Mobilities in South-East Asia

ALEXANDER TRUPP[1] & CLAUDIA DOLEZAL[2]

In the current age of time and space compression, one finds people (e.g. tourists, migrants, refugees, researchers) as well as material and immaterial objects or resources (e.g. capital, vehicles, information, ideas) to be increasingly on the move, leading to the idea that we are living in an "age of mobility [,which] has replaced the sedentary age" (Rolshoven, 2007, p. 17). For more than two decades, this shift has been noted in various academic disciplines (such as geography, anthropology, and sociology, to name a few), and most importantly in the field of migration and tourism studies – areas of study where a pronounced interest in issues of mobilities has emerged (Husa, Trupp, & Wohlschlägl, 2014).

For some decades now, South-East Asia has been characterized by rapid economic and socio-cultural transformations involving large movements of people and goods within and between countries as well as rural and urban areas (Rigg, 2003). In addition to classical spatial mobility patterns of rural-urban migration, international labor migration, and international tourism becoming increasingly dynamic, forms of multi-local household arrangements, skilled migration, transnational communities or long-term tourism and domestic tourism have emerged. In this context, one can observe a number of interdependent forms of mobility, including the *physical movement of people* for reasons of work, leisure, family, or lifestyle as well as the *physical movement of objects* from and to producers, consumers, retailers, and the different places where people live, work, or go on holidays (Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006).

1 Alexander Trupp studied theoretical and applied geography in Vienna. He is currently assistant professor (*Universitätsassistent*) at the Department of Geography and Regional Research, University of Vienna, Austria, and member of the ASEAS editorial board. He specializes in tourism and migration in Asia. Contact: alexander.trupp@univie.ac.at

2 Claudia Dolezal is a doctoral researcher at the University of Brighton, UK. Her PhD project looks into community empowerment in community-based tourism in Bali. Claudia has a background in tourism and international development with a focus on South-East Asia and contributes to the work of the Society for South-East Asian Studies, i.a. as a member of the ASEAS editorial board. Contact: C.Dolezal@brighton.ac.uk

The prevailing "mobility turn" (Cresswell & Merriman, 2011) and the "mobilities paradigm" (Sheller & Urry, 2006) criticize the notion of sedentarism, which locates bounded places, regions, or nations as the fundamental basis of human identity and experience and thus, the main unit of social research analysis. In contrast, the mobilities paradigm "emphasises that all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an 'island'" (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 209). Although different forms of mobility have always shaped human life, academia only recently (re)discovered the importance and value of including notions of mobility in research. This emerging emphasis brought with it not only the acknowledgement of an increasing movement of people and objects, but also broader "transformat[ions] of social science, generating an alternative theoretical and methodological landscape" (Büscher, Urry, & Witchger, 2011, p. 4).

In recent years, an increasing number of empirical and theoretical studies dealing with mobilities in Asia have focused on *international* forms of movements. Important research areas in this context are tourism (Hitchcock, King, & Parnwell, 2009) and transnational migration flows (Hewison & Young, 2005; Yeoh, Willis, & Fakhri, 2003). Nevertheless, we cannot ignore that a large number of people moves *within the borders* of their country of birth (Skeldon, 2006, p. 17). Therefore, the "dominance of 'transnational migration' as an object of study over and above other forms of mobility in the region [in Asia] is somewhat at odds with its numerical importance" (Elmhirst, 2012, p. 275). Based on this argument, Olwig and Sorensen (2002) seek to redirect "migration research away from the narrow focus on international population movements" and instead call for "a broader investigation of mobile livelihoods and the fluid fields of social, economic and political relations and cultural values that these livelihoods imply" (p. 2). Elmhirst (2012) suggests that the popularity of transnational (and international) migration on the international research agenda can be traced to political fears that this type of migration provokes in the context of global security as well as the possibilities that come with it, such as in the context of economic remittances. Moreover, we should not forget that despite a seemingly interconnected world without borders, constraints on people's mobilities continue to exist, mainly through the presence and impact of states aiming at controlling or preventing migration (Carling, 2002; Horstmann, 2011).

The present collection of articles addresses a variety of issues concerning mobilities in South-East Asia, including case studies that involve moving people and objects in or from Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

Erik Cohen, by focusing on the cultural meanings of objects of mobility, analyzes the origins and making of airbrush paintings on charter tour coaches in Thailand serving the domestic and international tourism market. Cohen thereby explores the complex interplay between *global* and *local* in terms of its presence in the buses' motifs and depicts these objects of mobility as containers of globalized, hybridized post-modern symbols. The study's data are based on the documentation of 145 buses; of which 18 pictures are published in this contribution to help illustrate the discussed motifs.

Shifting the discussion from the objects to the subjects of mobilities, Dinita Setyawati addresses the idea of framing migrant workers as state assets, based on the premise that these workers maximize national economic benefits. While sending countries benefit through remittances of their 'economic heroes', receiving countries gain in low-skilled labor supply. Setyawati's contribution offers an examination of the legal regulations concerning migrant workers' protection in Indonesia and the Philippines, two of the largest exporters of migrant labor in South-East Asia.

In the context of low-skilled labor movements, forms of skilled migration seem to be underrepresented, especially in South-East Asian contexts. Cirilia Limpangog conducted a study based on in-depth interviews with professional Filipina migrants in Melbourne und identified diverse motives which are not only related to economic household strategies but highlight alternative lifestyles, escape from political persecution, migration in order to live united with one's spouse, and escape from gender and cultural norms as driving forces of mobility.

However, potential obstacles to mobility remain, supporting the argument that our times are characterized not only by large flows of various forms of mobilities but also by *immobilities*. Immigration policies and harsh controls by local or national governments can restrict migration. Highland ethnic minorities in Northern Thailand, for example, have sometimes found their mobility restricted by state regulations, as they had not received official Thai IDs and citizenship rights. Therefore, the notion of a seemingly borderless world in constant motion needs to be questioned and supplemented with the perspective of an "age of involuntary immobility" (Carling, 2002), which aims at identifying and analyzing barriers and constraints. In a study

on mobility and immobility of asylum seekers passing through Indonesia, Antje Missbach further focuses on international migration flows to Indonesia by comparing Indochinese asylum seekers between the 1970s and mid-1990s and more recent asylum seekers coming from the Middle East. The author explores how claims for protecting asylum seekers are handled in Indonesia and in this course introduces the notion of *obstructed mobility* to this issue.

In addition, everyday mobilities, e.g. walking for work purposes of mobile street vendors (Trupp, 2014), can be restricted by urban or selling regulations imposed by local governments or private actors. In our section 'Research Workshop', Kirsten W. Endres offers an anthropologically oriented contribution to this topic, which looks into marketplaces and bazaars in socialist Vietnam, exploring the influence of neoliberal politics on the lives of small traders. The author shows that these traders experience difficulties surviving in the marketplace, which is now owned by private investment companies, therefore deteriorating the traders' livelihoods. At the same time, the development of markets is actively fostered in the West, where urban planners regard markets as a tool to improve community life and relations.

Endres furthermore introduces the relevance of tourism as one aspect of mobility, by observing two opposing developments: On the one hand, privately owned supermarkets replace Vietnamese bazaars, while on the other hand, the traditional aspects of marketplaces are fostered to satisfy tourists in their search of the 'authentic'. The notion of authenticity has been a point of discussion in tourism studies for many decades and, hence, forms a vital part of the broader mobility paradigm, given its identification as one of the major travel motifs of international tourists. MacCannell's (1976) sketch of the modern subject on the move in search of *authenticity* still finds usage in current academia. While MacCannell's (1992) initial idea, however, pictured host communities as the ones being exploited, playing 'ex-primitive' on the touristic stage, authenticity or self-commodification are increasingly realized as bearing potential of self-empowerment for local communities in the global South (Ruiz-Ballesteros & Hernández-Ramírez, 2010). Oftentimes, it is through community-based tourism (CBT) – if organized and managed carefully – that rural communities in South-East Asia can gain power and derive greater economic and social benefits from tourism activity and international mobility, also through the conscious usage of notions of authenticity (Dolezal, 2011). In the section 'In Dialogue', Claudia Dolezal

presents an interview with the chairman of the *Bali Community-Based Tourism Association*, which refers to the complex play with ideas of authenticity as an aspect of the controversial empowerment debate in a tourism-for-development context. The interview sheds light on the social as well as economic impacts of international tourism on local communities in Bali and discusses the meaning of the ambiguous term 'empowerment' as well as the possibilities CBT creates locally. Tourism therefore can be regarded as an engine for mobility, connecting the tourist and rural communities in a complex interplay between the global and the local (Burns & Novelli, 2008).

In our section 'South-East Asia Visually', Bianca Gantner and Philip Weninger offer a visual account of a Filipin@s migrant communities' festival in Vienna, underlining the importance of the event in terms of fostering social and economic ties of the biggest South-East Asian migrant group in Austria.

Outside the mobilities focus, this issue features a 'Current Research' contribution on the social dimensions of deforestation and forest protection in local communities in Northern Cambodia, which have implemented Community Forestry (CF) and Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programs. The study conducted by Maya Pasgaard and Lily Chea is based on qualitative interviews and reveals that vulnerable households are disproportionately affected by the *costs* of deforestation and that they only marginally *benefit* from forest protection due to social exclusion facilitated by prevailing power structures.

The issue further includes two book reviews. William J. Jones' review of *Conversations with Thaksin: From Exile to Deliverance: Thailand's Populist Tycoon Tells His Story* by Tom Plate presents a collection of interviews with Thailand's former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, thereby focusing on Thaksin's self-exile and, at the same time, on the influence he still has on Thai politics from afar. A second book review by Dayana Parvanova of *Faith and the State: A History of Islamic Philanthropy in Indonesia* by Amelia Fauzia addresses Islamic philanthropic practices in Indonesia and provides insights into their influence on state-civil society relations as well as on socio-political and religious ideologies. The book discusses the practices of *zakat* (almsgiving), *sedekah* (donation, giving), and *waqf* (religious endowment) by covering a number of historic periods in the development of the Indonesian nation state.

Furthermore, ASEAS continues its introduction of Austrian research institutions featuring a focus on South-East Asia. In this context, Alfred Gerstl presents the newly

developed South-East Asian orientation at the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Vienna.

Finally, Paulo Castro Seixas provides some thoughts and reflections on the role of international scientific conferences and presents a short report on the coordination of the 7th EuroSEAS Conference, which took place in Lisbon in July 2013. The next EuroSEAS Conference is scheduled to take place in Vienna in August 2015.

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