

Identifying regional cultures of cooperation:

The ASEAN logic of anarchy

(Stefan Rother)

Theories of International Relations are often accused of being strictly confined to the Western hemisphere. However, their application is most certainly not: especially Southeast Asia has, over the last two decades, been turned into a testing ground for various theoretical approaches - from realism to institutionalism or constructivism and back to realism. What has been surprisingly absent so far, is a genuine theoretical model being developed from within the region. The few existing attempts have either become more or less obsolete due to the Asian crisis in 1997 (the Asian values debate) or are of a very limited range and based on strongly contested foundations (Kang 2003).

Thus, a more promising approach appears to be the adaptation of an existing theory, where the basic concept may have been based on western thoughts, but where the application itself implements terms, norms and ideas that are rooted in the regional political culture and history. The Social Constructivism as developed by Alexander Wendt and his concept of specific cultures of anarchy seem to lend themselves especially well to this modification (Wendt 1999, 2003). First, constructivist approaches are by their very nature highly flexible. And secondly, even though Wendt operates with terms rooted deeply in Western thinking by labeling these cultures Hobbesian or Lockean, he acknowledges the possible existence of other logics of anarchy.

Therefore, when applying this concept to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, it may be possible to identify distinctive ASEAN cultures of cooperation, in which, for example, a culture based on the Indian Arthashastra, a manual written on statecraft by Kautilya, replaces the Hobbesian culture or early roots of "regionness" as found in the 14th/15th century Majapahit empire could be seen as a base for early stages of cooperation. In an extension of Wendt, norms within a collective identity are not only constructed through interaction, but also through identity change at the domestic level (internal?) and through localization of norms prevalent in the existing international system or as promoted by outside actor.

Both regional studies and IR theory could benefit from such an approach: the regional studies would be provided with an instrument that takes into consideration the specific political cultures of their respective areas. And the constructivist school of IR could gain deeper insight into the dynamics of change between logics of anarchy, and by identifying specific forms in different regions could add a comparative approach to their theory.

Introduction: Southeast Asia and International Relations Theory

The relationship between Southeast Asia and International Relations Theory has certainly undergone a remarkable change during the past two decades. From being two nearly completely separate entities up until the end of the Cold War, Southeast Asia has become by now a – highly contested – experimental field for the application of the major Theories of International Relations (IR). Up until the late 1980s, authors writing about the region confined themselves mostly to atheoretical descriptions; if they chose to apply a theoretical framework, they usually picked neorealism. The 1990s on the other hand suddenly witnessed a very lively debate between the various schools of IR. What had caused this change? A change in world politics, a new dynamic in the region and a “proliferation of theories in IR”¹.

The end of the Cold War had shaken the foundation of the dominance of realist approaches to International Relations. States seemed all of a sudden to behave in unpredictable ways, *Balance of Power* did not necessarily seem to be the main variable in IR, cooperation seemed possible. These changes in the international environment had a profound impact on the Southeast Asian region as well, which was starting to encounter its “economic miracle”. This led to rising confidence among the politicians in the region, who were tracing this success to a specific set of “Asian values”, which they also claimed to be the guiding principle behind their regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN):

“We in ASEAN have created a community of Southeast Asian nations at peace with one another and at peace with the world, rapidly achieving prosperity for our peoples and steadily improving their lives. Our rich diversity has provided the strength and inspiration to us to help one another foster a strong sense of community.”²

The ASEAN started to receive increasing attention among scholars with an IR background; in the early 1990s, institutionalists challenged the prevailing dominance of realistic models which mostly focused on security issues in the region.³ Those liberal-institutionalist authors introduced *cooperation* and *institution-building* as new paradigms to the study of International Relations in Southeast Asia. Most authors shared the optimistic outlook prevailing in the region, based on the efforts of the ASEAN member states to play a more active role in regional and transregional cooperation. The withdrawal of Vietnam from Cambodia brought an end to one of the main

¹ Cf. Amitav Acharya/Richard, *Theorizing Southeast Asian Relations: an introduction*, in: *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, June 2006, pp. 125-134, p. 126.

² ASEAN VISION 2020, Kuala Lumpur 1997, zitiert nach (Juli 2002): <http://www.asean sec.org/summit/vision97.htm>.

³ Cf. Amitav Acharya, *Realism, Institutionalism, and the Asian Economic Crisis*, in: *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 1999, pp. 1-29, p. 2.

challenges of the organization in the past one and a half decades and the creation of the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) was seen as a promising response to the new uncertainty that was prevalent after the end of the bipolar world order. Still, formal institutionalization remained rather weak – a fact that was actually interpreted as an advantage by some authors. Thus, the *ASEAN Way* was praised as a unique code of conduct for inter-state behavior and a decision-making process based on consultations and consensus.⁴ Principles attributed to the *ASEAN Way* were non-interference in the domestic affairs of member countries, non-use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the ASEAN states. This set code of conduct, wrote Amitav Acharya in 1997, was „not so much about the substance or structure of multilateral interactions, but a claim about the *process*, through which such interactions are carried out“.⁵

Another unique attribute ASEAN member states claimed was their aforementioned set of “Asian values”, which were never clearly defined but said to give economic development priority over democratization. Critics saw the value debate, which was pushed forward by authoritarian leaders like Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad or Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, as an attempt to use the rapid economic success as an excuse for the poor performance in the area of human rights.

This euphoria came to a sudden halt with the Asian financial crisis in 1997, which witnessed “everybody for themselves” reactions instead of regional cooperation: „The economic crisis in Asia has created a deep sense of gloom about the prospects for order and stability in the region. Most assessments of the political and security implications tend to be pessimistic.“⁶ concluded Acharya. While institutionalist interpretations of the region seem to have never fully recovered from the blow of the financial crisis, new reflexivist/constructivist theory models which contributed to the aforementioned “proliferation of theories in IR” stepped in and started being applied to the region. Different sets of norms, state actors and collective identities were some of the key focus points with which scholars tried to analyze „one of the most successful regional organisations in the developing world.“⁷

Some of these constructivist interpretations ambitiously aimed for the status of a meta-theory that subsumes and supplants realism and liberalism⁸. This is yet to happen, and the

⁴ Cf. Amitav Acharya: Ideas, Identity and Institution-Building: From the „ASEAN Way“ to the “Asia-Pacific Way?”, in: *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 10, pp. 319-346, p. 328.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 329. Highlighted as in the original..

⁶ Acharya (1999), p. 1.

⁷ Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia. ASEAN and the problem of regional order*, London 2001, p. 208.

⁸ Cf. See Seng Tan, Rescuing constructivism from the constructivists: a critical reading of constructivist interventions in Southeast Asian security, in: *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, June 2006, pp. 239-260, p. 248; Sorpong Peou, Realism and constructivism in Southeast

assessment of See Tang that a “new constructivist orthodoxy”⁹ is by now in place seems quite farfetched. Acharya/Stubbs identify “only a handful”¹⁰ of constructivist writers on ASEAN and see realism as still the dominant approach by far in the region. Writers like Tsuyoshi Kawasaki have taken up the challenge posed by constructivism and characterize the approach as applied in the region as “romantic and intellectually naïve”¹¹. While some authors support theoretical pluralism instead of the dominance of one theory¹², others predict something short of a showdown where realism and constructivism are “the key intellectual competitors in Southeast Asian security studies”¹³. Meanwhile, proponents of the English School(ES) reject the notion that concepts like Hedley Bulls security community are merely precursors to the more comprehensive constructivist approaches that can easily be subsumed. Shaun Narine makes the point that “the ES remains a distinct approach to understanding IR” and is “more in accordance with the realities in the Southeast Asian region”¹⁴.

In short, the current debates in IR have highly influenced the analytical discourse in the region, but does the same apply the other way round? Acharya criticizes that „theoretical work on Asian regionalism continues to ignore local, national, or regional political context central to those writing on Asian regionalism”¹⁵. Although some adaptation has taken place, most theories still heavily carry with them their European or North American background and references. The results are still legitimate and fruitful, of course, but discourses from within the region have been curiously absent since the *Asian Values* debate, which produced only very limited academic output anyway. One exception has been a debate started by David C. Kang . In his article „Getting Asia Wrong: the need for new analytical frameworks“ he criticized the Eurocentric background of IR studies, and stated that „these theories do a poor job as they are applied to Asia”¹⁶; furthermore the debate between the prevalent theory schools constitutes for him “soul-crushingly boring research”. The author has been applauded for his statement but his answer – a kind of reductionist realism with focus on *balancing* and *bandwagoning* and a highly problematic praise of the stabilizing potential of

Asian security studies today: a review essay, in: The Pacific Review, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2002, pp. 119-138; Stefan Rother, Normen, Identitäten und die Logik der Anarchie: Die ASEAN aus konstruktivistischer Perspektive (Norms, identities and the logic of anarchy: a constructivist analysis of ASEAN), Freiburg 2004.

⁹ Seng Tan(2006), pp 239-240.

¹⁰ Acharya/Stubbs (2006), p. 130.

¹¹ As quoted in Acharya/Stubbs (2006) p. 130.

¹² Ibid, p. 125/6.

¹³ Cf. Peou (2002).

¹⁴ Shaun Narine, The English School and ASEAN, in The Pacific Review, Vol. 19, No. 2, June 2006, pp 199-218, pp199-200.

¹⁵ Amitav Acharya, “Why Is There No NATO in Asia?” The Normative Origins of Asian Multilateralisms, Weatherhead Working Paper No. 05-05, July 2005, pp. 7.

¹⁶ Cf. David C. Kang, Getting Asia Wrong: the need for a new analytical framework, in: International Security 27, no.4, Spring, 2003 pp. 57-85, p. 4.

Chinese hegemony - has not been overly thrilling either. In a reply, Acharya characterized the approach as a dangerous attempt in "Asian cultural historicism"¹⁷.

Furthermore, while interdisciplinarity has many proponents, the exchange between area specialists and IR scholars has been very limited so far. This paper argues that IR research can learn a lot from regional specialists and maybe at some point develop something like a genuinely Southeast Asian theoretical approach. Until then, a first step would be a fusion of regional historical experiences and discourses and IR theory, which was developed on the same premises but nearly exclusively with regards to Western experiences. I argue that an approach based on the Social Constructivism as developed by Alexander Wendt would be a promising starting point. To state my point, I will first discuss the work of Wendt which has undergone some surprising changes in the course of its development, and propose a model to use his "cultures of anarchy" concept in a Southeast Asian context. Following this, I will try to put the model to use and tentatively discuss which *logics of anarchy* may best reflect the development of the Association.

The constructivism of Alexander Wendt I, II and III

The selection of "Social Theory of International Politics", published in 1999, for the "International Studies Best Book of the Decade Award" last year is a telling reflection of the impact Alexander Wendt's "Opus magnum"¹⁸ has left on the IR debate. Praise, debate and criticism of Wendt's concepts have been very frequent and passionate, implementation much less so. Especially among the constructivist approaches analyzing regionalism in Southeast Asia', many authors have implemented norms or ideas in their research, but very few explicitly derive their theoretical foundation from Alexander Wendt.

While constructivism has been accused of being more method than theory¹⁹, readers of Social Theory might rather encounter a lot of theory but only very little methodological help. Wendt's apparent lack of interest in a "real world" equivalent to his concepts like "logics of anarchy" has not helped to promote an empirical application either²⁰. Furthermore, two recent turns in his theory – one teleological, one quantum - have added to the confusion. For the purpose of this paper I will refrain from an extended introduction into "Social Theory", which has been done comprehensively,

¹⁷ Amitav Acharya, Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?, in: International Security, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2003/4, pp. 149-164, p. 156.

¹⁸ Petr Drulák, Reflexivity and structural change, in: Stefano Guzzini/Anna Leander, Constructivism and International Relations. Alexander Wendt and his critics, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 140-159.

¹⁹ Cf. Jeffrey T. Checkel, The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory, in: World Politics 50 (January 1998), pp. 324-348, p. 325.

²⁰ „Readers looking for detailed propositions about the international system, let alone empirical tests, will be disappointed. The book is about the ontology of the states system, and so is more about international theory than about international politics as such.” Alexander Wendt, Social Theory of International Politics, Cambridge 1999 p. 6.

but go straight to the points I find important in “Wendt I, II and III”²¹ to derive a model that is useful to bring insights from area studies into the Theory of International Relations.

Considering the recent turns in his theory, I propose an approach for the study of ASEAN which is not “Wendt all the way down” but more something of a “rump social constructivism” with added features. This is based on the following assumptions:

States are the main level of analysis

While this has been one of the most criticized aspects of Wendt's theory, and I am fully aware of the growing importance of civil society, transnational organizations etc., I think the criticism is in a way besides the point. Wendt is looking at the systemic level of states, where change can be achieved mainly through the actors who constitute this system - „as such it makes no more sense to criticize a theory of international politics as ‚state-centric‘ than it does to criticize a theory of forests for being ‚tree-centric‘“. ²² In the case of Southeast Asian security, for example, See Seng Tan goes to great lengths in his article to demonstrate the misguided underlying assumptions of constructivist researchers that treat agency as essentially pre-given and accuses Wendt in making a „mockery out of human agency“²³, only to come to this conclusion:

*„Importantly, constructivists help to undermine the rationalist myth, maintained by neo-realists and neo-liberals alike, about international anarchy as given. Constructivists also show how regions and regional identities come about. Thanks to constructivism, we are able to see how states and norms work to produce anarchy, regions and or states.“*²⁴

This is a prospect of insights to gain where one might argue that taking states as given entities and as central actors is a price well worth paying for. Considering the early stage of research in this area it is certainly legitimate to exhaust the new possibilities by this state-centric approach first and save including additional levels or apply a „thicker“ constructivism, as Tan seems to postulate, for later.

States interests and identities are not exogenously given, but constructed

„Rather than follow Neorealists in focusing first on material structure, I believe that if we want to say a small number of big and important things about world politics we would do better to focus first on

²¹ I use the distinction between „Wendt I“ and „Wendt II“ introduced by Petr Drulák and add „Wendt III“ for his most recent work. Under “Wendt I” I subsume a highly influential set of articles, culminating in the aforementioned book “Social Theory of International Politics”. Wendt II refers to the “teleological turn” in the article “Why a World State is Inevitable”. (Alexander Wendt, Why a World State is Inevitable, in: European Journal of International Relations, Vol. 9 (4), 2003, pp. 491-542.) Wendt III refers to the „quantum turn“ in „Social Theory in Cartesian Science“ which is a fascinating challenge to the basic assumptions of classical thinking and is based on the „heretical thought: „What if the limitations of contemporary social science and philosophy of mind alike lie in their common assumption that relationship of mind (ideas) to body (the material world) must be compatible with classical physics?“ (Alexander Wendt: *Social Theory as Cartesian science: an auto-critique from a quantum perspective*, in: Stefano Guzzini/Anna Leander, Constructivism and International Relations. Alexander Wendt and his critics, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 181-219, p. 183). Since this turn is still in an early stage of theory development and a whole volume to this issue forthcoming, I make only limited use of it at this stage.

²² Wendt (1999), p. 9.

²³ Cf. Seng Tan (2006), p. 252.

²⁴ Wendt (1999), p. 255.

*states' ideas and the interests they constitute, and only then worry about who has how many guns.”*²⁵

Several Southeast Asian security studies have been characterized by highly accurate but somewhat tiresome listings of military capacities. The „arms race“ in the early 1990s in the region has been interpreted as a sign of continuing or growing mistrust, but the more interesting question, Wendt might argue, would be „what perception of the Other (state) provides these weapons with their frightening potential“? In a simple but effective example the author states that a high number of weapons may have an inherent threat potential, but for the United States it makes an extreme difference if these belong to Great Britain or North Korea.

Jepperson et al. define identity simply as „the basic character of states“ but acknowledge the possibility of identity change by referring to a concept common in social psychology: „It refers to the images of individuality and distinctiveness („selfhood“) held and projected by an actor and formed (and modified over time) through relations with significant “others”. Thus the term (by convention) references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other.”²⁶

States can define and develop their interests by using a certain identity as reference. These identities carry with them certain sets of norms - adhering to a „civilized“ identity, for example, would mean to accept norms like the ban on chemical weapons etc. Besides norms, interest of states can be generated or redefined by collective identities. One way by which collective identities are formed is „the overlapping ambit of the national identities of individual member states, and their respective constitutive norms“²⁷. These collective identities can take up a life of their own and develop even if they are not congruent with the identities of some of the members. Wendt III uses the quantum approach to define social systems as „super-organisms with collective consciousness“ , which seems plausible even if one does not subscribe to the underlying view that this consciousness is constituted by „wave functions“ which collapse by the process of inter-action.²⁸

Anarchy has more than one logic, which is not necessarily based on Western thought

Starting point of Wendt I is the frequently quoted article „Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics“. The main point in which Wendt distinguishes himself from the rationalist approaches is his view on agency. Both neorealism and neoliberalism assume that the interests of states like the primacy of *self-help* are exogenously given, due to the anarchical structure

²⁵ Ibid. p. 256.

²⁶ Ronald L. Jepperson / Alexander Wendt / Peter J. Katzenstein: Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security, in: P. Katzenstein [ed.], The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics, New York 1996, pp. 33-75, p. 59.

²⁷ Acharya (2001), p. 28.

²⁸ Wendt (2006), p. 200.

of the international system.²⁹ Wendt on the other hand argues that neither *self-help* nor *power politics* follow either logically or causally from the state of anarchy.³⁰ Thus, there is no given “logic” of anarchy apart from the practices that create and instantiate one type of structure of identities and interests: „Anarchy is what states make of it.“³¹ If the identity and central interest of a state are not given *a priori*, as especially realism assumes, there is a possibility that these variables can change through interaction³²: „Constructivist optimists assume that what is, need not always be“.³³

In his 1994 article „Collective Identity Formation and the International State“, Wendt specifies his „claim that interaction at the systemic level changes state identities and interests“.³⁴ He states that States are the principal unit of analysis for international political theory, that the key structures in the states system are intersubjective, rather than material and that State identities and interests are in important part constructed by these social structures. This opens the door to international cooperation:

„By showing others through cooperative acts that one expects them to be cooperators too, one changes the intersubjective knowledge in terms of which their identities are defined. Second, through interaction actors are also trying to project and sustain presentation of self. Thus, by engaging in cooperative behaviour, an actor will gradually change its own beliefs about who it is, helping to internalize that new identity for itself.“³⁵

This identity is based on norms, commonly defined as collective expectations about proper behaviour for a given identity.³⁶ They “contain specific prescriptions for action which serve as standards for guiding the behaviour of an actor and enable others to evaluate his actions“.³⁷

These articles culminate in the monograph with the title that refers to Waltz’ „Theory of International Politics“ but adds a „Social“ dimension. For some critics, this is the only significant difference between Wendts theory and neorealism and there are indeed many similarities like the state-centered approach. But Wendt gives his central actors a new definition by claiming “states are people too” and attesting them similar attributes like intentionality, rationality, interests etc.³⁸ The internal process of identity formation is of no interest to Wendt – his level of analysis is systemic or

²⁹ Cf. Alexander Wendt, Anarchy is what states make of it, in: International Organization 46, Spring 1992, pp. 379-396, pp. 392-394.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, p. 395.

³² Cf. . Alexander Wendt, Collective Identity Formation and the International State, in: American Political Science Review, Vol. 88, No. 2, June 1994, pp. 384-395, p. 386.

³³ Jonathan Mercer, Anarchy and Identity, in: International Organization 49, 2, Spring 1995, pp. 229-252, p. 229.

³⁴ Wendt (1994), pp. 384-385.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 390.

³⁶ Jepperson et al. (1996), p. 54.

³⁷ Nikolas Busse, Constructivism and Southeast Asian Security, in: The Pacific Review, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1999, pp. 39-60, p. 45.

³⁸ Cf. Wendt (1999), p. 6.

the macro structure of international politics.³⁹ This is where interaction can bring change about, resulting in several “logics” of anarchy which Wendt also calls “cultures”⁴⁰.

In Wendt I, the author uses the concept of the multiple realizable logics of anarchy and defines three distinctive *cultures of anarchy*.⁴¹ This is where his social constructivism plays out his „almost frightening potential as meta-theory subsuming all others“⁴², because realists analysis could be seen as one particular *culture of anarchy* which may be dominant at the moment but does not have to remain in this position for an infinite amount of time. Wendt I argues, that anarchy can take at least three different structures at the macro-level – enemy, rival, friend – which he calls in reference to the English school „Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian“ cultures. Wendt II adds two new cultures, the *World Society*, which is situated between the Lockean and Kantian culture and, more problematically, an end state – the *world state*.

This *world state* is more than a mere teleological addition but constitutive to the whole system, because by drawing from *self-organizing theory*, Wendt implements in his theory the tendency of structured systems to develop towards a state of *completed development*. This claim might make a practical adaptation difficult, but since it is a goal set in a nondescript future, an empirical analysis would only clash with the concept if no change happens at all. The relative instability of early cultures of anarchy in Southeast Asia, which will be discussed later, could on the other hand be attributed to the tendency to develop towards more stable states, whether one believes this will in the end be a *world state* or not. And Wendt’s notion that a world state is manifold realizable supports the argument of this paper that there can be regionally distinctive cultures of anarchy.

Adaptation for Southeast Asia

How can this complex model which draws almost exclusively on Western experiences be used in a Southeast Asian context? I argue that Social Constructivism is the theory best equipped to be applied in a different regional context because of its high flexibility: Cultures of anarchy are what regional organizations make out of them. Thus, as argued above, while Wendt has observed or predicted cultures based on Western philosophers like Locke or Kant, there is still room for different anarchies based on different identities. Although teleological amendments of Wendt II may at first lessen the appeal of the “not everything is likely, almost everything is possible in IR” philosophy

³⁹ Cf. *ibid.* p.12.

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.* p. 20.

⁴¹ Wendt (1999), p. 246.

⁴² S. Guzzini / A. Leander, A Social Theory for International Relations: An Appraisal of Alexander Wendt’s Theoretical and Disciplinary Synthesis, in: *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2001, pp. 316-338, p. 317.

(which is in some way reinstated by the unpredictability on the quantum level in Wendt III), the “world state” as an inevitable endpoint can be fairly easily put aside, since it is manifold realizable and therefore of no immediate concern for present research as mentioned above.

One aspect in which Wendt has been persistently vague is the question if his *cultures of anarchy* refer to the system of all states or if this concept can be applied to subsystems like regional organizations as well. Since he uses the European Union as an occasional example, it can be assumed that different assortments of states might yield different cultures of anarchy. Plus, the often overlooked attributes of Wendt I – change is actually difficult, if norms are deeply internalized; norms can be good or bad; collective identities do not necessarily lead to cooperation – seem quite adequate in light of the empirical evidence from the region.

One way to apply social constructivism to the Southeast Asian – and any other – region, would be to look at norms and collective identities that have been constructed by interaction in the region (interactive norms), brought in from the outside and have been successfully localized⁴³ (external norms) or are the result of the redefinition of identity because of internal change of an actor (internal/domestic norms). Here, area studies can contribute significantly to the research by providing the historical and cultural context which IR researchers are often lacking. This paper tentatively suggests the following possible ASEAN cultures of anarchy:

The ASEAN cultures of anarchy

One of the rather vague aspects of the concept of the “cultures of anarchy” is the starting point. Wendt argues that it might be hypothetically possible that in an early stage there was no common knowledge among the states at all,⁴⁴ but deems this condition highly unlikely. In his Hobbesian culture there is common knowledge, or in a sense common *lack of* knowledge, which leads to the assumption that the other states are enemies and cannot be trusted. While this may be initially based on missing information, states might actively reproduce and enforce such a view by acting “as if” the Other is an enemy, thereby making it a self-fulfilling assumption. East Asia is an especially interesting case to study these initial cultures of anarchy, since in a way most of the states in the region entered the arena of international politics as new actors within a short period of time – as newly born nations or, in a form of rebirth, overcoming colonial rule.

With this completely new identities in place, one might expect a high degree of mistrust and enmity among the actors. This expectation might be enforced by the fact that there was a century-

⁴³ For the concept of localization and its adaptation to the region, see: Amitav Acharya, How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism, in: *International Organization*, 58, Spring 2004, pp. 239-275.

⁴⁴ Wendt (1999), p. 266.

old discourse – or norm – prevalent in the region which would result in states’ interests that were far from cooperation and bore some resemblance to the European teachings of Machiavelli: The Kautilya Arthaśāstra, "a book of political realism, a book analysing how the political world does work and not very often stating how it ought to work, a book that frequently discloses to a king what calculating and sometimes brutal measures he must carry out to preserve the state and the common good."⁴⁵ The Arthaśāstra ⁴⁶ has served as a manual of statecraft which influenced generations of Indian thinkers and politicians. About the Arthaśāstra, Max Weber, in his work "Politics as a vocation", admirably said:

"Truly radical 'Machiavellism', in the popular sense of that word is classically expressed in Indian literature in the Arthaśāstra of Kautilya (written long before the birth of Christ, ostensibly in the time of Chandragupta): compared to it, Machiavelli's The Prince is harmless."⁴⁷

In the Arthashastra, there is an abstracted conception of the international system embodied in the idea of *mandala*, which means a circle with a center or nucleus. All the states in the *mandala*, which means a circle with a center or nucleus, face the same predicament: they are surrounded by a ring of allies and enemies, middle states and indifferent neutral powers. Thus, the *mandala* system is a very fluid one in which relationships are being interpreted on a constant basis, and reinterpreted, thereby creating new opportunities for some and exposing others to new danger.⁴⁸

For Kautilya, diplomacy was an art, not concerned with ideals but with achieving practical result for state. He wrote: "A weak king should avert invasion by making a treaty of peace, or by a treacherous fight in the battlefield. He may reduce the enemy's men either by conciliation or by giving gifts..." (Book VI, 4)

Rüland has demonstrated that the norms proposed in the *Arthaśāstra* have been passed on in Southeast Asia not only through intellectual discourses but also through popular art genres such as Ramayana and Mahabharata epics and are deeply internalized by the leading political class – and thus the states – in the region until the present day.⁴⁹ This can be explained in terms of "cultural

⁴⁵ Boesche, Roger (January 2003). "Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India". *The Journal of Military History* 67 (1), pp. 9–37.

⁴⁶ The Arthashastra was brought to the attention of the world at large in the first decade of the 20th century when a Sanskrit manuscript was translated into English by Dr. R. Shamasastri.

⁴⁷ Cf. Max Weber, „Politics as a Vocation,“ in Weber: Selections in Translation, ed. W.G. Runciman, trans. Eric Mathews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 212-25, p. 220.

⁴⁸ Cf. George Modelski, Kautilya: Foreign Policy and International System in the Ancient Hindu World, *The American Political Science Review*, September 1964, Vol. LVIII, No. 3, pp. 549-560.

⁴⁹ Cf. Jürgen Rüland, Die Gemeinschaft Südostasiatischer Staaten (ASEAN): Vom Antikommunismus zum regionalen Ordnungsfaktor, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, Nr. B13-14, 8.Dezember 1995, pp. 3-12..

memory”⁵⁰ or maybe, in using the quantum terms of Wendt III, by the surviving “collective consciousness” of the super-organism formed by the states or their precursors in the region.

Still, war and chaos did not immediately commence after the end of the Pacific War and the beginning of decolonization in the region. I argue that this might be attributable to a competing norm which could have led to an – albeit instable – *Majapahit* culture of anarchy, referring to the 1293-1500 kingdom in Easter Java that at its 14th century peak dominated other kingdoms in the southern Malay Peninsula, Borneo, Sumatra, Bali, and the Philippines. In his pointedly titled article “*The Roots of ASEAN: Regional Identities in the Strait of Melaka Region Circa 1500 C.E.*”, the Historian Kenneth R. Hall argues that there was “less dislocation and isolation in the region at that time than is supposed by many twentieth century scholars”⁵¹. He claims that, notwithstanding the number of political and religious transitions underway in the Southeast Asian archipelago and mainland, there still was “a sense of regional self-confidence and progress among societies who had enjoyed over two hundred years of widespread socio-economic success”. Hall states that these successes were “the product of the functional international, regional, and local networks of communication, as well as a common heritage that had developed in the Strait of Melaka region during the pre-1500 era.”

While Hall acknowledges the significant influence of India’s culture in the region (including the aforementioned teachings of the *Arthaśāstra*), he opposes the view established by early century historians that the “Hinduized” states of pre-1500 Southeast Asia were merely extensions of India’s culture as largely a by-product of the colonial period. The indigenous sources used by Hall draw a mixed picture of the empire; in the *Nagarakertagama*, written by a Buddhist priest, the ruler of the *Majapahit* court is praised for his righteous conduct and in consequence his moral purity drew outlying regions to participate in his court. This high ethical standard was coherent with the Indian notion of the Cakravarti as an “universal monarch” who ruled the center of a resulting “circle of kings”⁵². The *Pararaton* on the other hand, a 15th century chronicle poem, links *Mapahit’s* aggressive initiatives as more appropriate to the *Arthaśāstra* tradition, resulting into the subordination of neighboring rulers and the incorporation of their territories in the *Majapahit* state.

The conflicting readings of the essential characteristics of the *Majapahit* empire are less important for a constructivist reading of the region than its attributes that have survived in the “collective consciousness”. Hall demonstrates how in the 20th Century *Majapahit* was meaningfully

⁵⁰ Cf. Jan Assmann, *Kollektives Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München: Beck’sche Reihe, 4. Auflage, 2002..

⁵¹ Kenneth R. Hall, *The Roots of ASEAN: Regional Identities in the Strait of Melaka Region Circa 1500 C.E.*, in: *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2001 pp. 87-119, p. 87.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

employed in the construction of a “national history” – first, to support the Dutch colonial rule, but later also employed by the earliest Indonesian nationalist organization Budi Utomo, which applied the legacy initially to Java and then to the region as a whole.⁵³ The Indonesian poet, historian, playwright and politician, Muhammad Yamin, later President Sukarno’s principal “myth-maker”, started in the 1940s to transform Majapahit from the foundational *bangsabudaya* (“Folk, cultural nation”) into the *bangsa-negara* (“political nation”) which he conceived to include Irian Jaya, Malaysia, Thailand and Portuguese Timor. This construction was used to promote “a new Indonesian nation that unified a diverse, widespread region under a singular leadership”⁵⁴ and traces of the image can still be found in fourth grade national (*Pancasila*) textbooks.

Thus, if we see the anarchical logic in the constitutional stage of the Southeast Asian region after the Pacific War as a *Majapahit culture*, it is characterized by highly contesting norms and identities. Majapahit, especially as reconstructed in the 20th century narrative, carries with it a strong *Arthaśāstra* set of norms which include a hostile attitude towards direct neighbours and in a way foreshadow the *konfrontasi* policy used by Sukarno in the 1960s. But it could have also laid the foundations for a concept or at least sense of “regioness” in Southeast Asia. Anthony Reid traces the view of the ten states that make up ASEAN today as some kind of “natural” unit not explicitly to *Majapahit*, but to the Malacca Straits area as a traditional place of ports and portages, and therefore communication, which has contributed to the indigenous origin of the Southeast Asian idea.⁵⁵ He argues that there are “profound commonalities in Southeast Asia, essentially arising from a similar environment, a long history of maritime interaction among themselves, and a somewhat similar pattern of influences from their neighbouring civilizations – China, India and Japan”.⁵⁶

Reid adds that the Melaka sultanate “was intensely aware that it was part of a Southeast Asian world – between Siam, Pegu, Sumatra, Java, Manila and Maluku”⁵⁷. And for Hall and Read, the rulers of the Ayudhya Thai kingdom in the 15th century cultivated a cosmopolitan outlook as well; not only as self-perceived heirs to the mainland administrative and cultural legacy of the Angkor realm, but also by a “new collective sense of community among those realms that shared the Bay of Bengal and Theravada Buddhism on the one hand, and the Malay Peninsula trading realm on the other”⁵⁸.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 104.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 105.

⁵⁵ Anthony Reid, A Saucer Model of Southeast Asian Identity, in: Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1999, pp. 7-23, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁸ Hall 2001, p. 108.

While a lot more research has to go into these historical and cultural contexts, I hope that I have been able to show that there are several indigenous sources that could have contributed to the formation of the first “collective identity” among the states in Southeast Asia. Obviously, the newly independent nations did not enter a vacuum but instead a fully fledged international system of states with dominant norms like sovereignty, perceived as so highly internalized identities that these interests were seen largely a given. But to assume that Southeast Asian states simply adapted the given norms of the international system, as is still prevalent among realist interpretations of ASEAN, does not do justice to the complexity of their specific regionalism. Acharya has observed that IR scholars still generally assume that “the history of sovereignty is largely the history of Westphalia’s geographic extension”, but argues that these scholars thereby “ignore the crucial agency of local actors in the developing world in translating the idea of sovereignty into norms of conduct in a regional setting”⁵⁹. Reid sees the struggle against returning colonialism as a common theme for the countries of Southeast Asia and a first step to a “Southeast Asian” identity⁶⁰. While early calls for anti-imperial unity were of the pan-Asian type, regarding India and China Reid observes that by 1947 there was “ a widespread view that Southeast Asia’s interests could best be served by keeping the big players out”.

This does not mean that these states were not influential in establishing distinctive and highly influential norms for the region. By studying the widely under-researched 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung and the dominant role of the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Acharya identified normative resistance from within Asia to the idea of regional collective defense: “These interactions, while not creating a regional organization, created a durable normative framework which undermined the prospects for regional collective defence through subsequent decades”⁶¹. This “Nehru norm” can be seen as a case of norm localization on two levels – first into the wider South and Southeast Asian context, where it was prevalent from the 1950s on, and then into the specific ASEAN culture of anarchy, where the refusal of a regional collective defence became one of the dominant norms and the basis for declarations like the 1971 “Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality” (ZOPFAN).

Still, while the *Nehru norm*, as Acharya argues, has contributed to the decline of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), a more inclusive and indigenous regional organization as the manifestation of a collective identity did not immediately emerge. Instead, the 1960s saw the *konfrontasi* policy of Indonesian president Sukarno, where Indonesia and to a lesser extent the

⁵⁹ Acharya (2005), abstract.

⁶⁰ Reid (1999), p. 17.

⁶¹ Acharya (2005), p. 46.

Philippines challenged the pure legitimacy of Malaysia and Singapore⁶². From a constructivist point of view, this could be traced to the low level of internalisation of the community norms of the *Majapahit logic of anarchy* while the already inherent *Arthaśāstra* norms with their aggressive stance towards direct neighbors and the specific national interpretation of Indonesian supremacy became dominant.

The end of the *konfrontasi* policy and the following foundation of ASEAN is a somewhat hard case for a strict reading of state identities according to Wendt I, because the rather radical change in Indonesia's state identity came about not through interaction or the systemic level but through a coup d'état.⁶³ In a way, this fact could be used to extend the Wendt I model by including a level of identity formation within a state, which would acknowledge the important role of domestic politics in identity formation and allow more of the reflexivity, which Drulák sees as lacking in Wendt I and II.

When we see the *konfrontasi*-period as a collapse of the regional *logic of anarchy* into an *Arthaśāstra* culture, the founding of ASEAN could be seen as a return to the *Majapahit culture*. This change was due to an independent and internal change of identity and interest of one of the states in the region: Indonesia projected a different picture of "Other" to the states with which its would associate in ASEAN soon after. As acknowledged, the *Majapahit culture* continues to include the *Arthaśāstra cultural* norm which is still valid until the present day, but to a lesser degree of internalization. In addition, the community elements of this culture and localized norms like the rejection of a regional collective defence provided the basis for the institutionalization of ASEAN. That norm change had happened was evident a mere six months after the birth of ASEAN, when the conflict over Sabah reemerged and escalated between Malaysia and the Philippines. While in no way solving the crisis and restraining from taking the role as negotiator, ASEAN members nevertheless "through direct and indirect measures of restraint, pressure, diplomacy, communications and trade-offs, did succeed in *preventing* any further escalation of the crisis".⁶⁴

This can be seen as the birth of the *ASEAN Way* which played a decisive factor in the further evolution of the association and might be a good term to describe the logic of anarchy prevalent in Southeast Asia until today. But at this stage of my research I end my analysis with the starting point of ASEAN. In an earlier effort, I have positioned ASEAN in a highly internalized *Lockean culture* (Wendt I), respectively moving towards *World Society*, a new culture of anarchy introduced in Wendt II⁶⁵. This

⁶² Narine (2006), p. 201.

⁶³ Rother (2004), p. 56.

⁶⁴ Acharya (2001), p. 50. Highlighted in the original.

⁶⁵ Rother 2004, p. 95.

analysis would surely benefit from a more region-specific approach of cultures of anarchy which I have tried to outline here and will recapitulate in the following preliminary conclusion.

Conclusion

International Relations approaches to area studies are diverse, but often neglect the historical and cultural context. I proposed a model based on the social constructivism as developed by Alexander Wendt that can be adapted to the analysis of regions with a cultural background different from the European or North-American experience: A collective identity among states in a region can manifest itself in distinctive *logics* or *cultures of anarchy*. These are based on norms that can be established through interaction, can be proposed by outside agents and localized or can be effected by an identity change of a state caused by domestic events. In addition, there are cultural norms rooted in the cultural memory or *consciousness* of a region, which are often ignored by interpretations that merely focus on current events or established Western models of cooperation.

I have tried to identify *cultures of anarchy* in the early stages of Southeast Asian regionalism and described them with the “working terms” of *Majaphit*, *Arthaśāstra* and *ASEAN WAY*. The preceding analysis has shown that these cultures can collapse if there is a change in the prevalent norms or if these are only weakly internalized. This could lead to an interpretation very different from the existing constructivist readings of the region which are often characterized by a deterministic bias that equals *collective identity with cooperation*⁶⁶.

For an empirical application of this model, all the norms and their level of internalization within a cultures of anarchy would have to be identified and used for the explanation of change between two cultures. If this concept will be applied to regions with varying cultural memories, a comparative approach would provide much deeper insights as opposed to one which only compares, say, guns or the levels of institutionalization. The potential of this approach can be seen in Acharya’s work on the Bandung conference, where he elaborates that the norm of non-intervention had very different consequences in the Latin-American region with the cultural background of settler societies – and thus in a different *culture of anarchy*.

⁶⁶ Cf. Busse (1999).

References

- Acharya, Amitav (1997): Ideas, Identity and Institution-Building: From the „ASEAN Way“ to the “Asia-Pacific Way?”, in: *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 10, pp. 319-346.
- Acharya, Amitav (1999): Realism, Institutionalism, and the Asian Economic Crisis, in: *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 1999, pp. 1-29.
- Acharya, Amitav (2001): *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia. ASEAN and the problem of regional order*, London.
- Acharya, Amitav (2004): How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism, in: *International Organization*, 58, Spring, pp. 239-275.
- Amitav Acharya (2005): “Why Is There No NATO in Asia?” The Normative Origins of Asian Multilateralisms, *Weatherhead Working Paper* No. 05-05, July.
- Acharya, Amitav/Stubbs, Richard (2006): Theorizing Southeast Asian Relations: an introduction, in: *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, June 2006, pp. 125-134.
- Assmann, Jan (2002): *Kollektives Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München: Beck’sche Reihe, 4. Auflage.
- Boesche, Roger (2003): "Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India". *The Journal of Military History* 67 (1, January), pp. 9–37.
- Busse, Nikolas (1999): Constructivism and Southeast Asian Security, in: *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 39-60.
- Checkel, Jeffrey T (1998): The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory, in: *World Politics* 50 (January), pp. 324- 348.
- Drulák, Petr (2006): Reflexivity and structural change, in: Stefano Guzzini/Anna Leander, *Constructivism and International Relations. Alexander Wendt and his critics*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 140-159.
- Guzzini, Stefano / Leander, Anna (2001): A Social Theory for International Relations: An Appraisal of Alexander Wendt’s Theoretical and Disciplinary Synthesis, in: *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 316-338.
- Hall, Kenneth R. (2001): The Roots of ASEAN: Regional Identities in the Strait of Melaka Region Circa 1500 C.E., in: *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 87-119.

- Jepperson, Ronald L. / Wendt, Alexander / Katzenstein, Peter J. (1996): Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security, in: P. Katzenstein [ed.], *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York, pp. 33-75.
- Kang, David C. (2003): Getting Asia Wrong: the need for a new analytical framework, in: *International Security* 27, no.4, Spring, pp. 57-85.
- Mercer, Jonathan (1995): Anarchy and Identity, in: *International Organization* 49, 2, Spring, pp. 229-252.
- Modelski, George (1964): Kautilya: Foreign Policy and International System in the Ancient Hindu World, in: *The American Political Science Review*, September, Vol. LVIII, No. 3, pp. 549-560.
- Narine, Shaun (2006): The English School and ASEAN, in: *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, June 2006, pp 199-218.
- Peou, Sorpong (2002): Realism and constructivism in Southeast Asian security studies today: a review essay, in: *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 119-138.
- Rother, Stefan (2004): *Normen, Identitäten und die Logik der Anarchie: Die ASEAN aus konstruktivistischer Perspektive*, Freiburg 2004.
- Weber, Max (1978): „Politics as a Vocation,“ in Weber: Selections in Translation, ed. W.G. Runciman, trans. Eric Mathews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 212-225.
- Reid, Anthony (1999): A Saucer Model of Southeast Asian Identity, in: *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 27, No. 1, , pp. 7-23.
- Rüland, Jürgen (1995): Die Gemeinschaft Südostasiatischer Staaten (ASEAN): Vom Antikommunismus zum regionalen Ordnungsfaktor, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, Nr. B13-14, 8.Dezember, pp 3-12.
- Wendt, Alexander (1992): Anarchy is what states make of it, in: *International Organization* 46, Spring, pp. 379-396.
- Wendt, Alexander (1994): Collective Identity Formation and the international State, in: *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 2, June, pp. 384-395.
- Wendt, Alexander (1999): *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge.
- Wendt, Alexander (2003): Why a World State is Inevitable, in: *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 9 (4), pp. 491-542.
- Wendt, Alexander (2006): *Social Theory as Cartesian science: an auto-critique from a quantum perspective*, in: Stefano Guzzini/Anna Leander, *Constructivism and International Relations. Alexander Wendt and his critics*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 181-219.