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Abstract

Sozialstruktur und Arbeitsteilung. Eine historische Skizze am Beispiel Festlandsüdostasiens
(Social Structure and the Division of Labour. A Historical Outline Taking Mainland
Southeast Asia as an Example)

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The history of social structures in Southeast Asia displays many traits that we consider typical for recent
tendencies in globalisation: migration, diasporas, multiculturalism, the absence of nation states, and local and
regional diversity. The European social sciences emerged during the rise of the nation states, which they still
take as their units of analysis. Their concepts are therefore not adequate enough for analysing historical and
contemporary social structures in Southeast Asia. The argument made in this paper is based on the sociology of
Pierre Bourdieu, albeit with several revisions of his theory. A central conceptual distinction is made between
social structure and division of labour, terms which tradition has confused. “Division of labour” is conceived of
as a division of work (including activities that go beyond labour) and comprises a variety of different cultures.
These cultures have developed historically as divisions of work and persist as sociocultures even in modernised
societies. In Southeast Asia, subsistence ethics prevails among the rural population, while patrimonialism has
remained the dominating socioculture in urban environments. These sociocultures are superseded but not
done away with by globalisation and modern cultures like bureaucracy and capitalism. In different parts of
Southeast Asia varying configurations of sociocultures and structures emerge that build on historical and
contemporary differences.

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