in parallel with formal institutions. Patron-client ties are private and informal; they bypass formal ranks or institutional hierarchies, although they often complement them. Because of their vertical nature, they have often been used to explain why Southeast Asian countries have seen fewer large-scale, class-based, or horizontally organized resistance movements than other regions.

In some cases, patrimonialism might have given way to other forms of "dyadic" ties, with a different character. John Sidel for instance uses the concept of "bossism" to describe the particular feature of regional politics in the Philippines by which local bosses dominate regional politics (Sidel, 1999). While they might use a certain mix of coercion and purchase of loyalty, they develop strong bases to exercise power even nationally.

There are other, more unique features that explain political change (or its absence) in Southeast Asian countries. The monarchy in Thailand is a unique feature; the king has played a crucial role during times of crises. Monarchy in Cambodia has also been an important source of political loyalty and division. Mass killings in Cambodia and Indonesia cast long shadows over the politics of these countries.

Broad patterns could therefore be observed across cases but unique features are also important. In the chapters that follow, we will trace how economic growth and development has transformed some of the cases of the region. We will assess the extent to which the middle class was formed in these contexts, and weigh the extent to which it might be behind some of the political movements that have led to political change, in particular democratization. In cases with poor levels of economic development, we will similarly analyse the role of various social classes in the politics of the country, or explain the absence of significant political mobilization where change is absent. At the same time, when political change does occur, we will assess whether identifiable splits in the elites preceded the change.

These broad patterns are conditioned by the international context as mentioned above. In particular, the emergence and stabilization of communist regimes has shaped the way economic growth and development has occurred, as well as the type of political institutions and incentives that maintain elite unity. In comparing authoritarian regimes and their stability, this distinction is particularly important. Similarly,

in some cases, change will be linked to international shocks, particularly regional or global economic crises.

Finally, the chapters are organized as a historical narrative of political continuity and change in order to reflect some of the key, and sometimes unique factors, that have shaped political regimes.