

Synopsis til RUC om Demokrati og autoritære politiske systemer i Asien

fra Stein Tønnesson,
Nordisk Institut for Asienstudier
(NIAS)

Jeg har ved flere anledninger holdt foredrag om dette emne, har fyldt en arkivboks med fotokopier af artikler, og har udarbejdet en foreløbig kronologi. Dessuden har jeg skrevet om demokratispørgsmål i to NIAS-rapporter med titlerne *Democracy in Vietnam?* og *Democracy in Laos?* Den sidste, som endnu ikke er udkommet, er skrevet sammen med Søren Ivarsson og Thommy Svensson.

Jeg holder meget af at diskutere demokrati i Asien, både fordi jeg mener det er vigtigt, og fordi det åbner op for flere vigtige diskussioner om forholdet mellem Europa og Asien. Men det er ikke det emne jeg arbejder med som forsker (jeg studerer nationalisme i Sydøstasien 1945-48). Derimod er demokrati emne for en anden forsker ved NIAS, Geir Helgesen, og min medarbejder på NIAS, Hans Antlöv, har udarbejdet en ansøgning om støtte til et større projekt om demokrati i Asien. Emnet optager altså flere af forskerne på NIAS.

I diskussionen om demokrati gør der sig en modsætning gældende mellem på den ene side et *kulturrelativistisk* synspunkt som lægger vægt på de store forskelle mellem asiatiske og europæiske kulturer og advarer mod forsøg på at eksportere et europæisk politisk system til Asien; og på den anden side et *universalistisk* synspunkt som hævder at demokratiet (rigtigt defineret) er et overlegent politisk system som bør og kan blive en universell norm. På NIAS repræsenterer Geir Helgesen det første synspunkt medens jeg (Stein Tønnesson) er en udpræget fortaler for det andet.

Jeg mener imidlertid ikke at demokratiet har fundet nogen ideel form i noget europæisk land, og slet ikke i USA. Jeg mener heller ikke at demokratiet skal opfattes som noget ideelt system. Snarere mener jeg med Winston Churchill at det trods alle dets svagheder er bedre end noget andet.

Et land kan efter min opfattelse regnes for demokratisk hvis det opfylder visse grundlæggende betingelser:

- respekt for frihederne (ytrings-, forsamlings- osv., retssikkerhed),

kort sagt de universelle menneskerettigheder

- et system med hemmelige valg (og fortrinsvis almindelig stemmeret)
- en anerkendt norm om at regeringen (eller presidenten) går af og viger pladsen for en anden hvis den/hun taber et valg eller ikke har flertal for sin politik i en valgt repræsentativ forsamling (nationalforsamling).

Den store fordel ved et demokratisk system er at det inneholder en mekanisme for fredelig udskiftning af magthavere. Dessuden har kvantitativ fredsforskning vist at stater med demokratiske systemer heller ikke fører krig mod hinanden. Fred er noget alle mennesker har godt af, uanset kultur.

Efter min opfattelse er det muligt at opfylde de tre grundlæggende krav ovenover uden at det behøver at gå ud over ens kultur på nogen uforsvarlig måde. Et uindskænket monarki er måske godt for kongen og et militærdiktatur for diktatoren, men ikke for deres undersåtter. Et demokrati som overholder de tre krav ovenfor kan desuden udformes i tusen forskellige varianter som vil passe for de forskelligste kulturer.

Med dette udgangspunkt argumenterer jeg for at det fra et demokratisk synspunkt er specielt vigtigt at studere Asien. Hvorfor? Fordi demokratiske systemer i de sidste tyve år er blevet indført i en lang række nye lande i Syd-Europa, Syd-Amerika, Øst-Europa og Afrika, men kun i ringe udstrækning i Asien (I Asien respekterer kun Indien, Japan, Taiwan, Filippinerne, Syd-Korea, Thailand, Israel (og måske Kambodia) i rimelig grad de krav der blev stillede ovenfor). Samtidigt er Stillehavsasien (Kina, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Laos, Kambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysien, Singapore, Brunei, Filippinerne og Indonesien) et område med en meget stor økonomisk vækst. Dette område er nu blevet verdens tredje økonomiske magtpol ved siden af Europa og Nord-Amerika.

Hvis der nu kommer et tilbageslag for demokratiet på verdensbasis med politiske bevægelser der kræver et autoritært og mere handlekraftigt styre, vil de let kunne pege på autoritære stater i Stillehavsasien som eksempler til efterfølgelse.

Derfor er det vigtigt at kende den politiske udvikling i Stillehavsasien. Jeg vil påstå at dette området sidder med *nøglen til universalisering af demokratiet som politisk system*. Hvis Kina, Indonesien, Singapore og Vietnam bliver stater med et levedygtigt demokrati, vil der ikke længere være nogen betydelig stat i verden der kan fungere som autoritær model for andre. De islamske stater i Nord-Afrika og Mellemøsten vil nemlig ikke

kunne ha nogen sådan modelvirkning udenfor den islamske verden.

Er det så muligt at forestille seg en demokratisering af Stillehavsasien? For tiden går der sig modstridende tendenser gældende, på den ene side en gradvis udvikling i retning af mere demokrati i flere lande, på den anden side en tendens til at ville formulere en ideologisk asiatisk politisk model (eller et alternativ) til det "vestlige" system. En sådan alternativ ideologi kunde forsåvidt godt tænkes at være demokratisk (den ville så formentlig angribe udemokratiske træk ved de europæiske lande og USA, og det kunde de have godt af), men foreløbig ser "Asiensideologerne" med Malaysiens statsminister i spidsen snarere ud til at ville skabe et ideologisk røgslør som legitimerer autoritære politiske løsninger og manglende overholdelse af menneskerettighederne.

Endnu en grund til at udviklingen i Stillehavsasien er vigtig, er at det demokratiske system stadig væk er skørt i mange af de østeuropæiske, sydamerikanske og afrikanske lande som fornylig har indført demokratiske forfatninger. Det har sammenhæng med at systemet blev indført pludseligt. Jeg vil argumentere for at det mest solide demokrati udvikler sig gradvis gennem en årrække af politiske kampe, og tager form af en institutionaliseret kompromissøgende og magtfordelende praxis. Hvis den udvikling som for øjeblikket er i gang i de stillehavsasiatiske lande kan fortolkes som begyndelsen på udviklingen af en sådan praxis, kan formentlig disse lande udvikle en betydelig mere levedyktig demokratisk kultur end de lande der fra den ene dag til den anden har indført en demokratisk forfatning simpelthen fordi et autoritært regime var faldet sammen.

Den måde en demokratisering sker på er afgørende for demokratiets levedyktighed. Som eksempel på fire forskellige udviklingsmuligheder i de stillehavsasiatiske lande, hvoraf kun to går i demokratisk retning, vil jeg her referere de fremtidsscenarier som vi har taget med i konklusionen på vores rapport om den lille kommunistiske etpartistaten Laos (rapporten blev skrevet på opdrag fra den svenske udviklingshjælpsorganisation SIDA som årlig bidrager med ca. 100 millioner svenske kroner til Laos). Konklusionen danner selvfølgelig afslutningen på en rapport som har meget information om landet. Når I læser det følgende, skal I ikke lade jer skræmme af alle de navne og detaljer som I ikke kender. Tænk ikke så meget på "Laos", men snarere på "et land i Asien" og bryd jer ikke om detaljerne. De er der kun for at levendegøre de fire fremtidsmuligheder, hvoraf den *stabilt autoritære* er den mest sandsynlige (i Laos) og en *gradvis demokratisering* som resultat af indre konflikter er den mest ønskværdige (i alle udemokratiske stater).

Future Scenarios

The four following scenarios are *imaginable* developments in Laos in view of current trends. Each one of them has been constructed as distinctly different from the others. Possible trends are consciously exaggerated, and many details are added that are not in themselves likely to happen. They are included as examples in order to prevent us from being vague. The real future will be far more complex and is likely to consist of a combination of two or more of the scenarios and perhaps include trends we have not thought of. Our scenarios should thus not be seen as mutually exclusive.

Given Laos' dependence on the outside world, we have fitted the scenarios for Laos into images of possible regional futures.

Collapse

Let us first assume that both China and Southeast Asia are hit by a recession. Banks and businesses in the region go bankrupt, and industrial projects in Laos are canceled. The internal situation in China is chaotic. From Yunnan, refugees and armed bands move into Laos and Vietnam where they try to lay hands on the local opium production. Hanoi tries unsuccessfully to seal off its border to China. The leadership in Vientiane quarrel about whether or not to align Laos with Vietnam, or to take a neutral attitude in the Sino-Vietnamese and the internal Yunnanese conflicts. These quarrels are reflected in the Thai press. Over the last years Laos has become so strongly integrated in the Thai economy that Vientiane is unwilling to react to the international crisis in ways that would annoy the Thai government. Laos provides Thai business corporations with inexpensive electricity, abundant wood and to some extent cheap labour, and depend on the currency earnings gained in these ways. Thailand has also taken over some of Vietnam's former role in providing training, arms and equipment for the Laotian army.

Inside Laos, a Thai-style symbiosis has developed between business, army and public administration. Corruption thrives, and the reforms that foreign donors have designed for the central administration, the taxation system and the customs service are more and more seen as failures. Laws and decrees are not taken seriously, and foreign investors depend on their Thai partners for getting through the bureaucratic imbroglios of Vientiane as well as the provincial capitals. The provinces and 'special zones' are only loosely controlled from Vientiane, and an enormous gap has developed between the Mekong valley and the highlands. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party turns out to be unable to solve its leadership problem and splits into a number of competing factions, each with their own business connections and regional basis.

Political stability is undermined from many quarters. Calls for multiparty democracy are heard from outside the Party with attacks being made mainly on the party hardliners. The police are unable to stop the activists who produce their leaflets and propaganda videos in Thailand. A new Lao movement (the 'New Lao Issara') originating among Lao students in Paris tries to mobilize popular resentment against Thai colonialism, corrupt nouveaux riches and Anglophone experts. The movement gains support within the least commercialized parts of the army, whose officers come mainly from the minority regions. They see Thailand as their enemy and the corrupted state officials in Vientiane as Bangkok's puppets.

In an attempt to restore popular legitimacy some groups in Vientiane and Luang Prabang conspire with the Thai royal family to bring the Laotian crown prince home from Paris and restore the monarchy in Luang Prabang with Thai support. At the same time the 'New Lao Issara' gain increasing support from dissatisfied groups not only among educated young people but also among jobless construction workers and even some highly placed provincial and government officials. A wave of strikes occurs for the first time in Laotian history, and the number of unemployed town dwellers increases every week. The multilateral donor agencies start to see Laos as a hopeless case. It is unable to repay its debt, and the country is barred from new credits. In this situation the Vientiane leaders entangle themselves in a bitter struggle between groups with different regional bases. Leaders losing out in the struggle find it preferable to return to their home provinces in order to be sure they have a following. Here they mobilize the local population by appealing to resentment against foreigners and Vientiane. Some use ethnic rhetoric. Hmong guerrillas get renewed support from parts of the Thai army, the newly built main roads become insecure, and the provinces cease to take orders from the capital.

Such an imbroglio may lead to a coup d'etat in Vientiane, but the army commanders cannot be sure that they will be obeyed by their units in the provinces. Laos is heading towards civil war in a climate of rising international tension.

This is a worst case scenario which seems highly unlikely. The reason for including it here is mainly that it points out some of the dangers the Laotian government, and its advisors, may have to be aware of in order not to face them. The future of Laos is more likely to look approximately like the situation today.

Growth and Political Stability

Let us now assume that both the Chinese and the Southeast Asian economies continue to grow. A rapidly increasing inter-Asian trade makes the local industries less dependent on overseas markets but Asia also

retains a significant share of the Western markets. The global influence of the West is decreasing. Within the ASEAN all major conflicts are sorted out and outstanding issues between the member states and China are peacefully negotiated. The Chinese Communist Party remains united under a consolidated group of technocratic party leaders. In Southeast Asia, only the Philippines and Thailand retain a democratic system. More and more of the informal economic sector in Laos is drawn into the monetary system. A modern infrastructure is established in all main population areas. The state bureaucracy continues to penetrate society, while respecting the laws of the free market. Vientiane refutes all external interference in its special form of democracy and its way of defining human rights. A number of Western NGOs are expelled after being accused of involvement in ethnically based protest movements against hydroelectric projects. Laos becomes a favourite economic partner for the booming region of southern China and serves as a major transit country for Sino-Thai and Thai-Vietnamese trade. Big business becomes a major economic player in Laos and gains increasing power also in Thailand in support of an authoritarian growth model.

The 6th party congress in 1995 reasserts its commitment to the New Economic Mechanism and makes promotions that increase the influence of the young technocrats. During the following years, a new Laotian elite, educated in Australia, Japan and the USA, gradually take over at all levels of Lao society. There is a general consensus among most parts of the Lao elite that the country is not ripe for democracy as the 'human resource base' remains too weak. A population that still consists of a great many illiterate subsistence farmers, many of whom continue to practise slash-and-burn agriculture, really need to be led by a strong hand.

The second scenario is a very likely one. Growth and stability are major catchwords in East and Southeast Asia today. These values will continue to be considered more important than individual freedom and democracy. Still, in the two remaining scenarios we shall look at possible sources of democratization: the return of the country's old elite in combination with pressure from the donor community, and new social and political conflicts within the Laotian society itself.

Democratization through external pressure

Let us assume that Laos remains dependent, at least for a decade, on substantial economic assistance from bilateral and multilateral donors. The foreign residents in Vientiane grow accustomed to having their advice accepted by the ministries in Vientiane within a wide range of fields, excluding security, culture and clearly political matters. Some of these foreign residents work closely with Laotians from the exile community and are influenced by them towards the view that Laos' modernization process

will not be complete before it involves the creation of a civil society. Laos has by now assumed a high profile in the *monde francophone*. With French funding, the Lao elite has made a considerable effort to reinforce their own national identity by invoking Lao history and tradition, rebuilding Luang Prabang, and even reinterpreting the colonial period in a more positive light. The major centres of cultural reawakening are the French *lycée* and a number of other Francophone institutions.

The old guard of uneducated peasant revolutionaries pass away or are forced to retire. Their sons and daughters, with their East European education, serve the less-and-less socialist regime as officials and experts. In order to ensure their social standing, they send their sons and daughters to be educated in the West, Australia and Japan, but this new generation, with education and inherited revolutionary credentials do not overcome the resentment of their parents against the old 'foreign passport elite'. Many of the latter now return to reclaim their properties in Laos. Some have become attached to the Western world but most agree, when the possibility arises, that it is better to be a big fish in a small pond than a small fish in a big one. Each time they return to Laos, they are pleasantly reminded of the status that follows their family names. People bow their heads when passing, are happy to serve them as servants, and say they need their leadership and talents.

A first breakthrough for reconciliation is made when the Lao government brokers a deal with a group of prominent Lao experts within the exile community, some of whom are employed in donor agencies and multinational corporations operating in Laos. These new officials take a leading role in formulating the economic policies of Laos, and work in close cooperation with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, without the usual consent of the party. Buddhism is officially acknowledged as the 'predominant religion' of the nation, and the independence of the *Buddhist Sangha* is restored.

But the party leaders cannot accept to see their power wane and start sustaining a campaign against the rich foreign-educated elite who are sneaking back to reclaim what the common people have won for the nation through years of independence struggles. When one foreign-sponsored activist is arrested in Vientiane, this becomes a delicate issue since the delinquent is immediately recognized as a highly trusted expert in the Asian Development Bank belonging to one of the well-known families from before 1975. The person in question is also a US citizen. The US ambassador quickly obtains his release but the United States has learnt from its failure to impose democracy on China, Myanmar and Indonesia, and decides to soft-pedal its approach to Laos, leaving the initiative to the Thais and Europeans. Some diplomats in Vientiane, notably the Swedes and the French, are dismayed by reports from Amnesty International about the

fate of three former government officials who languish in a prison close to the Vietnam border. The Swedes feel they can speak with the authority of a country that has stood by Laos as a friend in difficult times, and issues a warning: Unless the three 'prisoners of conscience' are released, Sweden will cancel all of its aid projects to Laos. After a drawn out politburo session, Laos issues a statement saying that for medical reasons the three prisoners have been transferred to a hospital.

Sweden is not satisfied. Together with France she takes up the human rights situation in Laos within the organs of the European Union and obtains agreement on a major initiative. In a situation where the recent democratization of Eastern Europe opens the prospect of a truly united Europe, it is unacceptable for the same Europe to continue bolstering a one party dictatorship in Asia. With assistance from US diplomacy, the Europeans secretly obtain a green light from Tokyo for freezing all IMF, World Bank and ADB credits to Laos until its government has agreed to respect all basic human rights, including the presence of international observers at the next elections, which must be open for participation by a certain number of opposition parties. It is clear that the Laotian government cannot resist such pressure alone, but Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia issue strongly worded protests against Western arrogance, while Thailand seems to play a part in the European ploy. Vientiane asks Beijing and Hanoi for advice. They both counsel the Laotian leaders to reject all external interference in their country's internal affairs but they also make it clear that they cannot give Laos the necessary credit to get over its financial crisis. In view of the risk of complete economic collapse, the Laotian government decides to make the necessary concessions. It forms a coalition government and prepares for general multi-party elections. The international press calls it the 'Cambodianization of Laos'.

The third scenario is unrealistic for several reasons. Firstly, it is doubtful that the donor community will agree on a line that would deeply antagonize much of Asia. Japan for one would probably not accept such conduct. Nor would Australia. Secondly, even should agreement be obtained on mounting strong pressure on Laos, the Laotian government might choose to resist and place the survival of its regime above their economic concerns. Most of the Laotian population are subsistence farmers anyhow. Thirdly, in a grand move to thwart European neo-colonialism, China, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia might mobilize sufficient funds to take over the role as donors in Laos. This would lead to a situation well in line with the Huntingtonian nightmare of a 'Clash of Civilizations'. And fourthly, Sweden knows better. The key to facilitating democratic transition is not to exert strong pressure from the outside but to promote the domestic forces that may in the long run constrain the authoritarianism of the regime,

contribute to the establishment of representative institutions, create international exchange programmes, encourage education, stimulate citizenship participation, and continuously publicize human rights violations. In such ways, it is possible to link up with significant ongoing processes in the country itself.

Democratization through internal conflict

Let us now assume that the donors tread more carefully but also that there is a growing sense among many Southeast Asians themselves that human rights and democracy may serve them well. The educated, urban middle classes want democratic freedoms and their votes cannot be easily bought or predicted in the same way as in immobile rural areas. Towards the end of the 1990s, middle class leaders in many Asian countries start to hail the democratic breakthroughs in Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines in the previous decade, as well as the prevention of the military coup in Thailand in 1992, as major landmarks. These leaders carefully emphasize that Asian democracy differs from the Western, the main distinction being that the increasingly immoral West builds on purely individual rights whereas Asians emphasize collective solidarity, morality, and obligations as much as rights. Both forms of democracy, however, have one feature in common: the rule of law. The preeminence of the law is necessary in a modern society to establish the kind of stability and trust that is needed to promote investments and growth. On this point Asian leaders and Western investors fully agree.

Several governments, such as the one in Laos, try to use the concept of Asian democracy as an excuse for authoritarian measures. But this leads to conflicts. It becomes difficult to violate basic freedoms without provoking an outcry in the more and more outspoken media. Elections with at least some degree of choice become a regular practice throughout the region, and eventually the principle becomes established that a government must resign if it cannot muster a majority in the National Assembly.

In 1995, a new generation takes over the leadership of the LPRP. The 6th Party Congress adopts a visionary economic plan, highlighting infrastructure, the rapid construction of dams, and investments in mining and manufacture. The plan also involves a rural development programme to transform the highlands from slash-and-burn to irrigated and fertilized agriculture. The Congress reasserts the need to develop 'human resources' and to continue active legislation. The new leadership makes it clear, however, that one-party rule will prevail. A multi-party system, it is asserted, would just lead to chaos. At the same time, however, some party leaders try to start a debate in the party and National Assembly about major development issues. A concern is voiced that too many essential

decisions concerning Laos' future are made by foreign experts with little knowledge of the people's genuine needs. There is also a growing resentment against the fact that so much of the profit gained from exploitation of the country's resources is going to foreign companies. The government is accused of widespread corruption and ineffectiveness.

These views and accusations are reflected in the Laotian press and radio. Since their editors-in-chief see no other way of competing with the Thai media, they become bolder in voicing grievances and alternative opinions. After some time the debate concentrates on one specific issue: the environmental, social and economic effects of the ongoing construction of dams by a number of foreign companies. This is the most crucial and controversial of all the things the public are allowed to discuss. Critical questions are asked concerning the forced resettlement of ethnic minority people from the flooded areas, about the destruction of forests, the rare animals and fish living there and in the Mekong. Others worry about the lack of national control and some accuse the government of selling out of the national heritage. It is pointed out that the government has agreed to let most of the profits remain in the foreign companies that are building the dams and that Thailand is paying too little for Laotian electricity.

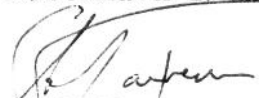
Gradually a political alliance emerges between environmentalists, local protest movements, old party veterans worrying about too much Thai influence, and a group of independent technicians who want stricter control with foreign capital. The latter want the dams but wish to minimize their damage and maximise the benefits for Laos. One protest group starts to assemble evidence for a law suit against a particularly nasty foreign company. Another group writes a draft concession law to replace the liberal legislation of the early 1990s. The draft law becomes a major issue in the next election campaign, and when the law is adopted by a majority in the new Assembly, the 'anti-concession' government is forced to resign. The new government pledges to respect the Constitution as well as all basic human rights. Throughout the political struggle, the LPRP has maintained a neutral stance since leading party members are active in both camps; neutrality has been the only option for a party wanting to survive. This means, then, that the party is reduced to a symbolic role in ensuring national unity. As a commentator jokingly observes in 2006, the LPRP has assumed the same role as the monarchy in Thailand.

The fourth scenario may be dismissed as wishful thinking or for being excessively speculative. But the point is not what kind of issue is going to become the most controversial or how the political struggles will happen. What the scenario is meant to demonstrate, is that democracy may not be achieved primarily through a reform process with a democratic system as its aim. Democracy may gradually emerge as the result of a need

to solve internal conflicts in ways that do not threaten the basic national unity. Perhaps the best way to institute a viable democracy in an authoritarian one-party state may *not* be to simply dissolve the leading party, abruptly adopt a democratic constitution and allow everyone to form their own parties. Such moves may lead to crisis, erosion of national unity and the creation of a range of competing factions based on geography, ethnicity, military divisions or kinship. The precondition for a well-functioning democracy is the existence of a national political culture, upheld by a critical mass of educated people with a need for legal non-violent ways of fighting out conflicts among themselves. They may disagree on a wide range of issues but must share a basic respect for their constitution and national institutions. Perhaps the most viable democracy emerges gradually from a process of conflict where opposing groups coalesce within the framework of existing representative institutions, relating themselves to issues of fundamental concern to the whole nation, and drawing larger social classes into the political process. If such a process of conflict is allowed to unfold non-violently, and within the framework of existing institutions, then the end result may well be democracy. It may take a long time, but a system embedded in a nation's own history is likely to be more resilient than one which is imported or imposed from above.

På kurset den 15 marts kunne jeg tænke mig først at fremlægge min vurdering af hvor demokratiske eller autoritære de enkelte stater i Stillehavsasien er, derefter vurdere hvilke stater der kan have størst symboleffekt i regionen og i andre dele af verden, og endelig vil jeg gerne diskutere med jer det jeg har skrevet ovenfor. (Husk at jeg er en teoretisk ubegavet historiker som forsøger at udtrykke mine egne tanker [som selvfølgelig er påvirket af læsning og af diskussion med andre]; jeg kan let blive "lost" hvis man vil have mig til at sige om jeg er "weberianer" eller "hungtingtonianer", enig med "Ruschmeyer" eller måske "georgsørensenist"; jeg er de argumenterer og synspunkter jeg lægger frem.)

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Stein Tønnesson